## CASS
College of Alberta School Superintendents

# The Alberta Framework for School System Success

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Foreword by Ken Leithwood

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# Foreword

The value ascribed to school districts has varied widely since their inception in North America more than a century ago. These structures were initially created as a response to the challenges of a growing population of students to be educated and the administrative tasks associated with larger numbers. Districts were also viewed in some parts of North America as an antidote to municipal corruption and the adverse effects of very local politics. School districts were not invented to improve student achievement. That was the job of schools.

As time went by, districts grew in size and their numbers diminished, often through amalgamations in response to calls for realizing "economies of scale". And with such growth came increasing bureaucratization. Senior district leaders often were compared to CEOs of large private organizations and encouraged to behave accordingly. In the process, district leaders lost any visible connection to teaching and learning that had been created or salvaged from earlier periods .

From about the end of the second world war to the important study of district effects in British Columbia by Coleman and La Roque in 1990[1], Canadian districts were routinely viewed primarily as instruments for helping Ministries and Departments of Education administer provincial policies. In the 1970s, this work began to much more explicitly include the implementation of provincial curriculum guidelines, a development which re-established the connection between districts and the learning of their students. It was not, however, until governments began to view significantly improving their educational systems as a key response to global economic competition that districts appeared in their crosshairs. And when they did, what emerged were two radically different courses of action. In England, for example, the

1.  Coleman, P., & LaRoque, L. (1990). *Struggling to be 'good enough': Adminstrative practices and school district ethos.* London: The Falmer Press.

powers and responsibilities of districts (Local Education Authorities) were radically reduced on the grounds that they were excessively bureaucratic and essentially stood in the way of schools doing the right things. Both Canada and the U.S. moved more slowly to re-position districts as key agents in the chains of accountability created through new policies between governments and classrooms. As this publication goes to press, districts in most Canadian provinces have not only achieved that key agent status but are important sources of government educational policy, as well.

I provide this little historical sketch to help capture both the underlying motivations giving rise to the work described in this monograph, as well as the two central challenges faced by those doing the work. As our conception of district purposes shifts from efficient administration of schools to key structures for facilitating school improvement, our understanding of the qualities of "successful" districts has to change accordingly; this was the first challenge. As our conception of district CEOs and their immediate colleagues shifts from central managers of large bureaucracies to transformational leaders of a continuously improving menu of instructional services for students, our understanding of the qualities of effective district leadership has to undergo a major facelift, as well; this was the second challenge.

This monograph describes, briefly, how the *College of Alberta School Superintendents* (CASS) approached these two challenges and, in much more detail, the result of that work, *The Alberta Framework for School System Success.* In my view, both the approach and its result demonstrate "best practice" for accomplishing several related purposes - using systematically collected evidence to inform decision making, creating "educative" policy, mobilizing knowledge for use, and setting the stage for successful policy implementation. The framework is a result of carefully synthesizing a comprehensive body of relevant empirical research, providing opportunities for superintendents to deliberate about what that evidence suggested and to both modify and exemplify the district qualities and leadership capacities described by that evidence. The eventual users of the framework had a key role in its development without diminishing the leverage provided by relevant empirical evidence. At key points, external "experts" were invited

to comment on how the work should proceed and what form it might take. But at no point did *CASS* "turn over" control of the work to those "experts". As the work proceeded, opportunities were provided for district leaders to review progress, to learn more about the underlying evidence and contribute to next steps. Pilot tests were carried out in a significant number of districts to provide more formal formative assessments of the framework and its proposed uses. By the time the *Framework* was officially completed, the vast majority of those for whom it was created had participated quite extensively in its development and had many opportunities to consider how best they might use it in their own districts.

I had the distinct privilege of participating in this work and learned as much as anyone from it. It became the starting point for similar efforts in Ontario, efforts which have provided additional new empirical justification for the account of effective district characteristics and district leaders found in the *Alberta Framework for School System Success*. CASS's initiative is a source of important lessons for other provinces and states attempting to support district leaders' efforts to improve the learning of the students they serve.

– Kenneth Leithwood

# Acknowledgements

The fact that the *Alberta Framework for School System Success* has made it into print is a tribute to a large number of people and organizations who have supported the authors' efforts to compile this volume of the best practice-tested evidence linking school system leadership to student learning. To a large extent, this College of Alberta School Superintendents' (CASS) initiative is the product of a tremendous ongoing collaboration with the Alberta Ministry of Education, our three provincial graduate university programs in educational leadership and four provincial education partners: the Alberta School Boards' Association, the Alberta School Councils' Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta. We are especially appreciative of the ongoing support provided by recently retired Deputy Minister of Education, Kerry Henke, and recently retired Assistant Deputy Minister, Carol McLean.

An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to Ken Leithwood from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) for supplying the research foundation that undergirds large portions of our manuscript. Since our first meetings with Dr. Leithwood in early 2008, he has very generously shared insights from decades of work inquiring into the nature and characteristics of educational leadership practice. In addition to his contributions through these and more recent seminal studies with his Canadian and American colleagues through the Wallace Foundation, Dr. Leithwood's two papers

commissioned by the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) have significantly influenced our conceptualization of the *Framework*.

A number of Alberta researchers have also contributed to the understanding of district leadership practice presented in this book. University of Calgary colleagues Sharon Friesen and Jennifer Lock's 2010 CASS funded review was a substantive influence on Chapters Two and Five. Other provincial scholars helped us through their research presentations, involvement on specific projects or through engagement on the CASS Leadership Advisory Panel. Our thanks go to George Bedard, Art Aitken, Carmen Mombourquette and Maurice Hollingsworth from the University of Lethbridge; to Frank Peters and Charmaine Brooks at the University of Alberta and to Ann Sherman, formerly with the University of Calgary.

Since the fall of 2008, we have had the privilege of working with a number of leading international researcher-consultants in our collective capacity building efforts with district leadership teams focused on improving student learning in their systems. Appreciation is extended to Sharon Friesen, Amanda Datnow, Ken Leithwood, Michael Fullan, Ben Levin, Andy Hargreaves, Lynn Sharratt and Dennis Shirley in this respect. The learning has been fantastic.

We are also keenly thankful for the efforts of our CASS colleagues in the 62 school systems across our province. They have been deeply engaged in the work of enhancing student learning through *Framework* related lateral capacity building for the past five years. Their field-tested reflections have been an important aspect of the development of this second iteration of the manuscript. This is particularly the case for three groups of school systems. Members of the first group competed to serve as pilot districts during the 2008-2009 school year. This group includes: Peace River School Division, Grande Prairie School District, Aspen View School Division, Living Waters Catholic School Division, Edmonton Public School District, Wetaskiwin School Division, Golden Hills School Division, Grasslands School Division and the Alberta Francophone Authorities. Members of a second group served as exemplars in the 2009 version of the *Framework:* Battle River

School Division, Edmonton Public School District, Chinook's Edge School Division, Red Deer Public School District, Grande Yellowhead School Division and Grande Prairie School District. Finally, four systems submitted summaries of specific areas of practice that serve as exemplars in this current version: Calgary Catholic School District, Red Deer Catholic School Division, Rocky View School Division and St. Thomas Aquinas Separate School Division.

On a more personal level, we would also like acknowledge our spouses – Terrie, Blair, Ruth, Andy and Linda – for their support throughout the writing process.

# About the Authors and Editors

## Jim Brandon

Jim Brandon is an Assistant Professor and the Director of Professional Programs at the University of Calgary. He is a past president of the College of Alberta School Superintendents and its former Director of Leadership Capacity Building. Jim served a total of 23 years in the superintendency of two Alberta school districts, worked as a Principal for nine years and as a Vice-Principal for four. Teaching secondary social studies was his primary focus during his classroom years.

## Paulette Hanna

Paulette Hanna is Director of Leadership Learning for the College of Alberta School Superintendents. She is past Superintendent of Schools for Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools and East Central Alberta Catholic Schools. Paulette was a member of the executive of The College of Alberta School Superintendents from May 2002 – June 2011 and served as President from July 2008 – June 2009. Paulette is in her 41st year as an educator, having served many roles including teacher, school administrator, deputy Superintendent, university sessional instructor, and senior system leader. Teaching secondary social studies and physical education was her primary focus during her classroom years.

## Rick Morrow

Rick spent 37 years in active service in various positions in public education. He was a teacher, guidance counselor and an assistant superintendent. He was an education consultant with the Grand Prairie and Calgary Regional Offices of Alberta Education and served in other leadership positions of increasing responsibility including Deputy Director, Director and Executive Director. In January, 2008 he retired from Alberta Education as Assistant Deputy Minister.

In February, 2008 Rick was the first Director of the CASS Moving and Improving Project designed to improve school system leadership capacity; he retired from this position in June, 2009. An important outcome of this initial project was the identification of several research-based descriptors of successful school systems. This initial project established an effective prototype for continued CASS projects to support the learning and the application of research-based methods by school system and other leaders responsible for improving education for Alberta students.

## Kath Rhyason

Kath Rhyason is Executive Director of the College of Alberta School Superintendents. She is past Superintendent of Schools for Fort McMurray Public School District and Associate Superintendent of the same district. Kath was very involved in the community serving in different capacities such as director and president of United Way. Kath was a member of the executive of The College of Alberta School Superintendents and Chair of the North-East zone. Kath is in her 41st year as an educator having served many roles including teacher, schools' administrator, college instructor, senior manager with Alberta Education and senior system leader. Teaching mathematics was her primary focus during her classroom years.

### Siegfried (Sig) Schmold

- Superintendent of Schools (CEO) for 24 years for three Alberta School Jurisdictions, most recently Pembina Hills Regional Division No. 7. Prior to the superintendency I held roles as a classroom teacher, school administrator and central office administrator (Director of Language Arts, Deputy Superintendent).

- Member of the Senate, University of Alberta (1990–1996)

- Associate Faculty (leadership training), Royal Roads University (2003-2010). Responsibilities involved both on-line and face-to-face instruction in the Master of Arts in Leadership training program.

- Retired from the Superintendency and currently act as a consultant to the Alberta School Boards Association, College of Alberta School Superintendents and Alberta Education.

- Compiled the College of Alberta Superintendent's Framework for Success and the Framework pilot project evaluation. This evidence based Framework proposes and discusses a number of leadership dimensions that have shown to have a positive impact on student achievement.

# Introduction

**1**
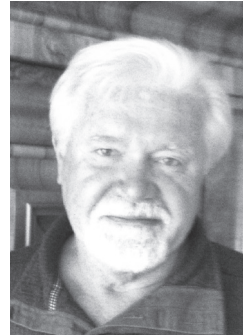
The Canadian province of Alberta has earned a reputation as a top performing education system (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, 2012a; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Levin, 20011, Alberta Education, 2011; Barber, Clark & Whelan, 2011; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Times Educational Supplement, 2011). Alberta students regularly perform at the highest levels on international measures of student achievement. Despite these consistently strong results, the Ministry of Education has signaled a need for transformational change through its Inspiring Education initiative. As former Minister of Education David Hancock observed:

> We have an excellent education system today where people come from all over the world to take a look at what we're doing now, but we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to build the education system for tomorrow (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 4).

Over a two-year period, the Minister encouraged members of the public, education stakeholders and students to re-imagine education within the realities of dynamically changing world. Through this Dialogue with Albertans, educational leaders were called upon to invent new learning environments and new education systems to better address the needs of our contemporary society. As public education readies for transformation, images from complexity leadership theory call for a shift in "thinking away

from individual, controlling views, and toward a perspective of organizations as complex adaptive systems that enable continuous creation and capture of knowledge" (Uhl-Bien, Marion, McKelvey, 2007, p. 301).

It is within this context that the provincial superintendents' association embarked on an initiative intended to help build school system leadership capacity through a government funded initiative initially titled Moving and Improving (Brandon, 2008). From its inception, the initiative adopted a constructive, organic approach to design, development and implementation through an artful union of evidence informed and reflective practice" (Schmold & Morrow, 2009).

This scaffold of research and expertise has given College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) credibility in the field while also increasing engagement of members, Alberta Education and provincial stakeholders. CASS has demonstrated openness to change and a keen responsiveness to the feedback of educational leaders and emerging research. A less linear and more organic approach to change is being nurtured. The CASS system leadership program is being shaped by the knowledge and experiences of the education community. The association is adopting an evidence-based, open and responsive form of leadership to catalyze change during uncertain political, social and economic times in Alberta (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2007).

This book is designed to support the efforts of educators and policy makers who are looking to benefit from the increasing body of evidence linking school system leadership to student learning. The Alberta Framework for School System Success builds on findings from a number of recent influential studies that highlight the important, but indirect connections between district leadership and student learning. The Framework focuses on the qualities of high-performing school systems and is conceived as an artful synthesis of the best available evidence combined with the wisdom and experience of practicing superintendents. Working with leading international researcher-consultants – Ken Leithwood, Michael Fullan, Ben Levin, Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley – superintendents in the Canadian province of Alberta have been using the Framework to improve system results since the fall of 2008.

Before detailing the Framework's four areas of collective system leadership practice in chapters two through five, this introduction provides a brief overview of its foundational evidence base and describes the artful union of this evidence with the practical wisdom of leaders in the field. The conceptual model that undergirds the Framework is then illustrated, followed by discussion of the ideas and challenges associated with evidence-based practice. Additional recent research findings that strengthen claims linking system leadership to student learning are summarized. The introductory chapter's final section itemizes the 12 dimensions and the four areas of collective practice that comprise the Alberta Framework for School System Success.

## System Leadership for Learning

CASS published its *Framework for School System Success* to its 350 members and educational partner organizations in the summer of 2009. The Framework was developed over a two-year period as a guide to improve student learning through actions at the system level. The document's research foundations rested on Leithwood's CASS commissioned *Review of the Characteristics of High-performing School Systems* (2008).

Leithwood's (2008) meta-analysis reviewed 31 studies of successful system efforts to improve student learning. Three criteria were used to determine the research reports were to be included. First, the research had to be published in a refereed journal or comparable source. Second, the study needed to report original evidence about the association between one or more system characteristics and "some valued set of outcomes". Third, the meta-analysis also took into account research that described one or more practices within a system previously found to be high-performing (p. 3). According to this foundational evidence, the 12 defining characteristics of high-performing school systems are listed on Table 1.1.

## Table 1.1: Characteristics of High-performing School Systems
(Leithwood, 2008)

District-wide sense of efficacy.

District-wide focuses on student achievement and the quality of instruction.

Adoption and commitment to district-wide performance standards.

Development/adoption of district-wide curricula and approaches to instruction.

Alignment of curriculum, teaching and learning materials, and assessment to relevant standards.

Multi-measure accountability systems and system-wide use of data to inform practice, to hold school and the district leaders accountable for results, and to monitor progress.

Targeted and phased focuses of improvement.

Investment in instructional leadership development at the school and district levels.

District-wide job-embedded professional development focuses and supports for teachers.

District-wide and school-level emphasis on teamwork and professional community.

New approaches to board-district and in district-school relations.

Strategic engagement with government reform policies and resources

## An Artful Union – Evidence and Practical Wisdom

Leithwood's (2008) summary of the research evidence was used to shape the design and dialogic adoption of the 2009 Framework through a process that came to be described as the artful union of the best available evidence combined with the practical wisdom of superintendents. The artful union notion stems from the understanding that "most fields informed by the social sciences have imperfect evidence available to inform their practices" and, as such, "judgments are rightly based on the best available evidence,

along with the practical wisdom of those actually working in the field (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 9).

The 2009 version of the Framework was the product of intense CASS member and partner engagement with Leithwood's basic research summary over a 15-month period. The work in progress nature of this developmental process was described as an exercise in "constructivism with a vengeance" (Schmold & Morrow, 2009a, p. 1). Dr. Leithwood segmented the system research findings into three portions, each of which served as the focus for a day-long presentation-discussion session in the spring of 2008. Approximately 140 CASS members and numerous partner representatives brought their practical wisdom to bear on these findings through deep conversations over the three separate days. Four additional drafts were shaped by similar efforts to meld research and experience through dialogue over the summer of 2008 and through implementation of one or more specific Framework Dimensions in ten pilot school systems during the 2008-2009 school year (Schmold & Morrow, 2009b).

At the conceptual level, the Framework is designed to funnel evidence-informed school system leadership practices in one direction: to improve student learning. The interconnections among the six key Framework constructs are diagrammed in Figure 2 below: school system practices, evidence and research, learning networks, reflection and dialogue, professional learning and system learning. The conceptual design indicates that each component is influencing and shaping each of the others. Undergirding the Framework is a dynamic research and evidence core that is growing and developing over time as school systems implement, refine and share evidence based professional dialogue, professional learning and organizational learning. The conceptual design indicates that each component is dynamically influencing and shaping each of the others. Undergirding the Framework is a dynamic research and evidence core that is growing and developing over time as school systems implement, refine and share evidence-based practices through means such as leadership learning networks, which foster both professional and organizational learning.

**Figure 1.2: The Alberta Framework for School System Success –
Conceptual Model**



School System
Practices

Learning
Networks

Leader, Teacher
and Student
Learning

Reflection
and
Dialogue

Evidence
and Research

System
Learning

Learning Our Way Forward

Professional
Learning
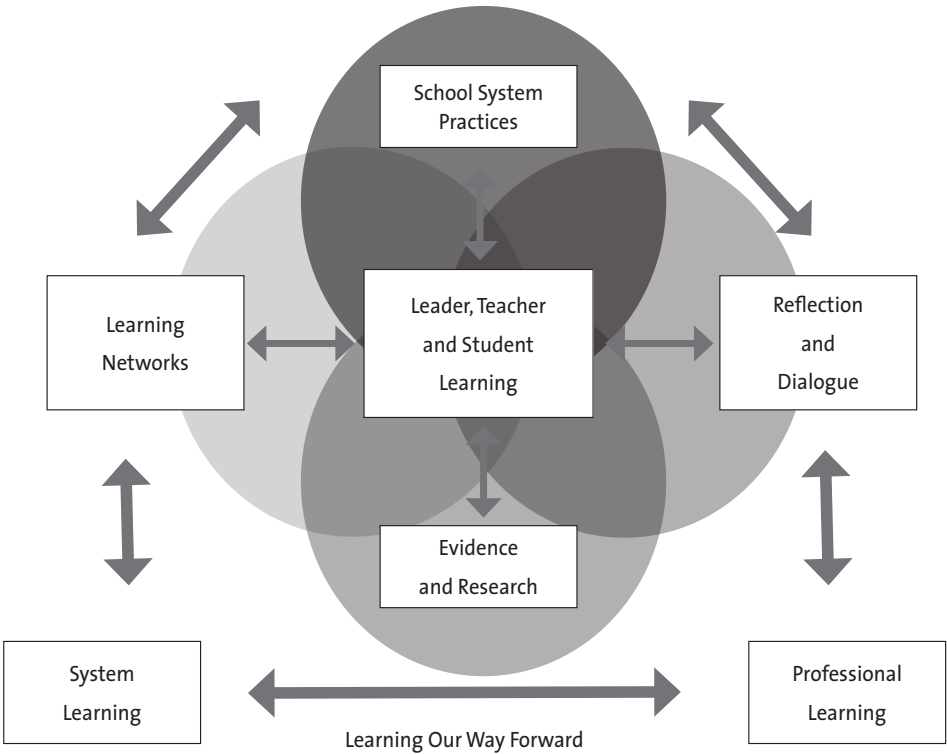
## System Leadership for Learning –
## Additional Evidence

A number of credible studies published since the 2008 Leithwood meta-analysis add significant weight to the Framework's primary premise – that system leadership does, in fact, have a significant role to play in improving student learning. Moreover, key claims from this fresh vein of system leadership research have been incorporated into the updated version of the Framework presented in this volume. Key findings from six of these studies are now addressed.

Leithwood has authored three of these recent contributions to our understanding of system effects. His current work with directors of education in Ontario (Leithwood, 2011) builds on his extensive efforts with CASS in Alberta during 2008 and 2009. The Ontario System Effectiveness Framework (DEF) itemizes 13 research supported system characteristics within four categories. Table 7.1 in our concluding chapter compares these characteristics with the 12 CASS framework dimensions. The DEF

> describes the qualities of school systems that are 'exceptionally effective at educating all students well'. It is based on systematic reviews of relevant empirical evidence, as well as an original, multi-methods empirical test, which confirmed the effects on student achievement of the qualities included in the framework (p1).

An earlier Leithwood contribution emanated from a 2010 paper commissioned by CASS, *Turning Around Underperforming School Systems: Guidelines for System Leaders.* The paper provides additional important evidence to guide system improvement processes. Though the focus of this meta-analysis is on helping underperforming school systems, the eight primary and three secondary strategies central to successful turnaround "are not qualitatively different than strategies which are also associated with the more common system improvement contexts" (p. 28). The importance of system level efforts is underscored in the paper's conclusion.

The system leadership team is the single most important influence on system turnaround processes and should be held directly accountable for tasks it is uniquely positioned to accomplish.

As the broader literature on organizational turnaround (e.g., Kanter, 2003) makes very clear, leadership matters most in times of crisis and significant change. Almost all other elements of the turnaround process, argues Murphy (2008), are dependent on leaders' problem solving and action.

In the case of school system turnarounds, key sources of such leadership will be the superintendent (CEO), other members of the senior administrative team, elected officials, and leaders of teacher unions working together. The speed of improvement associated with the concept of 'turnaround', furthermore, demands consistent communication and coordinated action from all of these sources of system leadership. (p. 28)

A third set of strong research generated claims about the impact of system leadership on student learning is found in the 2010 Wallace Foundation study, *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning* (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010a & b)). The authors observe that: "Research has converged on a common set of actions and policy conditions associated with system-wide improvement and effectiveness" (2010b, p. 17). The study calls for district practices that encourage wide participation in and distribution of leadership focused on teacher capacity development and instructional improvement. The following summary draws attention to the potential as well as the limitations of system leadership.

Districts have the power and specific responsibility to support effective educational leadership. The issue facing them is how to use their positions of authority to develop and support practices that improve student learning. Individual Principals cannot go it alone. District policies and structures cannot ensure that all

students will have an excellent teacher every year. The effect of District policies and structures on classrooms and students will be largely indirect. But districts can formulate strategies and support practices that enable Principals, teachers and students to thrive. (2010b, p. 32)

Important findings from this large-scale study have been incorporated into *Linking Leadership to Student Learning* authored in 2012 by Kenneth Leithwood and Karen Seashore Louis. This excellent source has been extensively used in the current iteration of the Alberta Framework.

The fourth of the six recent studies addressed in this section, Friesen and Lock (2010), provide specific insights into system practices that leverage technology to serve 21st century teaching and learning. The authors draw upon the best available research evidence ('public knowledge') in combination with the 'practitioner knowledge' of system leaders and partner stakeholders to generate 'new knowledge' – knowledge created together through collaborative work and inquiry toward the creation of school systems as knowledge-building organizations (NCSL, 2006). Their CASS commissioned study, *Characteristics of High-performing Jurisdictions in the Application of 21st Century Learning Technologies*, calls for systems leaders to act on four fronts:

1.    to develop a shared vision of 21st century learning and teaching,
2.    to enact transformational school and system leadership,
3.    to set up IT Governance structures and processes, and
4.    to work toward transforming school systems into knowledge-building organizations.

Marzano and Waters (2009) meta-analysis of school system leadership is the fifth study published in the last few years that supports the notion that district leadership matters and "that when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected (p. 5). They detail what they believe to be "a new view of district leadership – one that assumes district leadership can be a critical component of effective schooling" (p. 13). This perspective is based

on their earlier review of research on district effects on student achievement (2006) as well as "research and theory on high reliability organizations and the research regarding the highest-performing school systems in the world" (p. 22). In this new conception of district leadership:

> Nonnegotiable instructional goals are established at the district level. These goals are supported by leadership at every level of the district. Resources are dedicated to professional development that ensures high-quality instruction, strong and knowledgeable instructional leadership, ongoing monitoring of instructional quality, and the impact of instruction on learning. Despite this tight coupling, there is sufficient autonomy and flexibility at the school level to respond quickly and effectively to early indications of error and individual student failure. (p. 21)

A case study by Sheppard, Brown & Dibbon (2009) is the sixth and final recent research report addressed. This study reveals that "school systems can facilitate collaborative leadership and organizational learning within the context of hierarchical structures, and as a result, they can make a difference to student learning" (p. 131). The authors arrived at five understandings related to school system practices. Collaborative leadership and organizational learning in a school system

- are enhanced through in-depth understanding of emerging empirical evidence and developing theories.
- require mutual respect and trust between constituents.
- can be facilitated by structural changes with clearly defined rules of engagement.
- can shape a collective moral commitment to each child's success and foster a common vision of teaching and learning that will help achieve that commitment.
- require the enlistment of leaders from multiple sources to engage in strategic thinking and acting. (pp. 123–131)

## Evidence-Based Practice

By design, the Framework for School System Success promotes the idea of evidence-based practice, which has its origins in science and medicine. Health Canada, for example, defines evidence-based decision making as the "systematic application of the best available evidence to the evaluation of options and to decision making in clinical, management and policy settings". In this conception, "evidence is but one of the elements in decision making. The values and interests of the decision maker, as well as the situation or context in which the decision is being made, influence the process and outcome" (Brownson, Fielding & Maylahn, 2009. p. 176).

Levin (2010b) points out the obvious student learning benefits that would accrue from more consistent use of evidence-based practice and makes several suggestions for better mobilization of existing research knowledge. "The essence of a professional lies in its members' commitment to using what they commonly understand to be good practice" (p. 306). At the same time, he explains why it is so challenging to put what we know into practice on a consistent basis.

In most areas of educational practice, the evidence base is insufficient to act only when there is strong research supporting a change. When there is limited or no reliable evidence, Levin (2008) suggests "changes should be based on a credible theory of improvement" (p. 71). In this view, there should be a clear statement of supporting evidence before proceeding with an innovation. Both evidence and judgment are needed. Without professional wisdom, education cannot adapt to local circumstances, or operate intelligently in the many areas in which research evidence is absent or incomplete. And, without empirical evidence, education cannot resolve competing approaches, generate cumulative knowledge, or avoid fads, fancy and personal bias.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) envision a profession "that constantly and collectively builds its knowledge base and corresponding expertise, where practices and their impact are transparently tested, developed, circulated,

and adapted" (p. 50). In this scheme, "teachers develop their own and other teachers' practice informed by the research base and interpreted together" (p. 50). Such work involves "committing to best practice (existing practices that already have a good degree of widely agreed effectiveness) and having the freedom, space and resources to create next practice" – innovative practices that may evolve into best practices of the future (pp. 50–51).

Hattie (2009, 2012) provides additional insights into overcoming the historic difficulties we have had in mobilizing the growing body of evidence in education. These books aim to take further steps in this direction by providing a way of thinking about and acting upon what we know about the relationships among system leadership practices and improved student learning outcomes.

## The Alberta Framework for School System Success

To this point, our introductory chapter has provided the background of and the research basis for the 2013 Framework for School System Success. We now provide a description of its overall structure and format. The current version captures and integrates insights from the more recent system research findings traced in the preceding section and builds on practitioner learning over the past four years to form an updated artful union of research and practical wisdom. The Framework now features 12 research verified leadership dimensions organized within four areas of collective practice as outlined in Table 1.4 below. Whereas each of the dimensions is a system leadership quality positively correlated to student learning, the four practice areas – vision and direction setting, capacity building, relationships and system design – have been established to formulate a conceptually coherent structure for thinking and acting from the perspective of a system leadership team member. The four practice areas are similar to the four classifications employed in Leithwood (2012) and derived from earlier studies by Leithwood and colleagues: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization and improving instructional practices.

**Table 1.4: The Alberta Framework for School System Success**

| Vision and Direction Setting | |
|---|---|
| Dimension 1: | Focus on student learning |
| Dimension 2: | Curriculum and instruction |
| Dimension 3: | Uses of evidence |
| Capacity Building | |
| Dimension 4: | System efficacy |
| Dimension 5: | Leadership for learning |
| Dimension 6: | Professional learning |
| Relationships | |
| Dimension 7: | School – system connections |
| Dimension 8: | Parent and community engagement |
| Dimension 9: | School board leadership |
| System Design | |
| Dimension 10: | System alignment |
| Dimension 11: | System improvement |
| Dimension 12: | Leveraging technology |

The substantive adjustments made to formulate the current version of the Framework also reflect trends evident in the several of the world's top performing educational systems. The three tables that follow summarize these key trends as captured by Michael Fullan and Sir Michael Barber in the final report from the Building Blocks for Education: Whole System Reform Summit hosted by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2010. In several ways these tables reflect insights shared in the 2012 book by Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirely, *The Global Fourth Way: The Quest for Educational Excellence.* Their analysis of what can be learned from six of the world's leading education systems, including the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Ontario, includes the following observation about what these systems have in common:

> They engage people in their schools locally. They use testing prudently, not pervasively. They favour innovation, not detailed standardization. Teachers' performance rewards are not based on student test-score data. Teaching is a life-long career requiring rigorous training, not a short-term engagement that can be prepared for fast. (p. xi)

**Table 1.5: Standards and Targets**

Curriculum and standards will increasingly be globally benchmarked and relate to the creative future.

Standards and targets need to encompass a broad curriculum for all students. We need to avoid false dichotomies within curricula, such as between literacy and 21st century skills.

Although targets are optional, clarity about system direction is not. That direction must be widely shared.

Systems need to demonstrate their impact to taxpayers.

Assessment systems need to evolve and maintain clarity.

(Fullan & Barber, 2010. p. 10)

Our Chapter 2 also addresses the four key assessment and data issues in Table 1.6.

**Table 1.6: Assessment and the Use of Data**

A broader evidence base is needed.

Classroom and system use of data must be integrated.

Collaborative professionalism should be linked to student data.

Key concerns include the burden of work relative to yield, the danger of transparency and misuse of data.

(Fullan & Barber, 2010. p. 10)

The issues and trends in Tables 1.7 and 1.8 below are addressed in our Chapter 3, Capacity Building.

## Table 1.7 Capacity Building and the Teaching Profession

Coaching and mentoring systems focused on classroom improvement have great promise.

Collaboration among teachers and across schools through networks should be encouraged.

Schools, districts and faculties of education should be aligned.

System-level leadership should stay the course and provide ongoing context for teacher development.

The dilemma of flexibility versus fidelity must be continually addressed.

(Fullan & Barber, 2010. p. 10)

## Table 1.8: Leadership and Sustainability

A comprehensive set of leadership competencies is needed to drive 21st century learning.

Every individual leader has the responsibility to lead others and to learn the craft early.

Collaboration and partnership will be required.

Detailed and ongoing mentoring and coaching is essential.

The system has to invest in, and cultivate, leadership early and on a continuous basis.

Collaboration among teachers and across schools through networks should be encouraged.

Schools, districts and faculties of education should be aligned.

System-level leadership should stay the course and provide ongoing context for teacher development.

The dilemma of flexibility versus fidelity must be continually addressed.

(Fullan & Barber, 2010. p. 11)

CASS is fortunate to have worked continuously with a team of the world's best educational researchers, thinkers and scholars since the fall of 2008. In addition to Ken Leithwood's foundational research contributions, the present version of the Framework has been shaped by our ongoing interactions with the work of Michael Fullan, Sharon Friesen, Ben Levin, Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley. Their insights and scholarly wisdom are notably evident throughout this volume.

## Summary

In conjunction with the Ministry of Education, three universities and four provincial education partners, the College of Alberta School Superintendents is collaboratively implementing the Alberta Framework for School System Success to support school system improvement and to build the leadership capacity of its members. This introductory chapter traced the origins and conceptual underpinnings of the Framework, which focuses on the qualities of high-performing school systems and is conceived as an artful synthesis of the best available research evidence combined with the wisdom and experience of practicing superintendents. Working with leading international researcher-consultants during a time of challenge and transformational change, Alberta superintendents are continuing to use the Framework to improve a broad cross-section of system results including traditional measures of student achievement along with other indicators that point to what students should be prepared for if they are to have personally satisfying lives, as well as being responsible citizens and productive members of the workforce.

Attention now turns to the Framework's four areas of collective system leadership practice in chapters two through five. Each chapter is structured in a similar manner. The three leadership dimensions within the area of practice are described and evidence for suggested system approaches is presented. Exemplars of related Alberta system leadership approaches are provided along with suggested guidelines for practice from Leithwood (2011). Chapter six focuses on the major challenge of sustaining school system leadership through its focus on the CASS New Superintendent Induction Program. The book's concluding chapter more specifically examines our research in action theory of action.

# Vision and
# Direction Setting

2

## Introduction

The Alberta Framework for School System Success describes the qualities
of school systems that are exceptionally effective at educating all students
well. This chapter focuses on vision and direction setting, the first of four
categories of effective system leadership practice. Subsequent chapters
examine capacity building, relationships and system design. Each of these
four practice areas is comprised of three research substantiated leadership
dimensions. The vision and direction setting area consists of

- Dimension 1: Focus on Student Learning
- Dimension 2: Curriculum and Instruction
- Dimension 3: Uses of Evidence

Following a more general discussion of evidence informed system vision
and direction setting and related aspects of the Alberta context, the three
leadership dimensions are each described along with insights from the
supporting research literature. The ideas presented in relation to each
dimension are based on systematic reviews of empirical evidence completed
for CASS by Ken Leithwood in 2008 along with selected subsequent studies
of system leadership noted in Chapter One. An exemplar of relevant Alberta

system leadership practices is shared in a Vision and Direction Setting Snapshot and general system guidelines are offered in the chapter summary.

Alberta is reshaping its educational system in directions similar to other leading systems in the world as summarized by Michael Fullan and Michael Barber (2010). Educational sights are being set on a broader curriculum for all students, while avoiding false dichotomies such as between literacy and 21st century skills. Assessment and accountability mechanisms are evolving towards a broader evidence base. Investments in an array of teaching and leadership capacity building strategies are being accompanied by clearer, more relevant standards and an emphasis on collaboration and stakeholder engagement.

The provincial Ministry of Education's vision of the kind of education that Alberta students will need in the 21st century is as follows: "All students are inspired to achieve success and fulfillment as *engaged thinkers* and *ethical citizens* with an *entrepreneurial spirit* [emphasis in the original] (Alberta Education, 2011a, p 6). These three meta-outcomes or 'three Es' in the vision are further described:

Engaged Thinker: [An individual] who thinks critically and makes discoveries; who uses technology to learn, innovate, communicate, and discover; who works with multiple perspectives and disciplines to identify problems and find the best solutions; who communicates these ideas to others; and who, as a life-long learner, adapts to change with an attitude of optimism and hope for the future.

Ethical Citizen: [An individual] who builds relationships based on humility, fairness and open-mindedness; who demonstrates respect, empathy and compassion; and who through teamwork, collaboration and communication contributes fully to the community and the world.

Entrepreneurial Spirit: [An individual] who creates opportunities and achieves goals through hard work, perseverance and discipline; who strives for excellence and earns success; who

explores ideas and challenges the status quo; who is competitive, adaptable and resilient; and who has the confidence to take risks and make bold decisions in the face of adversity. (Alberta Education, 2011a, p. 6)

Most of what is expressed in Alberta's three Es aligns with other educational writing on the dispositions, skills and knowledge students will need to meet the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century (e.g., Binkley et al., 2010; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Friesen, 2009, 2011; Friesen & Lock, 2010; Koehler & Mishra, 2008; Sawyer, 2006, 2008; OECD 2001; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). School system leaders seeking to move student learning in these directions may be guided by the following discussion of how successful districts focus on student learning, shape curriculum and instruction, and use evidence to help all students learn well.

# Dimension 1: Focus on Student Learning

Leadership practices aimed at creating a widely shared sense of purpose that focus system energy and efforts on teaching and learning can have a significantly positive impact as demonstrated by Leithwood (2008, 2011, 2012), other foundational *Framework* studies (Friesen & Lock, 2010) and additional research reports cited in this sub-section. The four key system leadership strategies in *Dimension One* are itemized in Table 2.1 below. Each strategy is then elaborated in one of the four sub-sections that follow.

## Table 2.1 Dimension One: Focus on Student Learning

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | The school system has developed a widely shared vision and beliefs about student learning and well being in the 21st century that falls within the parameters set by the province or state. |
| 2 | The vision includes a focus on nurturing student engagement and welfare. |
| 3 | The vision includes a focus on 'closing the achievement gap' as well as 'raising the achievement bar'. |
| 4 | The school system's vision and beliefs for students are understood and shared by almost all staff. |

## A Widely-Shared Vision of 21st-Century Learning and Teaching

This sub-section looks at evidence informed approaches to developing a widely shared vision and beliefs about student learning and well being in two parts. We begin with 21st century conceptions of learning and teaching before addressing the importance of and challenges with maintaining a system's focus on its core business – teaching and learning.

### 21st Century Conceptions of Learning and Teaching

Twenty-first century learning and teaching are multifaceted ideas built on insights from the learning sciences combined with advances in networked digital technologies, as Sharon Friesen and Jennifer Lock report in their CASS commissioned study, Characteristics of High-performing Jurisdictions

in the Application of 21st Century Learning Technologies (2010, p. 4). Based on extensive consultations with Albertans and informed by current research, the *Inspiring Education Steering Committee Report* (Alberta Education, 2010) envisions the transformation of learning and teaching toward the development of three qualities and abilities in 21st century students: engaged thinking, ethical citizenship and entrepreneurial spirit. Binkley and colleagues (2010) focus on ten skills within four categories: **ways of thinking** that involve creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, learning to learn, and metacognition; **ways of working**, communication and collaboration; **tools for working**: information literacy, information and communication technology literacy; **living in the world**, local and global citizenship; **life and career**; personal and social responsibility – including cultural awareness and competence.

The U.S. Department of Education's national education technology plan (2010) presents a model of 21st century learning powered by technology with goals and recommendations in five essential areas: learning, assessment, teaching, infrastructure, and productivity.

According to Friesen and Lock, many of these skills have been part of the educational lexicon since the early 1960s, while others are new. Researchers generally agree that both old and new skills are needed and that the learning contexts in which these skills must be cultivated are different from those in previous centuries (p. 7). The two Alberta scholars suggest that these skills may better be understood as components of 21st century competencies in alignment with the Organization for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) definition:

> Competencies are more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. Competencies involve a mobilization of cognitive and practical skills, creative abilities and other psychosocial resources such as attitudes, motivation and values (OECD, 2005, p.4).

When educational technologies are embedded in robust 21st century knowledge-building environments they "offer ways of teaching and learning that can transform children's educational experiences, not only making them more personal and allowing them to develop more broadly, socially as well as academically, but also opening up the possibilities for creativity, raising aspirations and making connections" (Galloway, 2009, p. 64).

Several studies advocate for the mindful infusion of networked digital technologies directed toward rich, robust and meaningful learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Friesen, 2009; Koehler & Mishra, 2008; Lemke, et al., 2009; Sawyer, 2006, 2008; Scardmalia, et al., 2010; Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009). These studies suggest pedagogical practices that

- nurture active and in-depth learning,
- require authenticity,
- foster collaboration,
- utilize prior knowledge and experience,
- use formative assessment,
- organize knowledge around key concepts and connections and
- support the development of meta-cognitive skills.

The evidence further suggests that digital technologies should primarily be used by the learner to construct knowledge, rather than as a medium to deliver instruction (Jonassen, et al, 2008; Scardemalia, et al., 2010). In such conceptions, teachers help students to better understand the ways in which knowledge is created and verified, practiced and demonstrated, made public, critiqued, and handed on (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Gardner, 2006; Friesen, 2009; Friesen & Jardine, 2009; Sawyer, 2006, 2008; Scardamalia, et al., 2010).

Koehler and Mishra (2008) conclude that effective technology integration requires the intersection among the bodies of knowledge that are represented by pedagogical content knowledge, technology content knowledge and technological pedagogical knowledge. The intersection of all three knowledge types is described as technological pedagogical

content knowledge. Mishra and Koehler (2006) created the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework that "can be used to design pedagogical strategies and an analytic lens to study changes in educators' knowledge about successful teaching with technology" (p. 1046). "TPACK-competent teachers exhibit best practices in pedagogy, content, and technology. They understand the true nature of effective teaching and learning with technology" (Nelson, Christopher & Mims, 2009, p. 85).

### Focusing on Teaching and Learning

In his 2008 CASS commissioned *Review of the Characteristics of High-performing School Systems*, Ken Leithwood refers to a number of studies that illustrate the importance of developing a school system vision that clearly and unambiguously focuses on the teaching and learning. A summary of key findings from these studies is now noted.

The four significantly improving Alberta systems examined by Maguire (2003) had vision statements "that were more sharply focused on student learning and more widely promulgated and internalized at all levels" than other jurisdictions (p. 10). They had "widespread, top-to-bottom understanding of the jurisdiction's mission and goals" (p. 11). In these school systems there was "a powerful concentration by the jurisdiction's administration on improving student achievement, coupled with at least one senior leader whose passion and energy are sufficient to fuel the jurisdiction's vision" (p. 11).

Research carried out in both New York City's District #2 and in the San Diego School District illustrates the importance of the clarity of vision that focused all district work on the improvement of teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al., 2003; Hightower, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). Other studies in Leithwood (2008) support the importance of clarity. For example, four of the five high-performing jurisdictions in Togneri and Anderson's (2003) study "began their reform efforts by reassessing and revising their visions". Significantly, notable "was the extent to which these jurisdictions used their visions to guide instructional improvement" (p. 12).

Similarly, the high-performing jurisdictions in Iatarola and Fruchter's (2004) study were much clearer about their educational goals than the low performing jurisdictions. All four jurisdictions in Skrla et al.'s (2000) study had developed a clear sense of direction and focus. In these districts educators were found to share a common sense of mission. Moreover, understanding of this mission was highly consistent across all of the stakeholders in these districts.

## Nurturing Student Engagement and Welfare

Nurturing student engagement and welfare is the second district leadership strategy in Dimension One. The need for school systems to pay more attention to student engagement is clearly driven home by the 2009 research findings reported by Doug Willms, Sharon Friesen, and Penny Milton. Their work on the Canadian Education Association's What Did You Do in School? initiative (WDYDIS) has generated a number of key insights about student engagement in school. Four definitions of *student engagement* are used in the WDYDIS framework:

> Student engagement is the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes, have a sense of belonging at school, participate in academic and non-academic activities, strive to meet the formal requirements of schooling, and make a serious personal investment in learning.

> Academic (or Institutional) engagement is a students' participation in the formal requirements of schooling, for example, completing assignments, attending classes and accumulating credits for graduation.

> Intellectual engagement is a serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning, using higher-order thinking skills (such as analysis and evaluation) to increase understanding, solve complex problems or construct new knowledge.

> Social engagement is a student's sense of belonging and participation in school life. (p. 43)

While academic engagement involves important learning that helps students succeed in school, intellectual engagement refers to an absorbing, creatively energizing focus requiring contemplation, interpretation, understanding, meaning making and critique. The notion of intellectual engagement reflects the interrelated connection between emotion and cognition. Intellectual engagement results in a deep, personal commitment on the part of learners to explore and investigate ideas, issues, problems or questions for a sustained period of time. Increasing intellectual engagement is our schools needs to be a priority.

Willms, Friesen & Milton (2009) report the unsettling results of a survey of approximately 32,000 grades five to twelve students from ten school jurisdictions in five Canadian provinces. Intellectual engagement declines from a 58% in grade 6 to a low of 30% in grade 10, with a slight increase to approximately 38% in grade 12. Participation in school activities follows a parallel decline and student attendance falls from 90% in grade 6 to just 40% in grade 12. The only measure that remains consistently high is sense of belonging, which is at 74% in grade 6 and rises slightly to about 76% by grade 12.

For school districts to be truly successful, then, involves more than generating comparatively high scores on standardized tests. Highly successful school systems focus on being exceptionally effective at educating all students well. Attention must be placed on engaging students intellectually, academically and socially to support their learning and their welfare for the short term and the years after graduating from school.

## Closing the Gap and Raising the Bar

Leithwood (2008) summarized several studies that investigated system efforts go beyond the improvement of average levels of student achievement and increase the life chances of disadvantaged students in particular. Snipes et al.'s (2002) retrospective case study, for example, compared four high-performing jurisdictions with a selection of low-performing jurisdictions. The high-performing jurisdictions, in contrast to their low-performing counterparts, developed more specific student achievement goals for target

groups of students in their most challenging schools. By design, the lower performing schools in these systems were provided with more resources. Specific strategies were developed to improve the quality of leadership and teaching in these settings.

As Michael Fullan (2010) phrases it,

> Of course, an increase in the average level of educational achievement in a society is important, but light years better is whether the gap between high and low achievers decreases as the overall average rises. Closing the gap has profound multiple benefits for both individuals and for society as a whole. Large gaps spell doom. (p. 15)

Stephen Anderson and Karen Seashore Louis (2012) indicate that a district's focus on learning is more effective when addressing the learning of all students, rather than targeting just those students who are experiencing difficulty. Both higher and lower performing students must achieve success for real district improvement, in their view. They conceptualize three levels of support for schools:

> Level one provides basic resources to all schools to develop the basic knowledge, skills encompassed district expectations for student learning and development.

> Level two provides additional support and assistance to schools which significant numbers of students that are at risk or struggling to meet expectations.

> Level three support occurs when there is cross-school collaborative inquiry into important problems and a collaborative search for solutions that go beyond current knowledge and expectations (pp. 200-201).

Government accountability policies figure strongly in earlier research about districts that are successful in closing the gap. The studies by Skrla and her colleagues (Koschoreck, 2001; Skrla et al., 2000; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001) are based on evidence collected in four Texas districts that were explicitly committed to, and had a record of achieving high levels of performance on the part of disadvantaged and diverse students. Their overriding goal was equity of outcomes for all students. Reports of this research describe how the four districts managed to 'raise the bar' with low income students and students of colour. This research also found that the Texas accountability system stimulated superintendents, in particular, to radically change their expectations for the achievement of underperforming students and to lead their districts away from deficit thinking about these children.

Opfer and colleagues (2008) examined the responses of districts in six southern states to government accountability systems, as well as the effects of district responses on four variables – teachers' engagement in improving instruction, teachers' perception of school support, and teachers' perception of jurisdiction support. Their evidence suggests that jurisdictions act as intermediaries of external state policies and play an important role in the success of reform initiatives. More highly developed accountability systems stimulated heightened focus on teaching and learning. he authors explained: "Jurisdictions are compelled [by state accountability policies] to develop coherent instructional policies, including professional development opportunities; these policies focus teacher attention on instructional improvement; and this instructional focus results in improved teaching and learning" (p. 311). Other features associated with high-performing districts in this study were unity of purpose, a clear focus, and shared values for student learning.

In a more recent conception, Fullan (2010) uses the term 'intelligent accountability' to describe a set of policies and practices "that actually increases individual, and especially collective, capacity to the transparent point that shared responsibility carries most of the freight of effective

accountability" (p. 5). In his view, this new approach to accountability has the following characteristics. It

- relies on incentives more than on punishment.
- invests in capacity building so that people are able to meet the goals.
- invests in collective (peer) responsibility – what is called 'internal accountability'.
- intervenes initially in a nonjudgmental manner.
- embraces transparent data about practice and results.
- intervenes more decisively along the way when required. (p. 66)

## Sharing the Vision and Beliefs for Student Learning and Welfare

Inspirational visions require grounding in specific achievable goals if longer term results are to be realized and sustained. While the notions of vision, mission and goals are central to most contemporary planning practices, a key challenge for school systems is to develop these purposes statements in ways that lead to the vast majority of staff adopting them as their own.

Cawelti's (2001) evidence supports continuing work by districts aimed at developing shared beliefs "about learning and how the school system should operate, and a vision of the future" (p. 2). This evidence also stresses the importance of getting "beyond the rhetoric of 'all students can learn' by developing programs, policies and teaching strategies that lead to higher levels of achievement" (p. 2).

How this might be stimulated is exemplified in Ragland et al.'s (1999) study of ten high-performing Texas districts. Evidence from this research stressed the critical role of the superintendents. Many of the qualities of these ten jurisdictions had been developed through the efforts of the superintendents. A major theme across these jurisdictions was 'creating a sense of urgency in the community' regarding the improvement of students' academic achievement. Initiatives undertaken by superintendents and their jurisdiction colleagues to create this sense of urgency included: establishing a trustful relationship with the parents and the wider community; using

data and goals to reinforce a sense of urgency; and maintaining a productive working relationship, based on relatively high levels of trust between the superintendent and the school board.

Districts in this study also focused the work of the system on students by reducing distractions that might divert the energies of Principals and teachers from the focus on teaching and learning. In the case of Principals, for example, this meant "structuring activities so that Principals could spend minimum amounts of time away from their campuses during the school day and spend a maximum portion of each day focused on instruction" (p. 15). These jurisdictions also reduced monitoring requirements and eliminated central office requests for information and other similar distractions.

The research presented in this section underlines the importance of district leadership practice in Dimension One: Focus on Student Learning. Such focus requires that school system leaders be disciplined in the number and type of goals selected. Focusing on a few clear, widely understood priorities on teaching and learning leads to powerful results for the learning and welfare of all children. Focused school districts have a limited number of defined priorities that are clearly articulated, collaboratively developed and effectively communicated. They avoid the 'Christmas tree' glitter of numerous innovations and initiatives that invariably lead to 'initiative fatigue' and lack of coherence (Fullan, 2001).

## Dimension 2: Curriculum and Instruction

As significant as it is to focus system efforts on teaching and learning, it is even more important to take steps to ensure that the actual curriculum and instruction offered to students are of the highest quality. Leithwood (2008, 2011, 2012) and insights gained through four years of the CASS leadership learning initiative point to five key strategies listed in Table 2.2.

### Table 2.2 Dimension Two: Curriculum and Instruction

The school system and its staff

1. strongly support the efforts of schools to implement curricula that foster deep understandings of *big ideas* and to develop the basic competencies students need to acquire such understandings.

2. work effectively with schools to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.

3. work effectively with schools to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards.

4. work with schools to align curriculum, instruction, assessment and teaching resources in an extensive and ongoing manner.

5. include teachers in a majority of schools in the district's instructional improvement work and assist teachers in developing sophisticated understandings of powerful instruction for students.

## 1. Support Schools' Efforts to Implement Curricula that Foster Deep Understanding and the Competencies Needed to Acquire Such Understandings

This sub-section examines the ways in which effective school systems strongly support the efforts of schools to implement curricula that foster deep understandings of big ideas and to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings. We begin with 21st century conceptions of teaching and learning and move on to the importance of and challenges with maintaining a system's focus on its core business – teaching and learning.

Recent studies of learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; OECD, 2001, 2007, 2008; Sawyer, 2006, 2008) seek to better understand the cognitive, emotional and social processes that result in the most effective learning and to use this knowledge within the design of curriculum, teaching and assessment so that people learn more deeply and effectively. These approaches to learning are not only different in degrees, but also significantly different in kind. It is important for teachers to keep abreast of new advances in learning, as the task of teaching is to sponsor learning. Research from the learning sciences, an interdisciplinary field which includes cognitive science, educational psychology, computer science, anthropology, sociology, information sciences, neurosciences, education, design studies, and instructional design, is yielding new insights into learning as well as the implications for designing more effective learning environments, including school classrooms.

Learning environments emerging from contemporary research recognize learners as core participants, requiring active engagement and developing in them an understanding of their own activity as learners. These learning environments recognize that learning is not merely a solo activity, rather a distributed activity, social in nature, through the processes of interaction, negotiation, cooperation, collaboration and participation. They are highly attuned to the inextricably entwined nature of the emotional and cognitive dimensions of learning. Learning within these environments is organized to sponsor deep conceptual understanding rooted in disciplinary ways of knowing, doing and being connected both vertically within the discipline and horizontally across disciplines. Such learning environments are learner-focused and acutely sensitive to the fact that students differ in many ways, including their prior knowledge. Learning within these environments is maximized when each learner is sufficiently challenged and supported to reach just above their existing level and capacity. Assessment and instruction work together in these environments to ensure that learning goals are transparent and learners receive substantial, regular, timely, specific, meaningful feedback to improve learning.

## 2. Work with Schools to Provide All Students with Engaging Instruction

Highly successful school systems work effectively with schools to provide all students with engaging forms of instruction. Significant investments in ongoing instructional improvement are likely to be the most direct and powerful initiatives system can make: research consistently points to the quality of teaching practice as the most important factor in student learning and engagement. Maguire (2003) argues that "improvement in student achievement is accomplished by ensuring that teachers are highly skilled and committed to the goals of student learning and their own professional development and growth (p.138).

Conceptions of high quality professional teaching practice are evolving. System-wide adoption of one or more specific approaches to instruction is giving way to other strategies. England's Primary Strategies, for example, required a highly prescribed approach to the teaching of literacy and math in the first three years of implementation. This was based on a widespread belief that many primary teachers did not know how to effectively instruct in those areas. Evidence from the large-scale reform literature suggests some significant gains for students in the short term with such prescription in contexts where achievement is very poor. These gains 'ceiling out' quite quickly.

High-performing systems are much more likely to capitalize on the full range of teaching capacities their staffs possess and to build on this range – not to restrict it. Instructional improvement needs to be broadly conceptualized.

Resnick (2007), for example, proposes five classroom enablers: instructional time, content coverage, instructional quality, diagnostic adaptation and student engagement. Evidence suggests that children who traditionally struggle at school benefit from the same rich curriculum and engaging forms of instruction, as do traditionally successful students. High quality instruction is 'constructivist' and is defined by:

- academic rigour across task and assignments,

- the centrality of ideas,

- encouragement of a range of cognitive engagement,

- clear expectations about what high quality work is for students,

- high frequency of student/teacher accountablity talk,

- little off-task time.

Friesen and Lock's (2010) review indicates that the mindful infusion of networked digital technologies leads to rich, robust and meaningful learning through pedagogical practices which:

- nurture active and in-depth learning,

- require authenticity,

- foster collaboration,

- utilize prior knowledge and experience,

- use formative assessment,

- organize knowledge around key concepts and connections and

- support the development of meta-cognitive skills.

From their analysis of seven top performing school systems in the application of learning technologies, five characteristics of Teachers as Designers of 21st Century Learning are delineated. Such teachers

- develop strong authentic discipline-based inquiry work for students;

- scaffold student work with robust instructional practices that conform to the learners and assessment practices that assist and aid each child to improve, grow and thrive;

- call upon networked digital technologies to create knowledge-building classrooms;

- create strong relationships with their students and other teachers and create processes so that students built strong relationships with each other and with experts in the field as they learn together; and

- work with peers to critically reflect on their practice and work on improving their practice in the company of their peers.

John Hattie's *Visible Learning for Teachers* (2012) builds on his ground breaking 2009 synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses in the largest ever collection of evidence-based research into what works in schools to improve learning. The additional meta-analyses reviewed in this work bring the total cited to over 900. Hattie outlines the 42 most successful interventions within a five sequence lesson framework: preparing the lesson, starting the lesson, interpreting learning, and providing feedback during the lesson and post lesson follow up. Expert teachers are distinguished from experienced teachers by the learning outcomes achieved. To Hattie, inspired and passionate teachers

- solve instructional problems,
- interpret events in progress,
- are sensitive to context,
- monitor learning,
- test hypotheses,
- demonstrate respect for all in the school,
- show passion for teaching and learning, and
- help students to understand complexity. (pp. 30-31)

For Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) the importance of focusing system improvement efforts on developing and sustaining professional capital, "the systematic development and integration of three kinds of capital – human, social and decisional – into teaching," cannot be overstated (p. xv). Their view of teaching grounded in their analysis of the world's top educationally performing countries assumes that:

- Good teaching is technically sophisticated and difficult.
- Good teaching requires high levels of education and long periods of training.
- Good teaching is perfected through continuous improvement.
- Good teaching is a collective accomplishment and responsibility.
- Good teaching maximizes, mediates, and moderates online instruction. (p. 14)

Robinson (2011) explains that quantity and quality are both important to student success. Instructional time is lost in a variety of ways: when students are not on task, misalignment of activities to learning outcomes and lack of cognitive engagement. Other inhibitors include mismatching learning outcomes to student prior knowledge or interest, and not designed to promote success. For Robinson quality instruction and student opportunities to learn are related to four key questions:

- What is the importance of the outcomes being pursued?
- Is there an alignment of the activities and resources with outcomes?
- Are the students behaviorally and cognitively engaged?
- What is the students' success on the outcomes? (pp. 92-93)

Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) describe the features of *direct*, *constructivist* and *focused* teaching models. Direct teaching involves teachers setting learning outcomes, strategies for classroom management, content, and pacing – a teacher centred approach to instruction. On the other hand, constructivism requires teachers to design student activities that engage students in exploration and induction. Teachers serve as guides to help students construct meaning. *Focused* instruction combines elements of each model. The teacher controls the pace and content of lessons, allowing students to take charge of their own learning and construct their own knowledge. This combined approach is framed with these underlying principles:

The teacher enables students to construct their own knowledge. Disruptions of classroom time are minimized. The teacher assumes that most students in the classroom are capable of taking charge of their own learning (in age appropriate ways). The teacher emphasizes the development of deep knowledge of the core subject(s) that are being taught. A rapid pace of instruction in the classroom is being maintained (p.28).

The core principles of the CEA Teaching Effectiveness Framework (Friesen, 2009) stand up well when viewed through the lens of recent research; they serve as a starting point for the five guiding principles below developed by the Alberta Association of Deans of Education (Brandon, Friesen, da Costa,

Gunn, Hull, Nickel, Potvin, 2012). Together these interrelated principles generate research informed images of robust teaching and learning for today's complex and rapidly changing world.

Principle One:
Learning is socially constituted. The thoughtful and intentional design of learning supports academically and intellectually engaging learning environments.
Effective teaching practice begins with the design of academically and intellectually engaging learning for all students. To design challenging work that engages all learners, teachers require a deep understanding of their disciplines, the students they teach, how people learn, the resources available to them, as well as the curriculum outcomes. These design ideas are supported in a number of studies (e.g., Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Clifford, & Marinucci, 2008; Friesen, 2009, 2011; Friesen & Lock, 2010; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Koehler & Mishra, 2006, 2008; McTighe, 2010; OECD, 2001, 2007; Perkins, 2010; Rose & Meyer, 2002, 2006; Sawyer, 2006; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009).

Principle Two:
The work students undertake is personally meaningful and locally and globally situated.
Students become intellectually engaged in work that teachers design for and with students to instill depth of thinking and intellectual rigor in situated learning environments through face to face and digitally networked learning tasks. Situated learning environments move away from "a transmission-and-acquisition style of instruction, toward more collaborative, active and, inquiry-oriented classrooms" to create activity systems wherein students interact with each other, experts and an array of learning resources (Greeno, p. 92). Teachers must be able to continually draw out students' pre-existing understandings to scaffold them to a place of deeper learning and deeper understanding. Digital technologies play a powerful role when used to support learning and knowledge-building activity. They are particularly

powerful not only in helping students solve problems but also in posing new problems. These approaches allow students to be engaged in elaborated forms of communication, collaboration, requesting and gathering feedback, creating new products and participating in and contributing to local and global learning communities. A multitude of recent research studies take these approaches to sponsoring student learning (e.g., Binkley, Erstad, Herman, Raizen, Ripley & Rumble, 2010; Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Dede, 2007a, 2007b, 2010; Clifford, & Marinucci, 2008; Friesen, 2011; Friesen, Jardine & Gladstone, 2010; Friesen & Lock, 2010; Greeno, 2006; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Koehler & Mishra, 2006, 2008; Rose & Meyer, 2002, 2006; Sawyer, 2006; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Willms, 2003; Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009).

Principle Three:
### Assessment practices are focused on improving student learning and guiding teaching decisions and actions.

The intentional design of assessment for learning that invites students to co-create assessment criteria with teachers is one of the most powerful teaching strategies. When instruction and assessment work seamlessly together they enable students to think deeply to understand next steps and to become increasingly self-directed in their learning. Ongoing formative assessment is required throughout the learning activity to make students' thinking visible to both students and teachers. Assessment needs to be embedded in instruction and must include clear criteria for performances of understanding along with helpful feedback during learning. These approaches make learning goals transparent and ensure that learners receive substantial, regular, timely, specific, meaningful feedback to improve their learning on an ongoing basis. Recent studies support the application of this most powerful of learning strategies (e.g., Assessment Reform Group, 2006; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Friesen, 2009, 2011; Friesen & Lock, 2010; Goodrich, 1999; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Wiliam, 2011).

Principle Four:

Supportive relationships promote and sustain a strong learning culture.
Over time, as students participate in a variety of supportive relationships in
caring learning environments that encourage risk-taking and build trust,
students' confidence in themselves as learners grows. In such teaching and
learning contexts, diversity in a student population becomes something that is
welcomed, appreciated, and explored.

Fostering a variety of relationships is a critical component of effective teaching.
In addition to pedagogical relationships (teacher and student), peer relationships
and community relationships (students with others inside and outside of the
school) are important aspects of supportive learning environments. An extensive
body of research underlines the importance of supportive learning relationships
(e.g., ATA, 2003; Clifford & Friesen, 1993; Engle & Conant, 2002; Friesen & Lock,
2010; Gilbert, 2005; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Levin, 2009; National Research Council –
Institute of Medicine, 2003; Newmann, Wehlage & Lamborn, 1992).

Principle Five:

Communities of professional practice enhance teaching and learning.
Effective teachers improve their professional practice in the company of their
peers. As collaborative professionals, effective teachers engage with students,
teacher colleagues, educational leaders, parents, professionals from other
fields, community members and colleagues in the collective leadership of the
school. Frequent professional conversations through networked or school based
communities of inquiry, access to each other's classrooms, and collaborative
planning are effective professional learning practices well supported by the
research (e.g., Friesen, 2011; Friesen & Lock, 2010; Friesen, S. & Lock; Hattie
2009, 2012; Timperly, 2008, 2011; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009).

These five guiding principles support images of rich, robust and meaningful
learning for all students and undergird a research informed approach to teaching
practice. The principles support pedagogical design and practice which nurture
active and in-depth learning, organizes knowledge around key concepts and
connections, requires authenticity, utilizes prior knowledge and experience,
fosters collaboration, weaves formative assessment into the fabric of instruction
and supports the development of metacognition.

### 3. Work with Schools to Establish Ambitious but Realistic Student Performance Standards.

The evidence suggests that high-performing systems work effectively with schools to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards. While these systems take very seriously the standards for student performance that are set externally by the state or province, such systems adapt these to better suit local school contexts. Importantly, it is the way in which the system works with the standards or expectations that determines their impact on student learning. "Expectations are only effective when they are paired with accountability measures to determine whether expected outcomes are reasonable and whether they are being attained" (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood and Anderson, 2010, p. 30).

The evidence also suggests that high-performing jurisdictions push the development of standards beyond students, to teachers and administrators, as well. Indeed the teaching standards movement is very well developed around the world. In Alberta, for example, performance standards have been or are being developed for teachers, Principals and superintendents.

Leithwood's (2008) review provided additional information about standards-setting practices in high-performing systems. For example, several Texas systems (Skrla et al., 2000) had developed benchmark targets for all grades in the core subjects and some systems in Cawelti's (2001) study learned that item-by-item analysis of student responses to state test data was a quick way to determine if state curriculum standards were being taught. The adoption of performance standards for students in NYC's System #2 grew out of the instructional improvement work of the system, as a supplement to better serve the needs of underperforming students (Elmore & Burney, 1998). San Diego also established its own (state related) student performance standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003; Hightower, 2002).

### 4. Align Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and Teaching Resources

Successful school systems work with schools to align curriculum, instruction, teaching resources and assessment in extensive and ongoing ways. Such alignment can be accomplished successfully in a wide variety of ways. In the improving systems in Cawelti's (2001) study, central office staff encouraged school staffs to make decisions about how best to use their funds to meet district targets. Ongoing professional development was provided to all teachers and administrators in NYC's System #2 to prompt continuous efforts to align all elements of the instructional core (Elmore & Burney, 1998). D'Amico et al., (2001) indicated that these efforts to align instructional practices with the system's Balanced Literacy program were associated with improved student outcomes.

One of the important lessons from the O'Day and Bitter (2003) evaluation of California accountability initiatives was that school systems should give priority to helping schools develop internal capacity and a coherent instructional program. Snipes et al. (2002) also found that high-performing systems aligned curricula with stated standards and helped develop such standards into instructional practices, although they often did so from the top down.

Finally, one of the six features of high-performing systems and schools in Langer's (2000) research was the nurturing of a climate that "orchestrated coordinated efforts to improve student achievement" (p. 397). This included making available to teachers resources for professional development, and engaging teachers in ideas and debates leading to "a targeted local plan for instruction that would be orchestrated across grades and over time" (p. 413). According to Langer, this created coherence between policy and instruction. As performance increased, even higher goals were set for student performance. Desired outcomes were made overt and teachers and students received the support they needed in order to be successful.

In the context of a strong central provincial curriculum, highly successful Alberta school systems address questions such as the following:

- How well is the provincial curriculum being implemented and how do we know?
- In what ways does the provincial curriculum need to be adapted or supplemented given local expectations and circumstances and what evidence should we use to help with these decisions?
- To what extent is the curriculum actually taught suitably aligned with assessments (school, system, and province) of student learning?
- Do the resources adequately support the curriculum?
- Do the instructional strategies used by teachers align with the curriculum outcomes?

These questions, however, serve systems well on existing curriculum; they assume that the curriculum is generally a good fit for the needs of today's students. Both the province and school systems also need to have an eye to the future. Research on highly effective superintendents supports the idea that high-performing systems anticipate the future and prepare themselves to address it. These superintendents are engaged in many networks outside of their systems, exercise influence on policy makers and ensure that their systems are not surprised by evolving trends with implications for system policy and practice. They do this in relation to the curriculum as well as in relation to other components of their systems.

High-performing systems, then, support and encourage efforts to address longer-term concerns about how the current curriculum might need to be changed in order to better prepare the next generation of students for the challenges they will face as adults.

## 5.  Engage Teachers in the System's Instructional Improvement Work

School systems that are exceptionally effective at educating all students include teachers in a majority of schools in the district's instructional improvement work and assist teachers in developing sophisticated understandings of powerful instruction for students. Leithwood and Louis (2012) indicate that district leaders must work on multiple fronts with school personnel to foster a collective sense of ownership and responsibility for

curriculum that fosters deep learning of 'big ideas' scaffolded on the basic skills needed to acquire such understandings.

Three of the five high-performing systems in Togneri and Anderson's (2003) study developed their own curricula aligned to state standards and system goals, because teachers in these systems had believed they lacked curricular guidance. Once developed, the implementation of these curricula became the focus of system-wide professional development. In the case of NYC's System #2, the priority focus was first literacy and then math. Both the curriculum and the instruction for these areas of the curriculum emerged from the intensive professional development, which all teachers and administrators engaged in continuously. But this professional development was organized around balanced literacy instruction from the outset, and later in the process, around Resnick's Principles of Learning (Fink & Resnick, 1999). D'Amico et al. (2001) claimed that use of NYC's System 2's literacy and math programs 'levels the playing field' between impoverished and more affluent students. The system also adopted a mathematics program (TERC's Investigations) to serve the same system-wide purpose as the Balanced Literacy program.

## Dimension 3: Use of Evidence

Approaches to the use of data to inform educational practice are shifting in alignment with trends in the world's leading systems as reported by Michael Fullan and Michael Barber in the *Building Blocks for Education: Whole System Reform Summit Final Report* (2010). The trends are towards a broader evidence base and the fuller and more meaningful integration of system and classroom data. Making more regular use of collaborative professionalism in the interpretation and use of student achievement data is another important feature of these shifting practices. The five system leadership strategies listed in Table 2.3 reflect these trends.

### Table 2.3 Dimension Three: Use of Evidence

The school system

1.   has an efficient information management system.

2.   provides schools with relevant data and assists them in using data to improve performance.

3.   creates collaborative structures and opportunities for the interpretation of data in schools, including the use of external expertise when needed.

4.   uses appropriate data for accounting to stakeholders.

5.   makes effective use of existing research to guide policy making and planning.

### 1.   Develop Effective System Information Management Systems.

 Four studies highlight this aspect of high-performing systems' approaches to the use of evidence. For example, the six 'significantly improved' systems in Cawelti's (2001) study developed efficient information management systems allowing them to swiftly retrieve performance information, which they then provided to schools and teachers. As another example, the majority of high-performing systems in Florian et al.'s (2000) study used

performance assessments as part of their system assessment program. Developing the capacity to use evidence from the system assessment program was often done with assistance from external partners. McLaughlin and Talbert's (2003) study of high-performing San Francisco Bay area systems identified five key sets of activities associated with successful reforming systems also included using data-based inquiry and accountability.

In their qualitative comparison of two high- and two low-performing New York City sub-units or systems, Iatarola and Fruchter (2004) found that the high-performing units "made better use of data to drive instructional improvement and also diversified the data they used by balancing students' test score outcomes with other forms of performance data" (p. 508). High-performing systems also were more confident about their ability to use both data-driven results and observational assessments to make instructional changes. High-performing systems also stressed the importance of integrating parental information and feedback about children's learning needs and tried to balance test score results with a blend of other information about students' learning capacities and performance (p. 504).

## 2. Build Effective Data Use Practices in Schools

Insights from surveys, interviews and case studies led Anderson, Leithwood and Louis (2012) to make the following claims, among others, about district practices and data use in schools:

- District priorities and practices around data use substantially influence the leadership behavior of Principals and teachers.
- District leaders' influence occurs through setting expectations, modeling data use in district decision making and by providing direct support to schools
- Data use in schools occurs as a collective activity involving Principals with teachers in multiple contexts (e.g., school improvement teams, grade team meetings). Principals are more likely to enable data use by teachers than to be the primary data users.

- Leaders in high data use schools have clear purposes for analyzing data linked to goals for improvement in student learning. They build internal capacity for this work and use data to solve problems, not just to identify them.
- Principals and teachers have and use considerable amounts of evidence about the status of individual students and their student populations. They report less use of evidence about school and classroom conditions that would need to change for achievement to improve. (p. 58).

The research of Wohlstetter, Datnow and Park (2008, pp. 254-257) identified a number of ways districts can build a culture of data use in ongoing school improvement, including:

- establishing meaningful student learning goals aligned with system-wide curriculum and accountability requirements.
- creating a common language and shared expectations for data use in decision-making.
- developing structures for information exchange between school and the district in relation to improvement planning.
- investing in data use capacity building in schools and at the district level.

Studies by Snipes et al. (2002), Ragland et al. (1999), and Langer (2000) exemplify the efforts made by many high-performing systems to provide support for schools in making evidence-informed decisions. This support seems likely to enhance the sense of efficacy or confidence of teachers and Principals about meeting the challenges posed by their systems. Administrators and teachers in the high-performing schools and systems in Langer's (2000) study, for example, responded to each arrival of state-wide achievement results by reviewing the results and using this evidence to reflect on their own practices. Teachers in these schools and systems also stayed abreast of research in their field, consulted with experts, and used such advice and evidence to continually reshape their instructional practices.

Togneri and Anderson (2003) described the efforts of high-performing systems in their study to encourage data use as including:

- *Making the data safe*: encouraging a climate of openness to learn from data even if it did not always contain good news;
- *Making the data usable*: providing schools with simplified, already digested results; providing help with data interpretation; and
- *Making use of the data*: providing teachers and school administrators with the time and training needed to make sense of data for purposes of decision making in their own schools.

High-performing systems in most other studies touching on system data use also devoted considerable amounts of their professional development resources to assisting school staffs improve their capacities to analyze, interpret, and use data to make decisions about their own students (Elmore & Burney, 1998; Maguire, 2003; Skrla et al. 2000).

Such efforts seem critical in order for the increased availability of data to actually result in better decisions. Consider the findings of Stringfield and his colleagues (2005), for example. In their longitudinal study (1992-2003) of the Baltimore City Public School system), the researchers examined student achievement trajectories through three phases of accountability introduced by state or federal governments. The system had spent millions of dollars on computer systems to assist with financial and academic accounting. While there had been many positive outcomes of this investment, the authors pointed to many instances in which decision makers had been awash in numbers – data rich and information poor. This was attributed to lack of professional development to help with asking the right questions and interpreting the data. As an example of the latter problem, the authors cautioned other systems and states "to avoid overreactions to what may well be hyper rationalized analyses of small differences in moderately reliable measures over time"(p. 68).

### 3.  Create Collaborative Structures for Data Interpretation

Three studies included in the Leithwood (2008) review demonstrate the range of ways in which systems encouraged collaborative data interpretation practices. Fink and Resnick's (1999) study of how NYC's System #2 developed the instructional leadership capacities of Principals described a series of conferences with school leaders and system staff held throughout the school year. The central focus of these conferences was the improvement of instruction. Discussions with this focus often began by examining each school's achievement data, and using that examination as a guide for improving instructional practice. This very public sharing of school test results helped to reinforce a culture of shared responsibility for improving instruction and achievement across the system as a whole.

In the high-performing systems studied by Ragland et al. (1999), superintendents and central office personnel regularly discussed schools' student achievement data to keep teachers and administrators focused on the improvement of teaching and learning. While these discussions were ongoing over the school year, superintendents also tried to maintain a balance between accountability and flexibility. As schools increased their students' performance, they enjoyed increasing amounts of autonomy and discretion.

Eilers and Camacho's (2007) research was conducted in just one elementary school which served disadvantaged children and which had dramatically improved its students' academic achievement over a five to six year period. Much of the credit for this improvement was attributed to the work of a Principal who enacted a collaborative leadership style. Prior to this Principal's arrival, the school had largely ignored what evidence it had. The new Principal, however, brought a strong commitment to evidence-informed decision making to the school. As he said, "In God we trust, all others bring your data" (p. 629). A system curriculum and testing specialist supported this Principal during much of the time encompassed by the study. This specialist helped both the Principal and the staff better understand and use the data that were available to them. In addition, at the request of the Principal, other

system staff went over the school's data and helped staff interpret it. The system provided teachers with release time to do this and additional training in data use.

Anderson, Leithwood and Louis (2012) acknowledge "the powerful role of district leaders in shaping data use in schools" (p. 178) and advise districts to connect Principal professional development to data use policies to build Principal capacity to support teacher use of data to improve student learning. They found that schools that use data effectively do so through collaborative processes. Such schools "move beyond using data to identify problems and toward using data to develop strategic interventions (pp. 163-64). With respect to the "evidence about the impact of data use on student learning" the authors remind us "the most compelling line of research focuses on teachers' use of formative assessment or just-in-time evidence about students' learning to shape their own instruction (p. 162).

As a result of their examination of district data analysis practices, Ikerno & Marsh (2007), conceptualized a hierarchy of four data decision making models, as noted below.

*Basic models* use large-scale (provincial or state) assessment data from one point in time. In such circumstances, the decision-maker (Principal) acts alone and relies on readily available data without utilizing best practice approaches to analysis.

*Analysis focused models* also rely on large scale assessments, but engage teams of educators in the examination of empirical data sets. Sophisticated analysis techniques are employed to interpret evidence and explain the data. However, these models are unlikely to take advantage of school-based expert knowledge.

*Data-focused models* used complex forms of data and typically deployed group interpretation strategies. However, these were generally employed at only one point in time.

*Inquiry-focused* models feature a significant investment of time and resources to probe a particular problem of practice. Often this

work is the focus of formal professional learning sessions. They draw on multiple types and sources of data and employ collective effort to examine evidence as part of ongoing process of school and system improvement.

The value of inquiry-focused data use in the Alberta context is also supported in Maguire (2003). In Maguire's a 'model system' recognizes and utilizes an action research orientation to systematic and consistent improvement. The cycle of assessment, analysis, planning, implementation, and monitoring of outcomes is evident throughout the system. Data from multiple sources are routinely considered, disaggregated and analyzed for their implications for instructional practice and the allocation of resources. Teams of teachers and administrators, both within and across schools, regularly work together to identify strengths and areas of concern and develop plans and strategies to address them (p. 139).

## 4. Use Appropriate Data for Accounting to Stakeholders

Togneri and Anderson (2003) found that their high-performing systems considered state test results incomplete for their accountability purposes. These systems, among other initiatives, supplemented state test data by filling gaps in such data, adding a wide array of other student performance evidence to their accountability systems (e.g., student work, attendance rates), and collecting information about the community's views of their schools.

NYC's System #2 began to use student achievement data more directly to improve instruction as it became apparent that its initial instructional reform efforts were not having the desired impact on underperforming students (Elmore & Burney, 1998). Analysis of achievement data prompted the system to adopt a much different and more difficult set of tests for students than the state administered assessments. This led, as well, to an extension of its focus on balanced literacy instruction termed 'focused literacy instruction,' which was more prescriptive, more teacher centred, and faster paced. Snipes et al. (2002) also found that unlike low performing

systems, high-performing systems in their study developed accountability systems for both school and system staff that were more rigorous than those of the state.

### 5. Make Effective Use of Existing Research to Guide Policy Making and Planning

Many of the high-performing systems included in the 31 studies in Leithwood's (2008) review were explicitly responsive to research evidence about best practices. However, NYC's System #2, and San Diego (Fink & Resnick, 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003), were more explicitly guided by such evidence than most. Instructional improvement efforts in literacy and math were based on research in these areas, and were directly informed by the engagement of the researchers in the system's coaching and professional development activities.

## A Vision and Direction Setting Snapshot: Data Use in Rocky View School Division

This snapshot defines how Rocky View Schools are making Michael Fullan's concept of 'permeable connectivity' between central office and school administration real through review and dialogue regarding each school's Annual Report and Education Plan. There is considerable research evidence that successful programming for students' success and school improvement needs to be grounded in solid, comprehensive data reflecting complex education environments, including good assessment systems. Having a firm commitment to accountability processes of reporting advantages Alberta and planning premised on solid data.

This accountability framework permits prioritizing and directing joint efforts at identifying issues and meeting common goals through flexible, responsive, adaptive and systemic education leadership. Rocky View leaders are focusing on major educational goals, including 21st century learning, that are intrinsically aligned with general provincial educational

initiatives and priorities, but at the same time account for the specific and unique needs arising from the local Rocky View contexts. Grassroots school leadership systems are nested and organically integrated in the districts' leadership frameworks by keeping an eye on general goals while initiating and supporting school level solutions. School results are then considered in relationship to district and provincial comparators as one means to judge the degrees of success being achieved. Adaptive leadership presumes flexibility, transparency and openness.

Empirical evidence is the lubricant that makes the reviews of school Annual Reports and Education Plans function like a fine-tuned engine. On-going learning about current and emerging student needs and possible solutions, goal setting, strategies and decisions are rooted in accurate and timely data as well as more qualitative sharing of key insights. Successful and effective leadership frameworks should be supported by comprehensive and relevant system-wide data systems.

Rocky View Schools is building and enhancing a culture of trust, collaboration, support and transparency throughout all levels of the organization. The degree to which any change is successful and/or sustainable is dependent upon the relationships and degree of trust between all levels of the school Division. As the Division engages school administrators and central office leaders in establishing a framework for analysis, planning and decision-making, the following fundamental questions will continue to be addressed:

- What evidence and sources of data would best inform discussions?
- What confidence does the division have that the information is valid, reliable and a strong indicator of improved student achievement and engagement?
- What is the proper balance of qualitative and quantitative information?

Rocky View's efforts promise a future where leadership behaviors are better understood through the enhanced inter-connectivity of leaders' critical reflection focused on success for all students.

# Summary

The research informed insights presented in Chapter Two underline the importance of *vision and direction setting,* the first of four categories of effective system leadership practice. Districts that are exceptionally effective at educating all students well in the 21st century are guided by a clear focus on student learning, support instructional approaches that engage all students in the pursuit of ambitious, but realistic goals and gauge progress and shift direction through skillful attention to carefully selected evidence. Before turning to the *Framework's* second area of collective system leadership practice – *Capacity Building* – five guidelines for system leaders are summarized below.

### Vision and Direction Setting: Guidelines for System Leaders

1. Spend whatever time it takes to ensure that the mission, vision and goals (directions) of the system are widely known, understood and shared by all members of your organization.

2. Insist on the use of your system's directions as fundamental criteria for virtually all decisions: you are the chief 'stewards' of these directions.

3. Develop and implement board and school improvement plans interactively and collaboratively with your school leaders.

4. Build your system's capacity and disposition for using systematically collected data to inform as many decisions as possible. Train Principals and staff on the use of data and research literature to sustain decision-making.

5. Make flexible, adaptive use of provincial initiatives and frameworks ensuring that they contribute to, rather than detract from, accomplishing your system's directions.

Leithwood, 2011

# Capacity Building

3

## Introduction

This chapter examines strategies employed by exceptionally effective school systems to build capacity and enhance collective efficacy so that they are better able to educate all students well. Our focus is on three research substantiated leadership dimensions

- Dimension 4: System Efficacy
- Dimension 5: Leadership for Learning
- Dimension 6: Professional Learning

We begin with a discussion of the importance of capacity building in school system improvement before moving the three major sections of the chapter. Each of these three leadership dimensions is described in a separate section along with insights from the supporting research literature. The ideas presented in relation to each dimension are based on systematic reviews of empirical evidence completed for CASS by Ken Leithwood in 2008 along with selected subsequent studies of system leadership. An exemplar of

relevant Alberta system leadership practices is shared in a Capacity Building Setting Snapshot and general system guidelines are offered in the chapter summary.

The importance of capacity building approaches is increasingly heralded in the educational reform literature. Ben Levin and Michael Fullan are among its strongest proponents. Fullan (2008) provided the following descriptive commentary:

> Capacity building concerns competencies, resources and motivation. Individuals and groups are high in capacity if they possess and continue to develop knowledge and skills, if they attract and use resources (time, ideals, expertise, money) wisely, and if they are committed to putting in the energy to get important things done *collaboratively* and *continuously* (ever learning). This is a tall order in complex systems, but it is exactly the order required. (57)

A wide variety of capacity building strategies contributed to the rapid improvement of educational results in Ontario during the last decade (Levin, 2008, p. 34). The following seven are among the most important of these:

- Providing high-quality resource materials to schools and teachers
- Creating and supporting networks of teachers and school leaders
- Connecting professional development with ongoing school practice through supports such as coaches and teacher leaders
- Working with Principals to ensure that professional development was supported by planning time and classroom visits

In Levin's assessment, capacity building involves efforts to help people learn new and effective practices. It requires

> a thoughtful, sustained approach that will create and support the changes in behaviour or practice that we want to see. Because schools are social settings, change is not just a matter of giving people new ideas but of creating the social conditions that foster and support changed practices. (p. 82)

The importance of collective capacity building is a focal point of *All Systems Go: The Change Imperative for Whole System Reform* (2010) by Michael Fullan. He stresses the importance of "collective capacity (which is exponentially powerful) and individual capacity (which is necessary but not sufficient)" (p. xvi). He concludes that the force of collective capacity building and efficacy is a vital component of whole system reform:

> There is no force so durable and potent as a social force. It has it all. Competencies and skills increase, quality and innovation occur hand in hand, and the gale force commitment occurs because peers commit to peers and hierarchies become flattened in their interactions. (p. 102)

## Dimension 4: System Efficacy

Leadership practices aimed at fostering a widely shared sense system-wide efficacy have been shown to have a significantly positive impact. As Wahlstrom and colleagues make clear, school and system leaders "who see themselves as working collaboratively towards clear, common goals with district personnel, other Principals, and teachers are more confident in their leadership"(Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood and Anderson, 2010, p. 30). The two key system leadership strategies developing this collective efficacy in Dimension Four are itemized in Table 3.1 below. We begin with a brief introduction to the construct of efficacy and its place within the educational leadership literature. The two strategies for enhancing system efficacy are then elaborated.

### Table 3.1 Dimension Four: System Efficacy

The school system

1. provides extensive opportunities for staff to develop expertise relevant to achieving the district's goals.

2. creates organizational structures and settings that support and enhance staff's work and learning.

Collective efficacy is defined as a belief about the ability of one's colleagues, as a whole, to perform a task or achieve a goal. Self-efficacy has long been considered the key cognitive variable regulating leader behaviour in dynamic environments. Every major review of the leadership literature lists self-confidence as an essential characteristic of effective leadership (McCormick, 2001). The evidence supports the notion that superintendents and Principals in high-performing districts convey a strong belief in their own and their colleague's capacities to accomplish good things for all students.

Confidence, like enthusiasm, is contagious in that the confidence felt by leaders 'brushes off' onto others. The effects of self-efficacy:

- Attribute success to effort rather than talent
- Cause people to persist long enough to master whatever the task or goal might be

- Is associated with highly desirable outcomes whether the focus is on students, teachers or leaders.

In Fullan's (2011) view,

> a sense of efficacy is not so much advance confidence that you can succeed but rather that you can make things work, that what you have to do is within your control. Efficacy is very close to realized purpose because it stems from your experience that you can be successful. It may be a struggle, but you, working with others, will get there. (p. 8)

Leithwood's (2008) research summary examined four studies that associated a district sense of collective efficacy as an important explanation of high district performance. Further research by Leithwood and colleagues (2012, 2010) found that this sense of collective efficacy on the part of a district's Principals was a significant factor in accounting for district effects on student achievement.

The potential impact of a staff's sense of efficacy (both individual and collective) finds considerable support in a rich empirical and theoretical literature, much of it based on Bandura's 1993 research. High levels of efficacy are associated with persistence in solving problems, and effortful responses to challenges that might cause others to give up. According to Bandura, sources of efficacy include experiences of mastery, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and work settings perceived to support one's work.

Leithwood, Anderson and Louis (2012) found that districts contribute most to school leaders' sense of efficacy by:

- Unambiguously assigning priority to the improvement of student achievement and instruction;
- Making significant investments in the development of instructional leadership;
- Ensuring that personnel policies support the selection and maintenance of the best people for each school; and

- Emphasizing teamwork and professional community.
- Providing worthwhile programs of professional development, aimed at strengthening their capacities to achieve shared purposes. (p. 119)

## 1. Develop Expertise in Areas Related to System Goals

Principals who believe they are working collaboratively toward clear, common goals with system personnel, other Principals, and teachers in their schools are more confident in their leadership. In their inquiry into the relationship between Principal efficacy and district-led professional development, Leithwood, Anderson and Louis (2012) found that that districts that help their school leaders feel more efficacious or confident about their school improvement work have positive effects on important school conditions, as well as student learning. Districts can do this through the provision of "worthwhile programs of professional development, aimed at strengthening their (Principal) capacities to achieve shared purposes" (p. 119).

Evidence from Florian's (2000) study indicated that districts' success at sustaining a reform effort over many years was due, in part to the strong sense of efficacy about instruction in the state's new standards since teachers had already implemented a somewhat similar reform effort at an earlier point in time.

Opportunities to develop professional expertise can arise from planned professional development or through extensive experience that results in on-the-job learning. Elmore and Burney (1998) describe an example of the first type of opportunity. As a result of the ongoing and lengthy professional development they had received through NYC's District #2 efforts, teachers and administrators had become quite expert on instructional matters, and demonstrated considerable confidence in their own knowledge about the best forms of instruction. This actually made it quite difficult to introduce new forms of instruction intended to better meet the needs of underperforming students into the system, since these new forms of instruction seemed at odds with instructional practices that had proven to be very successful with most students.

## 2. Create Structures that Support Positive Learning and Working Environments

Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) found that "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).

Earlier studies have underlined the importance of professional community in fostering productive working environments for teachers that heighten efficacy and lead to enhanced student learning. Langer (2000) used the term 'agency' in her study. The development of a sense of agency distinguished teachers in high-performing schools and districts from their counterparts in more typical schools and districts. Such agency arose through teachers' extensive engagement in professional communities through which they continued their professional learning, kept up-to-date with new knowledge in their field, and shared their practices with trusted colleagues. This contributed to the sense of mastery which Bandura (1993) claims is a central source of one's confidence or efficacy in being able to solve problems in one's work.

Building efficacy was a major theme identified across the ten high-performing districts in Ragland et al.'s (1999) study. Such efficacy, the authors concluded, was developed when central offices were reorganized to support instruction, and when structures were created to support the learning of teachers and administrators.

## Dimension 5: Leadership for Learning

Focusing system and school leadership practices on teaching and learning is a central tenet of the Alberta Framework for School System Success. Dimension Five's ten descriptors outlined in Table 3.2 below provide a blueprint for district leadership for learning practices that have a significantly positive impact on student learning. Primarily based on the work of Leithwood and his colleagues (2004, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012), the ten strategies are discussed in four sub-sections: Instructional Leadership in Schools, Instructional Leadership at the District Level, Redesigning Human Resource Policies for School Leadership and Coordinating Leadership Distribution following a general introduction to the field of instructional leadership.

## Table 3.2 Dimension Five: Leadership for Learning

The school system

1. has well-designed and carefully implemented procedures for identifying, recruiting, selecting and appraising, and retaining school-level leaders.

2. implements procedures for transferring school-level leaders that do no harm and, whenever possible, add value to improvement efforts underway in schools.

3. ensures that the most skilled leaders in the system are placed where they are most needed.

4. encourages school-level leaders, when useful, to supplement their own capacities with system-level expertise.

5. expects Principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction. This is a central criterion for selecting school leaders and for their performance appraisal.

6. keeps the central office staff focused on learning and they support Principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure high levels of learning for all students. The system assumes responsibility for significantly improving instructional leadership in schools.

7. expects system-level leaders to reflect the practices and competences identified in the *CASS Practice Standard and Leadership Dimensions,* as well as such other practices as might be deemed critical for local district purposes.

8. expects school-level leaders to reflect the practices and competences identified in Alberta's *Professional Practice Competencies for School Principals,* as well as such other practices as might be deemed critical for local district purposes.

9. encourages coordinated forms of leadership distribution throughout the system and its schools.

In their analysis of the literature on instructional leadership, Leithwood and Louis (2012) indicate that

> The evidence to date suggests that few Principals have made the time and demonstrated the ability to provide high-quality instructional feedback to teachers. Importantly, a few well-developed models of instructional leadership posit a set of responsibilities for Principals that goes well beyond observing and intervening in classrooms – responsibilities touching on vision, organizational culture and the like. (p. 6)

This orientation is similar to the 2008 Leithwood review for CASS, wherein two 'overlapping models' of instructional leadership are proposed: second-order and first-order instructional leadership. Second-order instructional leadership mirrors what we know about successful leadership in many organizational contexts. Second-order instructional leadership assumes that the improvement of teaching and learning require refinements of the school organization as a whole, not simply a unitary focus on classroom practices. First-order instructional leadership can be traced to research on effective schools in which strong instructional leadership was identified as one of a handful of effective school correlates. This version of instructional leadership adopts a 'domain specific' approach to instruction rather than a 'domain general' approach. The quality of instruction is assumed to be dependent on the teacher's deep content knowledge along with knowledge about how best to help students acquire key concepts and ideas about such content.

An important finding from in *A Synthesis of Implications for Policy and Practice from Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning Final report to the Wallace Foundation* (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010) is that

> successful school-level leadership involves significant attention to classroom instructional practices, but it also includes attention to other issues critical to the health and welfare of schools.

> Furthermore, school leaders can have a significant influence on teachers' classroom practices through their efforts to motivate teachers and create workplace settings compatible with instructional practices known to be effective. (p.2)

The next four sub-sections build on these broader conceptions of instructional leadership at the school and system levels.

## 1.  Instructional Leadership in Schools

Leithwood's (2012) assessment of the evidence on successful school leadership lends support to "the most widely known models of instructional leadership, which actually give considerable weight to non-instructional elements of the school" (p. 67). Using Hallinger and Heck's (1999) conceptualization, which emphasizes purpose, people and structures and social systems, Leithwood explains:

> This conceptualization underscores the point that classroom practices occur within larger organizational systems that can vary enormously in the extent to which they support, reward, and nurture good instruction. School leaders who ignore or neglect the state of this larger context can easily find their direct efforts to improve instruction substantially frustrated. Successful Principal leadership includes careful attention to classroom instructional practices, but it also includes careful attention to many other issues that are critical to the ongoing health and welfare of school organizations. (p. 67).

This conception is in keeping with an earlier view by Leithwood and colleagues (2006) that instructional leadership has been mostly used as "a slogan to focus administrators on their students' progress" (p. 6). They point to a more detailed three-category model with ten more specific practices described in Hallinger's (2003) review of the evidence on instructional leadership

- defining the school's mission includes framing and then communicating the school's goals;

- managing the instructional program includes supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress; and
- promoting a positive school learning climate encompasses protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning.

Robinson and colleagues (2007, 2008, 2009) analysis of the available evidence linking school leadership to student outcomes resulted in five broad categories of leadership dimensions:
- establishing goals and expectations,
- resourcing strategically,
- ensuring quality teaching,
- leading teacher learning and development,
- and ensuring an orderly safe and caring environment

In *Student-Centred Leadership* (2011), Robinson describes the ways in which these five dimensions are inter-connected and can work together with three leadership capacities – applying relevant knowledge, solving complex problems and building relational trust – to foster strong learning and teaching environments.

Wahlstrom (2012) groups 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). Wahlstrom found that setting a tone and developing a vision for student learning and teacher growth is present in high-performing schools of all grade levels, K-12. The second category– Instructional Actions – involves explicit engagement with individual teachers about their own professional growth and is more evident in elementary schools than in secondary settings. Instructional Actions include direct observations and conversations with teachers in classrooms and in team meetings.

Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) indicate that though there are still controversies in the research literature on instructional leadership, with some scholars emphasizing Principal work with individual teachers and others focusing more on the creation of learning cultures in schools, they see value in studying both elements (p. 30). In their analysis, leadership efforts to improve instruction positively impact student learning through improved working relationships with teachers. "When Principals and teachers share leadership, teachers' working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher" (p. 25).

The need to pay closer attention to the benefits of collective, shared efforts to improve instruction is supported by evidence from Louis and Wahlstrom (2012.) One of their significant claims is that "leadership effects on student achievement occur largely because effective leadership strengthens professional community, a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning" (p. 39). They explain this result as follows:

> Professional community, in turn, is a strong predictor of instructional practices that are strongly associated with student achievement. The link between professional community and student achievement may be explained by reference to a school climate that encourages levels of student effort above and beyond the levels encouraged in individual classrooms... Increasing teachers' involvement in the difficult task of making good decisions, and introducing improved practices must be at the heart of school leadership. There is no simple short cut (p. 25).

The following quotation indicates that district leadership has a significant role to play in supporting the advancement of school-level instructional leadership:

> The gap between how Principals spend their time and what they are being encouraged to do has persisted for at least a half century. By now it should be obvious that structural changes in the work of school leaders are a pre-condition for the emergence

of this significant change: cajoling, demanding, advocating, explaining, and wishful thinking – typical strategies used to date – just will not do it (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood and Anderson, 2010, p. 1).

Recent studies focusing on instructional leadership by Alberta researchers have led to two general categories of findings. The first category of research identified a number of obstacles to instructional leadership (Mason, 2013; Sherman, 2008). The obstacles primarily fell into what Brandon (2006) identified as the management challenge. In the second category, Brandon (2008) found that Principals who overcame this hurdle as well as the mechanical and complexity challenges were

- Passionate about student, staff and their own learning within a strong school learning culture
- Intentional about their instructional leadership practice and had high expectations for students, teachers and themselves.
- Driven by a strong sense of moral purpose related to enhancing the life chances of all children
- Adept at establishing trusting relationships and able to effectively engage in reflective conversations about teaching practice and student learning

Beauchamp and Parsons (2012) reported eight activities that promoted student learning. Highly effective Principals

- Build and communicate common goals, a common sense of purpose, and a clear vision.
- Take time to really 'know' the people with whom they work and appreciate, value, and respect them.
- Listen, care, and support the people with whom they work on professional and on personal matters. Highly effective Principals have 'Open Doors.'
- Create 'family-based' working and learning environments.
- Are organized; they engage in detailed, inclusive, and proactive planning.

- Celebrate success with both formal and fun-filled informal events.
- Include others in planning and deciding, and are 'equal partners' who empower good decision-making among teachers
- 'Talk their talk' (p. 46)

In a final study from the second category Hanna's (2010) investigation of Principal practices in high-performing Alberta school systems generated an instructional leadership model with the following process components:
- Frame school goals, purpose and mission, articulate a clear vision, set goals related to vision and develop school education plan
- Create high expectations for students and staff
- Ensure special programs and support
- Select proficient teachers
- Fair and balanced assessment and evaluation practices
- Community of learners, shared practice, collective inquiry
- Professional development and professional growth plans
- Provide opportunities for people to lead
- Align curriculum with the Alberta Program of Studies
- Visibility of Principal and classroom walkthroughs
- Regular written and verbal communication (p. 154).

## 2. Instructional Leadership at the District Level

In their "The District Difference" chapter in Leithwood and Louis (2012) *Linking Leadership to Student Learning*, Stephen Anderson and Karen Seashore Louis claim "District policies and practices around instruction are sufficiently powerful that they can be felt, indirectly, by teachers as stronger and more directed leadership behaviors by Principals" (p. 181). Their study found that system leaders in higher performing districts:
- Communicate a strong belief in the capacity of teachers and Principals to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and in the district's capacity to develop the organizational conditions needed for that to happen (high collective efficacy).

- Build consensus about core expectations for professional practice (curriculum, teaching, leadership).
- Differentiate support to schools in relation to evidence of compliance and skill in implementing the expectations, with flexibility for school-based innovation.
- Set clear expectations for school leadership practices, and establish leadership- development systems to select, train, and assist Principals and teacher leaders consistent with district expectations.
- Provide organized opportunities for teachers and Principals to engage in school-to-school communication, focusing on the challenges of improving student learning and program implementation.
- Develop and model strategies and norms for local inquiry into challenges related to student learning and program implementation.
- Coordinate district support for school improvement across organizational units (e.g., supervision, curriculum and instruction, staff development, human resources) in relation to district priorities, expectations for professional practice, and a shared understanding of the goals and needs of specific schools. (p. 181-182)

Leithwood's (2008) review of the evidence about high-performing districts underlines the priority placed on instructional leadership by these districts at both the school and district level. He identified 16 studies which provided information about high-performing districts' investments in instructional leadership – both the importance and the nature of such investments. Significant improvements in student achievement depend on significant improvements in the quality of classroom instruction (e.g., Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Eilers and Camancho's (2007) case study of a new Principal illustrates such an orientation. This Principal had adopted a collaborative approach to instructional leadership in his school. The district invested in his development in many ways, most of which took the form of responses to requests he made to the central office for assistance. This assistance included the provision of mid-level central office staff with instructional expertise for ongoing consultation in the school. It also took the form of 'just-in-time'

coaching and mentorship from the assistant superintendent for elementary schools with whom the Principal developed a strong working relationship.

Although helping to forward what was referred to above as a 'neo heroic' view of Principals' instructional leadership, evidence from the District #2 and San Diego studies also shows central office staff working side-by-side with Principals to deliver meaningful instructional leadership to teachers.

## Expect Principals to be Knowledgeable about the Quality of Teaching in Their Schools

Wahlstrom (2012) stresses that "Principals need to be held accountable for taking actions that are known to have direct effects on the quality of teaching and learning in their schools" (p. 84). This involves more that expecting Principals to have a vision (creating instructional ethos) and 'popping in' and 'being visible'. She claims that district leaders can play a significant role by expecting Principals to regularly undertake instructional actions by being "very intentional about each classroom visit and conversation, with the explicit purpose of engaging with teachers about well-defined instructional ideas" (p. 83).

The evidence from several studies indicates that in high-performing districts, the Principals' work is to support teachers' efforts to provide opportunities for all students to achieve academic success (for instance, Koschoreck, 2001; Maguire, 2003). Ragland et al. (1999) found that the development of instructional leadership was part of a larger theme – "sharing responsibility for academic achievement." In many of the successful districts in this study, superintendents created a focus on improving teaching and learning by clarifying expectations and responsibilities for Principals. Both district and school administrators knew that their futures were tightly connected to increasing their students' achievement

NYC's District #2 (Elmore & Burney, 1998) adopted perhaps the most demanding set of expectations for Principals found in any of the 31 studies included in the Leithwood (2008) review. School-level leadership was considered to be a pivotal element of this district's instructional

improvement strategy. Principals were expected to perform all the functions required to integrate the district's overall strategy into their schools, including:

- continuously monitoring instruction and providing teachers with feedback and guidance,
- planning and organizing professional development targeted on specific instructional issues in their building,
- negotiating with district administrators around the resources required to deliver professional development (p. 22).

### Focus Central Office on Learning

In their summary of implications from *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*, their final report to the Wallace Foundation, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson (2010c) describe eight key ways in which school system leaders can foster stronger instructional leadership:

- Ensure coordination and coherence in support for schools across different organizational units at the district level. Schools benefit from coordinated support provided in relation to district goals and based on shared understandings of school- improvement plans and needs.
- Be crystal clear and repetitive when communicating the district's agenda for student learning. Effective superintendents are visible and articulate, but they also work with others in the district office so that the message is conveyed by all.
- Provide increased opportunities for administrators to collaborate on common work. Without collaboration, Principals' collective sense of efficacy is unlikely to increase. In addition, as with teachers, collaboration is associated with increased job satisfaction and motivation.
- Prioritize assistance and support to secondary schools. Secondary school administrators need significantly more support in all areas of practice than they are receiving in most settings.
- Provide a wide range of intensive opportunities for teachers and

school-level leaders to develop the capacities they need to accomplish the district's student-learning agenda. These opportunities will often take place in schools and be aimed at meeting pressing challenges unique to individual school.

- Spend time in schools. Most Principals report that the administrators who evaluate them rarely visit their schools (other district staff members may be more visible). Use school visits as well as district meetings to help build Principals' sense of efficacy or confidence in their abilities to accomplish the priorities for student learning agreed on in the district.

- Differentiate the support provided to schools in light of schools' individual priorities, strengths, weaknesses, and circumstances. One-size-fits-all district interventions are typically of much less value to schools than many districts believe.

- Gather data about how well district policies are working at the school level. Work continually to increase synergy among district policies, procedures, and practices aimed at guiding and supporting the district's agenda for student learning. (pp. 3-4)

Through her inquiry into midlevel leader roles and practices in five rural Alberta school systems, Steele (2010) found that interdependent approaches were most highly effective. Effectiveness is enhanced when educators with specialized expertise enact their roles as members of interdisciplinary teams

through structures and processes established to promote interdependence within the system as midlevel leaders work with their direct supervisors, senior administrators, and other departments to refine their roles, work with schools, and report their progress toward the attainment of common goals. Such interdependence, because of the structures and processes established, creates a truly distributed model of leadership whereby leadership is stretched over multiple leaders within the system, who are dependent on each other to achieve the core work of the organization. (p. 15)

The suggestion that senior district leaders, far removed from daily contact with students, and typically embroiled in the management of complex organizational, legal, financial, and political issues should somehow be 'instructional leaders' seems unrealistic. Yet research by Skrla and her associates (Skrla et al., 2000; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Koschoreck, 2001) in four Texas districts that dramatically improved the achievement of their disadvantaged and minority students illustrates this as a real possibility.

Faced with a mandate from the state to improve the achievement of disadvantaged children in their districts, the role played by superintendents gradually shifted from acting as organizational managers to being instructional leaders. As the four districts changed their beliefs about equitable achievement for all children, and as they developed practices consistent with this belief, there was a profound change in the role definition of other educators in the districts as well. The description of the instructional leadership of the superintendent included: "keep[ing] both the community and the district staff focused on learning as the primary activity and goal of the school district. The superintendent must literally sell it to the community. He or she must also continually sell it the district staff" (Skrla et al., 2000, p. 33).

In one of these districts, the superintendent also created senior administrative positions responsible for instruction, who, along with district support staff, worked directly with Principals on instructional matters. Superintendents also were prompted to look for exemplars of districts, schools, and classrooms in which instruction was more successful for previously low-achieving, disadvantaged children. The new role of the central office was to support Principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure high levels of learning for all students. The role of the school boards in these four districts included clarifying for their superintendents the expectation that changes in student performance were anticipated, and then monitoring progress toward improvements in students' results.

Assume Responsibility for Significantly Improving Instructional Leadership in Schools

Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) indicate that Principal preparation and professional development programs "should continue to emphasize both the 'softer' (emotional) and the 'harder' (behavioral) aspects of leadership" (p. 40). Their justification is as follows:

> While our results suggest that Principals' behavior is more important than the levels of trust Principals evoke, behavior and levels of trust are empirically part of a bundle that is difficult to disentangle. Trust without instructional and shared leadership to support it may be of little consequence for students, but our data suggest that teachers' relationships with each other, and their trust in the Principal cannot be easily disaggregated (p. 40).

Most districts that have succeeded in moving from low to high-performing have provided intensive long-term opportunities for Principals to further develop their capacities as instructional leaders (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Many of these districts have developed their own leadership development programs rather than relying on programs available from universities and other external agencies.

Fink and Resnick (1999) provide an extended description of NYC's District 2's approach to the development of instructional leadership capacities of its Principals, among the most ambitious of such efforts found in the 31 studies included in the review. Those especially interested in this issue would do well to read the paper themselves. But key features of District 2's investment in instructional leadership included:

- Principal conferences and institutes;
- Support groups and study groups;
- Inter-visitations and buddy systems; and
- Individualized coaching.

Each of these components was aimed to accomplish well-defined goals such as the development of shared purposes across the district, the

endorsement of widespread commitment to continuous learning for all, the encouragement of collaborative problem solving, a focus on individual skill development. The development of instructional leadership capacities was a major responsibility of the Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent who also modeled instructional leadership in their relationships with Principals.

Among the most important capacities for school-based instructional leaders is determining teachers' instructional capacities and providing opportunities for their improvement. Principals in the six significantly improving districts studied by Cawelti (2001) "had to learn how to identify teacher needs at the building level" (p. 2). Their role included providing for the staff development needs of teachers, sometimes in their own building, sometimes by sending teachers to district professional development.

Other evidence indicates that diagnosing teachers' instructional capacities is better done when the Principal does not act in isolation. While primarily focused on teachers' professional lives and teachers' participation in professional learning communities, Langer's (2000) study also described cases of school administrators with strong affiliations to school-level professional communities, remaining involved as they took on senior district leadership roles. Engagement in professional communities, this study suggests, builds the capacity of all those involved, including Principals and district leaders, to help their colleagues improve instruction, and creates opportunities for more formal instructional leadership roles as well. A district's support for teacher engagement in professional communities of many sorts can be viewed as an investment in both formal and informal instructional leadership.

Leadership development in New York's District #2 included initial preparation, sometimes in a specially designed program developed with a partner university, as well as a year-long internship, mentoring by an experienced Principal, and interaction in a network of colleagues on a continuous basis (Elmore & Burney, 1998).

One of the six lessons emerging from Maguire's (2003) Alberta study of high-performing districts, for example, is the "identification of Principals as the primary instructional leaders in their schools and active contributors to district-level leadership" (p. 11). While it is important for Principals to contribute to district-level instructional leadership, it is not the only way in which instructional leadership learning can be addressed by districts. A key role of senior district leaders is to provide school leaders with opportunities to develop their instructional leadership capacities and to create other working conditions that allow and encourage school leaders to pay attention to instruction. This can occur in a variety of ways, for example.

- Creating distinct and usually new administrative support roles in schools to free Principals from excessive administration and provide time to focus on the quality of instruction in their schools.
- Creating co-Principal opportunities: two people sharing a school leadership position increases the chances of a school having access to the full range of managerial and instructional leadership skills.
- Using instructional leadership as a criterion in the selection of new school leaders.
- Making the development of instructional leaders a criterion on which existing school leaders are evaluated.
- Becoming instructionally expert themselves
- Creating policies which evidence suggests foster student learning
- Job-embedded professional development.

## 3. Redesigning Human Resource Policies Related to Educational Leadership

Systems that are successful at educating all children well pay attention to the important human resource practices of leadership recruitment, induction, growth, supervision, evaluation and retention. In general, these practices discourage turnover, plan for effective leadership transition when turnover occurs and focus selection, development and assessment on the aspects of school and system leadership most critical for student learning.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) indicate that the "regularized rotation of Principals by their districts every 3 – 5 years has more of negative than a positive effect on improvement efforts" (p. 167). They appeal for "stable and sustainable (not stagnant and stale) leadership" that "does not drag a school or a system from one initiative to another, condemning its educators to manic depressive mood swings rather than consistency of orientation and focus" (p. 167).

Leithwood, Anderson and Louis (2012) examined the impact of district personnel policies and practices on Principal efficacy. "Principals' commitment to directions established by the district, and confidence in being able to pursue them successfully, were significantly eroded by frequent superintendent turnover" (p. 139). Among the factors with positive influence were the following:

- Encouraging promotion of Principals from within the district.
- Giving Principals a significant role in hiring teachers.
- Matching teachers and Principals to the mission of the school.
- Allocating especially effective Principals to especially challenging schools.
- Stable and consistent district leadership. (p. 139)

Mascall and Leithwood (2012) suggest that systems aim to retain "most school leaders in their schools for a minimum of four years, and preferably five to seven years" (p. 156). They advise incoming Principals to "understand and respect the school improvement work of staff members already underway and to see their job as continuing and refining the work" (p. 156).

Linking school and system leaders' practice to district, state or provincial competencies, standards or otherwise expressed expectations is a wise human resource practice. For example, the *Alberta Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders* (Alberta Education, 2012) provide direction to system and individual efforts to enhance growth, ensure quality and encourage retention. Similarly desirable effects can be generated in school jurisdictions that use documents such as the Alberta Professional Practice Competencies for System Educational Leaders. Documents of a similar nature can be found in many countries, provinces and states. They are useful

to the degree that they inform a shared view of what it means to practice well in a particular context.

The expectations expressed in the Alberta school leader competency document frame a school leader's career-long responsibility to fulfill the essential purpose of educational leadership "to ensure that each student has an opportunity to engage in quality learning experiences that lead to achievement of the goals of education and that address his or her learning and developmental needs" (Alberta Education, 2012, p. 1). Each of the seven competencies is augmented by a number of indicators that describe how the competency is demonstrated. The competencies "constitute an interrelated set of knowledge, skills and attributes that is drawn upon and applied to a particular context for successful performance" (p. 1) and are described as follows:

### Professional Practice Competency #1 – Fostering Effective Relationships

A school leader must build trust and foster positive working relationships within the school community on the basis of appropriate values and ethical foundations.

### Professional Practice Competency #2 – Embodying Visionary Leadership

A school leader must involve the school community in creating and sustaining shared vision, mission, values, principles and goals.

### Professional Practice Competency #3 – Leading a Learning Community

A school leader must nurture and sustain a school culture that values and supports learning.

### Professional Practice Competency #4 – Providing Instructional Leadership

A school leader must ensure that each student has access to quality teaching and the opportunity to engage in quality learning experiences.

### Professional Practice Competency #5 – Developing and Facilitating Leadership

A school leader must promote the development of leadership capacity within the school community for the overall benefit of the school community and education system.

### Professional Practice Competency #6 – Managing School Operations and Resources

A school leader must manage school operations and resources to ensure a safe, caring, and effective learning environment.

### Professional Practice Competency #7 – Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context

A school leader must understand and appropriately respond to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting the school.

Though still at the 'guideline' stage of optional implementation, the competencies are being used by many school jurisdictions for school leadership selection, development and assessment. A similar document was developed collaboratively by CASS in 2008 and is being updated in 2013. The following draft competencies are meant to serve system educational leadership recruitment, growth and assessment in ways similar to the school leadership expectations in the previous section.

### Professional Practice Competency #1 – Visionary Leadership

The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership in the development of a school system culture characterized by shared values and beliefs, and a collective vision that focuses on student learning.

### Professional Practice Competency #2 – Instructional Leadership

The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership in facilitating students' access to services and programs consistent with achieving provincial and school system goals.

Professional Practice Competency #3 – Human Resource Leadership
The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership in the development and sustained implementation of effective staff recruitment, selection, development, supervision and evaluation processes.

Professional Practice Competency #4 – Ethical Leadership
The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership by modeling and inspiring ethical behavior that honors the principles of integrity, objectivity, and protection of the public interest.

Professional Practice Competency #5 – Effective Relationships
The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership by building trust and effective relationships within the school system community.

Professional Practice Competency #6 – Organizational Leadership and Management
The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership by managing the operations and resources of the organization in a manner that creates a responsible and responsive environment.

Professional Practice Competency #7 – External Influences on Education
The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership by understanding and responding strategically to external influences in education.

Professional Practice Competency #8 – Chief Executive and Chief Education Officer Leadership
The Superintendent of Schools, as Chief Executive Officer of the Board and Chief Education Officer of the school system, ensures each student is provided the opportunity to achieve optimum learning.

## 4. Coordinating Leadership Distribution

In their summary of implications from their final report to the Wallace Foundation, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson (2010b) underline the importance of the distribution of leadership to include teachers, parents, and district staff in order to improve student achievement. Their findings suggest that school and district leaders should, "as a matter of policy and practice, extend significant influence to others in the school community as a foundation for their efforts to improve student achievement" and they note that "such an expansion of influence to others will in no way diminish their own influence" (p. 2). Without sustained encouragement and support from district leaders, distributing leadership in these ways is unlikely to become common practice. "Distributing leadership more widely in schools is definitely not a means of reducing Principals' workload, as has sometimes been suggested; neither is it likely to diminish the Principal's own influence" (p. 2).

"Distributing leadership in schools requires the allocation and sharing of leadership tasks by Principals in light of school goals and access to requisite expertise, in addition to providing genuine opportunities for input from teachers and others in school decisions," observes Anderson (2012, p. 55). Formal roles and arrangements can create and legitimize the distribution of leadership tasks, but do not guarantee their influence on organizational directions and practice of the person(s) fulfilling those tasks, nor effective coordination amongst those enacting those tasks. He concludes that the significance of the broader evidence on leadership distribution

> is probably a worthwhile way to approach improvement in student learning, but it needs to be coupled with leader efforts to motivate commitment to common directions for improvement and to develop teacher working conditions (especially professional community) that more directly support improvements in the quality of instruction and learning (p. 56).

Maguire (2003) supports the transformative power of distributed leadership and proposes that distributed leadership is one of six pillars of a 'model'

school district. He suggests that a model district "recognizes and validates leadership at all levels of the organization" and that the "collective wisdom of the organization can be brought to bear on issues both in schools and at the district level" resulting in a "sense of pride and ownership in collective district outcomes" (p.138).

## Dimension 6: Professional Learning

Evidence from Leithwood (2008, 2010, 2012) and additional researchers is presented in relation to the six Dimension Six leadership strategies itemized in Table 3.3 below. Following a general discussion of the importance of professional learning in systems that are exceptionally effective in educating all students well, the strategies are discussed more fully in one of the four sub-sections that follow: Refocus Routine Meeting Time on Professional Development, Align PD with System and School Improvement Priorities, Differentiate Professional Development Opportunities To Reflect The Needs Of Individual Schools, Administrators and Teachers and Base PD on the Best Available Evidence about How People Learn.

### Table 3.3 Dimension Six: Professional Learning

1. Very little time is devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and Principals. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional learning.

2. Most professional development is carefully aligned with district and school improvement initiatives.

3. Differentiated professional learning opportunities are provided in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.

4. Extensive opportunities are provided for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.

5. Almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.

6. All system-sponsored professional learning is closely aligned with the best evidence about how people learn.

The CASS review undertaken by Leithwood (2008) indicates that the following factors are important to an effective district level professional development (PD) model. Effective PD should

- occur both in and out of the school
- utilize both local and outside expertise
- focus on school and district priorities
- be justified by evidence of student learning
- take a wide range of forms

Maguire (2003) identifies staff development, and in particular, 'in-house' staff development as one of the key district practices that leads to improved student learning: The consistently improving districts for the most part had adopted a staff development model organized around a comprehensive set of program priorities identified by district needs and goals…Training programs were research- based and embedded in the curriculum and in the day-to-day practice of participants…New skills and knowledge were often shared with colleagues at the school (p. 131).

Further evidence about this dimension of high-performing school districts was provided by 21 studies, the largest number reporting evidence about any of the dimensions of high-performing districts reflected in Leithwood's (2008) review. Professional development in high-performing districts, according to this evidence, is intended to:

- Ensure that the time and money allocated to professional development reflects its value to the district;
- Refocus routine institutional practices in the service of professional development;
- Align the focus of professional development with district and school improvement initiatives;
- Differentiate professional development opportunities to reflect the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers; and
- Use contemporary learning theory as the foundation for designing professional development methods.

## 1. Refocusing Routine Meeting Time on Professional Development

Leithwood (2011) indicates that the central priority awarded to professional development in high-performing districts is reflected in institutional practices that would normally be devoted to routine administrative matters. For example, the monthly meetings that most districts have with their Principals are consumed with the delivery of information or discussions about school and district management issues. Many high-performing districts, in contrast, dedicate this valuable time to the continuing professional development of Principals.

## 2. Aligning PD with District and School Improvement Initiatives

The uncontested focus on student learning and the improvement of instruction in high-performing districts is accompanied by careful alignment of professional development. At both the district and school levels, time spent on professional development is clearly aimed at providing staff with the knowledge and skills they need to accomplish the improvement goals established by the district and school. Indeed, in the NYC District #2 context, D'Amico et al. (2001) found significant effects on student achievement when professional development was aligned with the District's literacy and math programs. As Firestone et al. (2005) claim: "districts play a key role in supporting instructional reform by being the primary designers and deliverers of learning opportunities for teachers, and if they do so in a focused, coherent fashion they can influence teaching practice" (p. 316).

Several studies exemplify the key features of this type of professional development. Pritchard and Marshall's (2002) study of 'healthy' districts – districts that, among other things, produce better than average achievement – found that professional development: addressed fundamental issues of curriculum and instruction as part of an integrated district strategy; was driven by shared district focus on learning; and included a shared school

focus aligned with district vision. In these districts, consistent district purpose came before individual selection or preference, and there was an expectation that professional development was a responsibility of everyone in the district. Opfer et al. (2007) found, not surprisingly, that the relationship between reform efforts and improvements in student achievement depended on what teachers knew and did in their classrooms, a consequence of their professional development opportunities. Coherent and aligned professional development provided by districts, according to this study, has three key features:

- Consistency of focus: teachers have opportunities to develop in-depth knowledge on a specific subject or topic;
- Extended and distributed time spent on professional development to promote long-term change; and
- Learning opportunities are provided that model the instructional approaches teachers are expected to employ, including problem solving, learning in authentic settings, and the examination of actual student work.

Based on evidence from a retrospective case study comparing four high-performing districts with a selection of low performing districts, Snipes et al. (2002) found that high-performing districts used professional development to help ensure consistent implementation of district mandated programs and forms of instruction. These districts also created roles for themselves, which involved guiding, supporting and improving instruction at the school level.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) provide an alternative perspective. In their assessment, PD has limited impact unless opportunities are provided for follow-through support for teachers working and learning in teams. The determining quality is whether the quality of support provided to teachers after the workshop or learning session (pp. 92-93). In a similar vein, Levin (2008) advocates shifting from autonomous practice and individual professional learning to more collective approaches.

> Shared practice is important because it is more likely to be more effective as each person learns from the experience of colleagues, and it helps build the sense of community and common purpose

that is vital to maintaining engagement. Clearly, this sort of learning is central to the development of agreed practices by the profession, as discussed in the previous chapter (p. 26).

### 3. Differentiating PD to Reflect the Needs of Schools, Administrators and Teachers

Alignment of professional development with the district and school improvement mission is accompanied, in many high-performing districts, by differentiated 'delivery' of professional development reflecting variation in levels of development on the part of both schools and their individual staff members. For example, many of the high-performing districts in Florian et al.'s (2000) study systematically evaluated their professional development initiatives including for example, "surveying teachers about their attitudes toward and changes in practice resulting from staff development experiences" (p. 8).

Timperley (2011) observes:

> When the professional learning is not driven by identified student and teacher needs, teachers might find the experience interesting but in the absence of a need to solve a specific problem of practice or to improve a particular outcome for students, there is little urgency or motivation to change and improve. (p. 47)

Langer's (2000) study of teachers' engagement in professional communities and the supports that schools and districts provided for such engagement adds considerable breadth to what differentiated, yet aligned, professional development for teachers and administrators can entail. For example, in one district reading specialists first went through their own training in several new programs being implemented by the district. After that training "during which they were immersed in the plan and its new instructional components, state and district standards, benchmarks, and assessment tools, the reading specialists supported teachers in incorporating these foci into their classrooms through workshops, model teaching and other [individualized] face-to-face interactions" (p. 414). Teachers and supervisors

in these organizations subscribed to a variety of professional journals; they "place themselves in the stream of new knowledge in their field" (p. 433).

Much of the professional development in both NYC's District #2 and San Diego was differentiated through the use of well trained coaches and mentors, as well as encouragement for teachers to visit other classrooms and schools, to form professional learning networks, and to participate in teacher study groups (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003; Elmore & Burney, 1998).

Eilers and Camacho's (2007) study of a single school, found that the district provided staff expertise and training on matters of curriculum and instruction through the use of Teachers On Special Assignment (TOSAs). This meant that the training was on-site and addressed the specific challenges with which each teacher was grappling. The district also provided week-long summer professional development over several years, targeting improvements in its areas of priority (math and language). Follow-up sessions were provided during the year in order to reinforce learnings from the summer sessions. TOSAs attended grade level meetings in the school each week and worked individually with teachers in the first, third and fifth grades because of the schools AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress] status.

In Iatarola and Fruchter's (2004) high-performing districts, professional development was more highly developed and both district and school initiatives were more successfully integrated in their programs. Low-performing districts mandated specific professional development programs, whereas high-performing districts created programs that offered schools both resources and support.

## 4. Basing PD on the Best Available Evidence about How People Learn

Human learning, according to the best evidence now available (e.g., Bransford, et al., 2006), is constructed from one's existing cognitive resources, influenced by one's social and cultural milieu, and shaped by the situation in which the learning occurs. The professional development provided by high-performing districts typically reflects this understanding of human learning.

By way of example, many of the high-performing districts in both the Togneri and Anderson (2003) and Ragland et al.'s (1999) studies had moved the conduct of professional development from a centralized function and location into schools, an authentic setting for teachers. These districts also looked to the socially and culturally informed expertise within their own districts to help others improve their instructional practices. Professional development in NYC's District #2 also followed this pattern.

Based on interview and classroom observation evidence, Stein and D'Amico's (2002) study demonstrated other parallels in District #2 between teaching and learning that is successful for children and forms of professional development that were productive for the learning of teachers. The main features of such professional development, according to this evidence, are

- engagement with complex tasks;
- interactions with more capable others; and
- the motivation for persistence and hard work that comes from a desire to become a member of a professional community whose goals and values one identifies with.

Leithwood (2008) maintains that the following characteristics of productive teacher professional development, whatever form it takes, should:

- Address a well-recognized issue, problem or interest
- Engage teachers in planning and implementing
- Be authentically 'situated'
- Be connected to teachers' existing skills and understandings
- Allow for low-risk practice and feedback
- Be open to promising new ideas and practices from whatever source
- Be supported by the school's professional community
- Be supported and rewarded by the organization.

## A Capacity Building Snapshot: Instructional Leadership in Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division

Red Deer Catholic School Division is building on a division priority to expand the instructional leadership capacity of school-based leaders and lead teachers through its division wide AISI cycle three project called CAPS (Curriculum, Assessment, Pyramid of Intervention, Spirituality). CAPS had been integrated into daily expectations in schools with an emphasis that the Alberta Program of Studies was a critical starting point for all teaching and assessment. There was a very strong focus on implementing academic achievement plans within a culture of collaboration (rather than competition) between schools. Support for individual and collective professional development is strong, including subsidies to support graduate level upgrading. All administrators and central services staff have graduate degrees. An expectation across the system is that research and evidence are to be utilized in decision making that impact student achievement.

Red Deer Catholic's approach to enhancing instructional leadership is comprehensive and detailed. Two of its research informed strategies are described below.

### 1. Changing the Conceptions of Leadership Expected of Senior Staff

Feedback from both administrators and teachers indicates that the view of senior level administrators is changing. They are increasingly being viewed as instructional leaders. The monthly leadership of senior administrators and central service staff in providing professional development to school-based administrators and teachers is contributing to this shift. Among the several other factors contributing to this altered perception, are the following:

- Changes in the organizational structure at central office with an expectation of collaboration between the departments of Learning Services, Student Services and Personnel, Finances and Facilities.

- Senior administration team meets weekly to ensure that a unified voice on all issues is evident when sharing decisions with Principals and teachers.
- Central services educational staff (curriculum co-orindators, directors) meet in department teams but also meet with all senior administration in the development of the division educational plan, as participants in the planning institutes for the school improvement initiative and periodically throughout the year to contribute to discussions regarding emergent issues, success in implementation and to increase awareness of all central service staff on division progress with priorities.
- Creation of CFL (Coaching for Learning) teams at two levels: Administrator and School. The Superintendent and three Associate Superintendents each lead a cohort of school-based administrators (Principals and vice Principals) organized by division into four administrator CFL cohorts: (elementary, middle, K-9 and high school). Central Services academic staff is all assigned to the cohorts who meet monthly to address strategies (eg. How to coach school CFL team members in sharing instructional expertise to improve all teaching in the school) that are directly focused on increasing the instructional leadership capacity in the division.

## 2. Supports for Principals to Strengthen Instructional Leadership Skills

A number of supports have been put in place to ensure that school-based administrators meet the system's expectation to place priority on development of their instructional leadership skills are positively.

- Emphasis on hiring practices that new hires are teachers with strong instructional practices and that rigorous performance evaluation is completed with positive results before a new hire is given continuous contract status.
- Newly appointed administrators have a Senior Administrator assigned to them for at least one year and that regular conversations occur, appropriate PD is available and the senior administrator is a 'go to' mentor for the new administrator.

- A performance review is completed on all newly appointed Principals which includes feedback from school staff, assessment of progress of the Principal, and review of student achievement.
- Monthly professional development sessions, primarily on topics of school improvement in teaching and learning, are compulsory and the schedule is developed based on an annual needs assessment.
- In division 'experts' from the administrator group are encouraged to lead administrator PD and there is an expectation that when administrators attend specialty conference or institutes that they are prepared to share the highlights of new learning with other administrators.
- The ATA Leadership Steering Committee members carried out a three year action research project which identified criteria and rubrics to assist in Principal professional growth and also explored strategies to attract individuals to the Principalship who have strong instructional leadership skills or potential to develop in this essential area of school leadership.
- Senior administration and central services staff participate in all division wide instructional leadership professional development.
- An annual school based administrator retreat (three days) is held each winter and the recurring theme of building instructional leadership capacity is integrated into feature topics.

Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division has made significant strides forward in the increasing achievement of students on provincial exams, very high student, teacher and parent satisfaction rates, a graduation rate significantly higher than the province and very high rates of educator satisfaction with professional development.

A noticeable trend upward is evident in the past three years and although many factors may be contributing to this positive phenomenon it is likely that the practices in place as an outcome of the CASS program on system improvement have added significant impact. The collaborative efforts to focus on instructional leadership by all Senior administration and Central Services, and the strategic and purposeful supports in place to strengthen

school based administration in building instructional leadership capacity are being positively received by stakeholders and the division is optimistic that these efforts will contribute to an ongoing increase in student achievement.

## Summary

Chapter Three focused on significant district level approaches to capacity building, the second of four categories of highly successful system leadership practice. Districts that are exceptionally effective at educating all students well in the 21st century foster a strong and widely felt sense of collective efficacy and they attend effectively to the professional learning needs of teachers, leaders and other staff members. Three guidelines for system educational leaders are summarized below, before shifting our attention to the Framework's third area of collective system leadership practice – Relationships.

### Table 3.4 Capacity Building: Guidelines for System Leaders

1. Create structures and norms within your system to ensure regular, reciprocal and extended deliberations about improvement progress within and across your schools, as well as across the system as a whole. These structures and norms should result in deeply interconnected networks of school and system leaders working together on achieving the system's directions.

2. Use the networks you create as the primary mechanism for the professional learning of your school leaders.

3. Regularly monitor the alignment of the system's policies and procedures. Refinements of directions or improvement processes may well prompt the need for some re-alignment.

Leithwood, 2011

# Relationships

4

## Introduction

The importance of relationships in exceptionally effective school systems is the subject of Chapter Four, which focuses on the following three dimensions:

- Dimension 7: System Connections
- Dimension 8: Parent and Community Engagement
- Dimension 9: School Board Leadership

These three leadership dimensions are described following a more general discussion of evidence informed relationships in the educational organizations. A snapshot of relevant Alberta system leadership practices is provided and general system guidelines for fostering effective relationships are offered.

Thirteen studies in Leithwood's (2008) review associated good relationships with high-performing districts and, in some cases, described how such relationships were developed and maintained. Leithwood notes that multiple

processes or feelings are encompassed in the term 'relationships': trust, morale, communication and motivation, for instance. He observes that when the educational community does not believe or trust the motives of provincial policy makers, the changes advocated by those policy makers are actively resisted no matter their potential consequences. When Principals feel overwhelmed with district initiatives and are unable to see how the individual initiatives are connected to one another, or to the needs of the school, Principals can feel demoralized. This is, at least in part, a function of poor communication between district and school staffs. Further, when teacher associations or unions feel their members are being treated unfairly, the likelihood of the district's mission being accomplished in an authentic and meaningful way is greatly diminished.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) indicate that trust, in particular relational trust (as distinct from organic or contractual trust), should be considered foundational to the building of productive relationships. At the organizational level, trusting relationships have been associated with

- More effective decision making
- Enhanced social support for innovation
- Increased likelihood of shared purposes
- Increased likelihood of members going the extra mile for their students.

Both school and district leaders build relational trust with and among their staffs, students and communities when they:

- Earn the respect of their colleagues
- Are viewed by their colleagues as competent to do their jobs
- Demonstrate personal regard for others
- Demonstrate integrity in their work with others.

Organizational theorists often refer to relational trust (as opposed to the kind of trust that resides in contracts) as the oil that keeps organizations functioning smoothly. When organizations have to rely primarily on formal policies, regulations, job descriptions and contracts they grind to a halt. Relational trust is at the heart of good relationships and without it organizations are in trouble. This means that building good relationships entails building trusting relationships.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) identify relational trust as a key factor in the remarkable improvement in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, which began from the rated position of 149 out of 149 English jurisdictions in 1996 and is presently above the national averages on all key indicators. The role played by the development of trust between district administration and schools is described thus:

> Knowledge of and presence in the schools by district provide support, build trust, and ground intervention in consistent and direct personal knowledge and communication more than in the numerical data that eventually appear on spreadsheets. Time and again, school leaders say they trust and are trusted by the district, and the district leaders say the same. One of Tower Hamlet's district administrators sums it up well. It's "not just about the data. It's actually knowing the school, knowing the community, knowing about the history, knowing about the staff – all of that." (p. 165)

Leithwood (2008) further makes the following points with regard to relationship 'lessons' supported by the research.

- For District–School relationships, the most productive outcome is a reconfiguration from a traditional 'controlling and directing' relationship to a 'service, support and partnership' relationship.
- For District–Union relationships, the most productive outcome is movement away from relationships that are often adversarial to much more respectful and collaborative relationships.
- For School–Parent relationships, the most productive outcome is a move away from trying to engage parents more in the life of the school toward helping parents work more productively with their children in the home. For some parents, this will result in altered expectations for their children and greater skill in coaching and instructing their children.
- For Teacher–Teacher relationships, the most productive outcome is a move away from simply collegial relationships with fellow staff members – leaving teachers to do their work in relative isolation and with extreme forms of autonomy – to community-like relationships governed by norms of collaboration, continuous learning and deprivatized practice.

## Dimension 7: System Connections

System leadership practices that foster relational trust connections within school districts can have a significantly positive impact as demonstrated by Leithwood (2008, 2011, 2012) and additional research reports cited in this sub-section. Eight key system leadership strategies in Dimension Seven are itemized in Table 4.1 below. These strategies are then elaborated in one of the three sub-sections that follow: System Collaboration and Interconnectivity; Learning Communities and Networks; and Strategic Engagement with the Government's Agenda.

### Table 4.1 Dimension Seven: System Connections

1. Central office roles are interconnected; work is undertaken collaboratively in the service of a widely shared set of purposes. Communication among staff is frequent and cordial.

2. School staffs often participate in system decisions and are in frequent contact with central office staff for support and assistance. Central office staff members are in schools frequently and know most school staff members by name.

3. Networks and PLCs are well established at both school and system levels and have become the established way of solving problems and taking care of other business

4. Time and space is provided for the teachers' association and unions to participate in planning system and school improvement efforts;

5. System and school leaders work with the teachers' association and unions to build trusting relationships

6. The district communicates regularly with the Department of Education, both formally and informally, about system goals and directions and encourages Department of Education collaboration in achieving these goals and directions.

7. The district provides feedback to the Department of Education about the relevance of its initiatives to district goals and directions and has a multi-year plan that explicitly integrates provincial and district priorities.

8. The district supplements government initiatives, when needed, in order to increase their local impact. Problem-solving groups in schools (e.g., PLCs) consider how to implement provincial initiatives in order to get the best results for the school and its students.

### 1. System Collaboration and Interconnectivity

McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) found that better district results were evident in cases where central office staff worked well together. The importance of modelling learning community approaches and working together across functions is highlighted in Leithwood (2011).

Communication in high-performing districts is fostered by a perception of 'flatness' in the district. Principals and teachers feel socially and organizationally close to those working in the central office, a perception which encourages fluid horizontal and vertical communication. Shared beliefs, values, and purpose are both stimulants for, and the result of, such communication. For example, one of the factors identified by Florian (2000) in a study of districts' success in sustaining reform initiatives was shared "school and district cultures that value learning, innovation and collaboration"(p. 16). Eilers and Camacho's (2007) case study of a single successful turnaround school demonstrates just how important to the Principal, and to the success of the school, was the development of a close, collaborative working relationship between the school and a wide array of both senior and mid-level district staff members.

Skrla et al. (2000) and Skrla and Scheurich (2001) found that to make the changes needed to become high-performing, the four districts in their study focused on treating their staffs in positive and supportive ways. These districts had adopted a 'no blame' policy in which significant change efforts were expected to result in some failure. People were not blamed for the failure, but were encouraged to continue to try to improve, and were continuously supported in those efforts. Those in leadership roles were "expected to create an environment of caring and support, encouragement, and assistance to ensure that the teachers could be equally successful with all children" (p. 32). This became an integral part of the districts' culture. Based on comparable evidence from their study, Togneri and Anderson (2003) concluded that:

> Collaboration and trust did not simply happen in the districts;
> rather, they were the result of deliberate and involved processes.

> Led by their boards and superintendents, the most collaborative
> districts in the study worked on working together. They engaged
> in ongoing dialogue, created cross-role leadership structures to
> facilitate communication among stakeholders, and intentionally
> sought tools to facilitate collaboration (p. 32).

Reinforcing the value of good working relationships, but from a negative
perspective, both Darling-Hammond et al. (2003) and Hightower (2002)
report that the speed and central source of the changes made in San Diego –
changes made as a result of a decidedly non-collaborative process – created
at least initial tensions and some distrust in the central office on the part of
significant numbers of teachers and Principals. This tension and distrust
persisted well into the reform effort, constantly challenging efforts to move
forward.

The value of developing good system relations with teachers unions and
associations is highlighted by a number of scholars (Hargreaves & Shirley,
2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Leithwood 2011; Levin 2008). Connecting
teacher associations more closely to the "core work of their profession –
teaching and learning" is evident in both Ontario and Alberta (Hargreaves
& Shirley, 2012, p. 195). In both cases, teacher association allocations of
large portions of their budgets to professional learning are offered as positive
examples.

## 2.  Learning Communities and Networks

Almost all significant reform efforts that are aimed at improving student
achievement, no matter what else they entail, depend for their success on
significant changes in teachers' classroom practices. These changes are
sometimes the product of quite formal learning, for example, planned
professional development opportunities. Such opportunities are often well-
designed for the teaching of explicit or codified knowledge. But changes
in teachers' practices often occur in less formal and more socially intense
environments that allow for, and more importantly, encourage the sharing of
practices with one's peers.

Environments such as these allow for the acquisition of tacit knowledge. The sharing of such knowledge is usually stimulated by conversations about real problems in particular contexts, and about the process of trial and error involved in finding solutions that work. The power of collegial environments to stimulate learning is now acknowledged in such concepts as 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wegner, 1994), and 'professional learning communities' (Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996). High-performing districts, the evidence suggests, work hard to reduce the traditional isolation of teachers and ameliorate the lack of opportunity they have to learn from one another by fostering the development of community-like environments in districts and in schools.

Langer's (2000) study is one of the best sources of evidence about this work on the part of high-performing districts. This was an in-depth study of secondary school English teachers in 14 schools 'beating the odds', and 11 schools achieving typical and expected results with their students. In this case, beating the odds meant that the diverse, poor, and traditionally low achieving students in these schools were achieving much better than comparable students in other schools. The main focus of the study was on teachers, their professional communities, the learning that occurred in these communities, and the consequences of that learning for their classroom instruction. Results of the study highlighted the nature and quality of teacher relationships and learning within case schools, and in a variety of different communities to which these teachers belonged. But the support provided to these teachers by their districts was remarkable, as well.

Both schools and districts fostered teachers' participation in a variety of professional communities. These ranged from informal communities such as teacher dyads and reading groups, to formal professional associations. Teachers' participation in these communities solidified their commitment to their profession, and to lifelong professional learning. It also built their confidence and sense of agency with respect to their own work and their work with colleagues. The districts in which these teachers worked supported teachers' activities in professional communities by providing time and resources for their participation, as well as engaging teachers in the

curriculum and instructional work of the district. District administrators remained members of these communities; thereby modeling the value they attached to them.

Other studies also reported evidence about the importance that high-performing districts attach to the development of collaborative working relations among teachers (Florian et al., 2000**;** D'Amico et al., 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2003; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). One of the studies of NYC District 2's reform strategy found moderately significant relationships between achievement in reading and math and the quality of schools' professional communities (Stein et al., 1999).

## 3. Strategic Engagement with the Government's Agenda

In their study of "District Responses to State Leadership" Louis, Anderson and Thomas (2012) found that superintendents "see state policies as a vehicle for achieving local goals" and that smaller districts more generally view state education agencies "as a source of support: medium and larger districts have other sources that are more important" (p. 203). The researchers suggest that district authorities should develop "networks that engage with state policy development and adaption", particularly in relation to district needs and priorities (p. 225).

Leithwood (2008) suggests that the notion of strategic engagement with the Department of Education includes:

- Active 'interpretation' of provincial initiatives in light of local needs
- Mobilization of local resources
- Active engagement of provincial decision making and provincial decision makers
- Proactive efforts to influence the provincial agenda to support local priorities and needs.

 Leithwood's (2008) review found six studies that outlined how high-performing districts engaged with their government's agenda for change and the resources associated with that agenda. Three distinct approaches to working with the government's agenda for change were identified. First,

complying with the government's initiatives and implementing them well. Second, supplementing the government's initiatives in order to increase their local impact. Third, leveraging the initiatives in the interests of the district's priorities.

### Implementing Government Initiatives

Skrla et al.'s (2000) report of high-performing districts in Texas provides the most explicit account of all the studies reviewed about how districts engaged with state policy directions. It was the state's accountability policies that prompted most of the improvements for students described by the study. Skrla et al. (2000) point to three crucial features of this system in Texas. First, there was a change from a deficit model, holding lowered expectations for low SES children and those from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, to an expectation that children from all backgrounds should succeed at equally high levels. Second, there was a change from an input and process focus for accountability, to a focus on outcomes . Finally, the public was given access to disaggregated student performance data at the school and district levels.

The authors point out that many Texas districts did not reorient themselves in response to these state policies in the same way as did the four case districts. But for these four districts, the reorientation was profound. This reorientation was considerably enhanced by key events related to the state's new policy direction including: demands by parent groups for more equitable achievement by students, superintendents' decisions to adopt equity as a moral imperative for their work, and school boards' decisions to refocus their energies on improving the achievement of all students.

O'Day and Bitter (2003) also provide an example of a 'comply and implement' approach to state directions. This was an evaluation of the implementation and impact on students of two programs encompassed by California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program and the Achieving/Improving Schools Program). One of the important findings from the evaluation was that districts significantly influence the quality of instruction

and levels of achievement in low performing schools. This influence was attributed to the instructionally related policies of the district for all underperforming schools. The authors concluded with four implications for districts interacting with state accountability initiatives:

- Districts should give priority to helping schools develop internal capacity and a coherent instructional program;
- School improvement efforts and support from external agents should adopt this as a goal;
- Improvement efforts should aim to develop professional communities within schools focused on improving student learning; and
- Districts should target underperforming schools and classes for the placement of their most effective administrators and teachers.

### Supplementing Government Initiatives to Increase Impact

Stringfield et al.'s (2005) study leads to the not very surprising conclusion that government initiatives will not always be sufficiently powerful to accomplish their goals. In the face of such inadequacy, these findings imply that high-performing districts might usefully add whatever is needed to increase the local impact.

The Stringfield et al. (2005) longitudinal study (1992-2003) of achievement trajectories in the Baltimore City Public School system, found only small changes in response to accountability policies which introduced high stakes testing but provided few or no new resources or added little to the district's human capital. When approaches to accountability included not only high stakes testing but also infused new resources and promoted increases in the capacities of teachers and administrators, significant gains in student achievement resulted. Districts do not have to wait for governments to get it right. They can supplement the government's strategy to better ensure the impact they want.

## Leveraging Government Initiatives to Address District Priorities

Some high-performing districts actively engage with government initiatives and resources in order to strengthen support for their own reform initiatives and to ensure a good fit with their own reforms. These districts also engage with government initiatives in order to influence the government's own directions (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). A good illustration of this approach is provided by the San Diego reform efforts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003; Hightower, 2002). Leaders in this district "used state – and sometimes federal – funding to achieve their goals by consolidating sources of funds and focusing them on major initiatives" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003, p. 50). The district "also leveraged state policies toward its own programs" (p. 5), in some cases actually sharpening the state's initiatives into a more rational, performance-based accountability system.

# Dimension 8: Parent and Community Engagement

System and school leadership practices that engage parents and community members in service of student learning have a significantly positive impact as demonstrated by Leithwood (2008, 2011, 2012) and additional research reports cited in this sub-section. Dimension Eight's four leadership strategies are itemized in Table 4.12 below. Practices for promoting parental engagement are dealt with first, followed by a review of practices for promoting community engagement.

## Table 4.2 Dimension Eight: Parent and Community Engagement

1. The district provides school staffs with helpful opportunities to acquire the capacities needed to productively engage parents in schools.

2. The district provides school staffs with helpful opportunities to acquire the capacities they need to assist parents in creating conditions in the home that support the success of their children at school.

3. The district has a formal policy on parent engagement and conducts periodic audits across schools about the extent to which that policy is being implemented. School staffs and parents are asked for evidence as part of these audits.

4. Community groups are routinely recognized for their contribution and support and consulted on almost all decisions affecting the community. School system staff are regularly members of these groups themselves.

## 1.  Parent Engagement

Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall and Straus (2010) maintain that effective parent engagement accounts for as much as fifty per cent of the variation in student achievement across schools. As such, influencing variables on the 'Family Path' is a high leverage option for school leaders (p.8). In a 2006 report to the U.K. Department for Education and Skills Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Hopkins and Harris draw on the large body of evidence supporting the importance of building productive relationships with families and communities**.** They cite a variety of research studies that indicate revised role expectations for educational leaders that embrace a meaningful role for

parents in schools and a close relationship with the larger community (e.g., Goldring & Rallis, 1993). Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll and Russ (2004) have identified this as a key leadership practice as important for improving schools in challenging circumstances.

Gordon and Lewis (2012) found that in schools "with more democratic collective leadership practices that include parents in influential positions, student achievement is higher. The role of the Principal in interpreting district engagement policies and in creating and communicating school-level expectations for parent engagement is critical" (p. 89).

Leithwood and Jantzi's (2006) synthesis of 40 studies points to the important influence on children's academic success of family work habits, academic guidance and support provided to children, stimulation to think about issues in the larger environment, provision of adequate health and nutritional conditions, and physical settings in the home conducive to academic work. Perhaps most important are the academic and occupational aspirations and expectations for children of parents, guardians and other significant members of their immediate community.

The importance of leadership efforts in this direction is underlined in Stelmach's (2005) Alberta Education sponsored research into the benefits of parent engagement. She asserts that a number of in-depth studies on the impact of family involvement on student achievement have demonstrated the following effects:

- higher grades and test scores;
- increased homework completion;
- improved school attendance;
- more positive attitudes;
- fewer discipline problems;
- increased high school completion rates;
- decreased school leaving rates; and
- greater participation in postsecondary education.

Levin (2008) points to a growing body of literature about how to build positive relationships with parents. "Most important is a genuine

commitment to partnership coupled with respect and ongoing effort to create dialogue and mutual understanding" (p. 112).

Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson (2010c) advise districts to develop policies and clear expectations that support community and parental engagement. They further suggest a system of incentives Principals may need to increase the influence of parents and community members within schools. Incorporating indicators of parental and community involvement into Principal assessment practices, for example.

> District engagement policies can have long lasting effects on Principals. The more Principals get used to interacting with the community, the more open they become to involving outside stakeholders in school improvement efforts. The role of the Principal in interpreting district engagement policies and in creating and communicating school level expectations for parent engagement is critical. (p. 11)

Evidence from Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) indicates that parent engagement in school is nurtured when parents come to understand that such involvement is a key part of what it means to be a responsible parent, when parents believe they have the skills and know-how to make meaningful contributions to the school's efforts and when they believe that school staffs, as well as their own children, value their participation in the school. School leaders and their staffs contribute to such beliefs by, for example:

- issuing invitations for parent participation that are personal and specific rather than general;
- matching parent skills to the activities in which they will participate;
- providing very specific information and feedback to parents about their child's progress;
- creating opportunities for parents to interact with one another about school matters;
- designing their classroom activities to include special projects which involve parents in direct support of instruction requiring skills well-matched to parents capacities;

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- communicating effectively with parents, for example, by altering schedules to accommodate the schedules of parents, modifying the format of parent conferences to make them less intimidating and more meaningful for parents, providing a private environment in which to have parent-teacher conferences;
- soliciting parent views on key matters concerning their children's education and engaging in joint problem solving with parents; and
- appointing a community liaison person as a link between the parents and the school in order to build both teacher and parent capacity to communicate with one another (p. 9).

Epstein's (2001) reports that effective parent involvement programs should focus on the following items:
- assisting parents with understanding their children's learning needs, and helping teachers understand family needs;
- communication that allows for two-way, open communication between the school and home;
- volunteering that recognizes parents' talents and contributions both in and for the school;
- learning at home strategies that engage the family with their children's school work;
- decision making that includes parents as key stakeholders in making decisions that will impact student learning; and
- collaborating with the community to create mutual benefit by sharing resources and contributing to both school and community goals.

Steinmann, Malcolm, Connell, Davis and McMann's (2009) examination of effective parent engagement strategies used in 2000-2008 Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) projects corroborates the thinking of Epstein. Their research conceptualized parental involvement under the following broad headings: volunteering in school; participating in parent education; supporting students at home; helping to develop and implement AISI projects; advancing beliefs, values, cultures and languages; sharing expertise, knowledge, talents and gifts.

## 2. Community Engagement

Gordon and Louis (2012) found that schools with more collaborative and inclusive leadership achieved stronger learning results than those with similar demographic profiles that operated with less emphasis on collective leadership. District policies that promote community engagement in schools increase participation and encourage Principals to interact with the community. They recommend that

> district leaders engage in dialogues with Principals about what openness to community and parental involvement means in practice, beyond merely establishing policies and structures. Pertinent topics for such discussions would include the value of partnering with parents and community members in school-improvement efforts, parents as vital partners in the learning process, the importance of shared leadership, and the critical role that the community plays in every child's life. (p. 105).

The four improving districts in Maguire's (2003) study, for example, had "more links with community partners and agencies capable of supporting students" (p. 10). Similarly, Ragland et al. (1999) discovered that good relationships in high-performing districts were part of a strategy intended to create a sense of urgency to improve student achievement. In particular, this study emphasized the relationships between the superintendent and parents, as well as the superintendent and members of the school board. These relationships depended on creating trust, which once it was established, allowed for the alignment of everyone's efforts in the service of raising achievement levels. Skrla et al. (2000) and Skrla and Scheurich (2001) found that not only the superintendent, but also other district level leaders, school board members, and members of the wider community were involved in the effort to create an equity-focused school system in response to the Texas state accountability system. These districts nurtured active alliances with business, government, and other community groups.

# Dimension 9: School Board Leadership

School systems that are effectively adept at educating all students well are served by elected school Trustees who focus their efforts on supporting student learning (Leithwood 2008, 2011, 2012) Dimension Eight's four leadership strategies are itemized in Table 4.12 below. Practices for promoting parental engagement are dealt with first, followed by a review of practices for promoting community engagement.

## Table 4.3 Dimension Nine: School Board Leadership

The Trustees

1. participate in assessing community values and interests and incorporating them into the school system's beliefs and vision for student learning and well being.

2. help mobilize parents and the wider community in developing and supporting the vision.

3. help create a climate of excellence that makes achieving the vision possible.

4. use the board's beliefs and vision for student learning and well being as the foundation for strategic planning and ongoing board evaluation.

5. focus most policy making on the improvement of student learning and well being consistent with the beliefs and vision.

6. identify and fund policies and programs that provide rich curricula and engaging forms of instruction for all students and eliminate those that do not.

7. maintain productive relationships with senior staff, school staffs, community stakeholders and provincial education officials.

8. provide systematic orientation opportunities for new members and ongoing training for existing members.

9. support and act, individually, in accordance with decisions made by the Board of Trustees, as a whole.

10. avoid becoming involved in day-to-day operations.

11. organize board governance to foster generative reflection in addition to fiduciary and strategic governance.

Leithwood (2010) indicates that in highly effective school systems Trustees contribute in two major ways. First, by focusing their work on supporting and monitoring progress being made in implementing the system's strategic multi-year plan. Second, by nurturing the wider community's understanding and support for their system's efforts. He further advises that systems adopting a policy governance model should provide ongoing training for all elected board members, system leaders and staff. This approach fosters collaboration and interdependency between professional and elected system leaders.

Canadian scholar Jon Young (2009) argues that community engagement is a core function of school boards and school Trustees in the 21st century. He stresses the importance of ongoing public participation in the educational processes as critical to a healthy public school system. In his view,

> Trustee legitimacy and credibility have to rest on more than a once-in-four-year election (or acclamation). Rallis, Shibles & Swanson (2002, p. 251) remind us that the role of school boards is to connect the public to its schools, and as such they are 'stewards of the community conversation about schools'. To fulfill this task, they suggest, school boards and school Trustees have to provide a range of invitational forums – formal school board meetings being only one – for such conversations characterized by *inclusion, dialogue* and *deliberation*. This requires a proactive stance from school boards that: seeks out multiple voices and ensures that they are listened to; fosters a process whereby different perspectives are properly explained and understood; and, when choices are to be made between different courses of action, they are well reasoned and carefully articulated. It is through these processes that Trustees demonstrate their integrity and their commitment to the educational well-being of the community's children and cultivate the support needed to make difficult decisions that invariably go with the role. (p 6)

Togneri and Anderson (2003) associate more successful districts with school boards that have adopted a policy governance role that emphasizes policy development, goal and standards setting, strategic planning, and monitoring

of system/school progress in relation to district plans, priorities, and accountability systems. Boards operating in this mode hold the superintendent responsible for implementation of system plans, but avoid direct involvement in managing the school system. Stability in membership and constructive long-term relations with the district administration are also characteristic of these boards.

In the words of the 2009 *Report of the Governance Committee to the Minister of Education of Ontario,* "governance by an elected board is not corporate governance, and cannot be made so. The report concluded that Boards of Trustees need to develop a governance model that best suits its context, taking such things as the system's mission, culture, traditions and relationships. The following principles of effective school board governance were offered:

- The Board of Trustees has a clearly stated mission that includes high expectations for student achievement;
- The Board of Trustees allocates its resources in support of the goals it has set;
- The Board of Trustees holds its system accountable for student achievement through its director of education (superintendent) by regular monitoring of evidence of student achievement;
- The Board of Trustees engages with its constituents in the creation of policies that affect them and communicates its progress in raising student achievement;
- The Board of Trustees monitors its own performance and takes action to continually improve its governance processes. (p. 13)

Writing about the Alberta context, Seel and Gibbons (2012) arrive at similar views about the nature of educational governance. They see merit in the notion of governance as "a decision-making process that strategically determines direction, engagement, and roles" (Graham, Amos, and Plumptre, 2003). Gill's (2005) definition of governance as the "exercise of authority, direction and control of an organization in order to ensure that its purpose is achieved" (p. 15) is also cited. Their analysis indicates that the practice of governance would need to change, moving from predominantly fiduciary and strategic domains of governance to include "generative governance" (Chait, Ryan, & Taylor,

2005). The planned policy shifts would be centred on seven principles:

1. learner centred
2. shared responsibility and accountability
3. engaged communities
4. inclusive, equitable access
5. responsive, flexible approach
6. sustainable and efficient use of resources
7. innovation to promote and strive for excellence

## A System Relationships Snapshot: Relationships in Calgary Catholic School District

Calgary Catholic School District is the largest Catholic school district in the province with 106 schools and almost 45,000 students. It has been recognized for the past three years as one of Alberta's Top 50 Employers. Students consistently have high academic achievement. In the fall of 2010, the Chief Superintendent was the recipient of the Alberta Lieutenant Governor's Award for Excellence in Public Administration. On accepting the award she made it very clear that she was accepting on behalf of the entire district for the work that has been done at all levels developing and encouraging strong relationships with staff, parents, students, and the many stakeholders and partners of the district.

Relationship building in this district is based on mutual respect, openness, transparency, shared responsibility for the children in their care, and recognition and protection of the dignity of every person. Calgary Catholic believes that successful organizations create a collaborative culture that focuses on building and maintaining outstanding relationships with students, staff, families, and community. The opportunity for ongoing and meaningful engagement of all stakeholders in this organization creates a culture where everyone shares responsibility for its direction and feels ownership and pride in its success.

The district embraces Shepherd Leadership as the foundation upon which all staff and stakeholders build a faith-based learning culture where students' needs are met through kindness, compassion, high quality professional practices, and

shared responsibility. Shepherd Leadership guides district leaders, Trustees, staff, and their community in collaborative decision-making, the creation of a healthy space for conflict and conflict resolution, and the identification and removal of obstacles and barriers to learning success through focused, purposeful action. Staff, Trustees, the Alberta Teachers Association, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, and district leaders, parents, students, and community members have come together in a spirit of caring and cooperation.

In 2007, the district introduced 'Re-Imagining' as a comprehensive and collaborative consultation process that has fostered a culture of openness, transparency, and communication among all stakeholders. Re-imagining, is guided by the question, "What would it look like if the best happened?" This process has become an integral part of shared ownership and collaborative decision-making. It is used regularly to inform decisions about budget, program and accommodation planning, district regulations, staffing practices, Alberta Education mandates, the Three-Year Education Plan and Annual Education Results Report, and emergent topics/needs. In 2009-2010, this process was used to Re-Imagine the district's mission, value and vision statements.

Senior Administration, led by the Chief Superintendent has led the district by example in building and maintaining good relations. The entire district leadership team, consisting of school administrators and non-school based leaders, promote a culture of trust, transparency, collaboration, commitment, and action where people come first. The Chief Superintendent continually corresponds with staff through emails, her blog, district website, and regular visits to all district schools. An open door policy gives all a voice. Staff says that district leadership has created an environment where you can 'disagree without being disagreeable' and where you do not have to be perfect. The district is committed to the the belief that no matter who they are or what role they play, the success of every child in the district ultimately depends on each of them and they have all agreed that they will never give up on a child.

## Summary

This chapter focused on relationships in three important areas of district leadership practice. Highly effective districts work collaboratively to develop learning oriented system connections. Such districts also work with schools to encourage parent and community engagement. In addition, they help Trustees to focus on generative governance in support of educating all students well in the 21st century. Six guidelines for system educational leaders are now summarized below prior to Chapter Five's examination of the Framework's fourth area of collective system leadership practice – System Design.

### Table 4.4 Relationships: Guidelines for System Leaders

1. The terms 'reciprocal', 'collaborative' and highly 'interactive' begin to capture the most productive type of relationship to be developed between system and school-level leaders.

2. Ensuring high levels of interaction among school leaders is important for system improvement. These interactions should include all school leaders and be driven by a shared sense of responsibility among school leaders for system improvement

3. Supporting schools in their parent engagement initiatives will have greater effects on student achievement than system efforts to engage parents.

4. System/Ministry relationships should feature high level of reciprocity in the interests of achieving both shared and system-specific goals in the context of local system circumstances.

5. Help Trustees contribute to their system's progress by encouraging them to focus their work on supporting and monitoring progress being made in implementing the system's strategic multi-year plan and by nurturing the wider community's understanding and support for their system's efforts.

6. Systems adopting a policy governance model should provide ongoing training for all elected board members, system leaders and staff. This approach fosters collaboration and interdependency between professional and elected system leaders.

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# System Design

**5**

## Introduction

Each of the three preceding chapters of the Alberta Framework for School System Success has presented one of the four categories of effective system leadership practice: vision and direction setting, capacity building and relationships. We now shift our attention to the final category: system design. Three research substantiated leadership dimensions are addressed in the chapter.

- Dimension 10: System Alignment
- Dimension 11: System Improvement
- Dimension 12: Leveraging Technology

The three dimensions are described along with insights from the supporting research literature. The ideas presented in relation to each dimension are primarily based on Leithwood and colleagues (2008, 2010, 2011, 2012) and Friesen and Lock (2010). An exemplar of relevant Alberta system leadership practices are shared in a System Design Snapshot and general system guidelines are offered in the chapter summary.

## Dimension 10: System Alignment

Evidence from Leithwood (2008, 2010, 2011) suggests that in order for districts to become high-performing and to sustain that high performance, they must align their infrastructures and organizational practices in support of their student-focused missions. The infrastructure in many school districts, this evidence seems to imply, has evolved in response to the needs of staff rather than in support of improvements in instructional practices and student learning. Thirteen of the 31 studies in Leithwood (2008) described the approaches high-performing districts have taken to better align their organizational structures with their efforts to improve teaching and learning. The four key system leadership strategies that emerged from these studies are itemized in Dimension Ten and noted in Table 5.1 below. Each strategy is then elaborated in one of the four sub-sections that follow.

### Table 5.1 Dimension Ten: System Alignment

1. The district has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align its budget with goals for students.

2. The district has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align its personnel policies and procedures with goals for students.

3. The district has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align its organizational structures with staff's instructional improvement work.

4. Adequate amounts of both the time and money have been allocated for the professional learning of both leaders and teachers.

## 1. Budget Alignment with Student Learning Goals

Eight of the 31 studies included in the Leithwood (2008) described financial and budget alignment as an important feature of most, but not all, high-performing districts. This meant both consolidating and aligning spending in the districts to support instructional improvements (e.g., Florian, 2000; Florian, et al., 2000; Ragland et al., 1999; Skrla et al., 2000).

Based on interview data from district and school administrators in the New York City school system, Iatarola and Fruchter (2004) examined the differences between two high-performing and two low-performing administrative sub-units (each the size of a mid-sized school system) on several dimensions, including their allocation and expenditure of resources. Both types of districts made many of the same resource allocation decisions. As compared with the low-performing sub-units, high-performing sub-units tended to encourage schools to negotiate services provided by community-based organizations directly. Low performing sub-units wanted more control over staff hiring and decisions about the use of their professional development funds. These differences appear to be what a well-functioning district would choose to do as part of its effort to improve its low performance.

Descriptions of both the NYC District #2 and San Diego reforms indicate quite radical shifts in resources aimed at attracting, hiring and further developing the capacities of teachers and Principals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003; Elmore & Burney, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). In San Diego, for example, a large number of teacher aides were eliminated and the money was used to support professional development programs. Many different funding sources were also consolidated to support in-depth forms of professional development that were often carried out within the schools. As McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) described it:

> Districts managed this expensive site-based support by ransacking their budgets to find the necessary funds. San Diego reallocated ESEA Title 1 dollars and various other state funds…[while] Bay area districts …were aggressive in seeking other supports for these site-based coaches. (p. 17)

## 2. Alignment of Personnel Policies with Student Learning Goals

Nine of the 31 studies included in the review associated high-performing district contributions to student learning with significant efforts to align personnel policies and procedures with district improvement efforts. These alignment initiatives addressed virtually all staff in the district, but especially education professionals. The initiatives also touched on procedures across the continuum from initial recruitment, selection, assignment, induction, ongoing evaluation and, as described in an earlier section, professional development. For each set of personnel practices, the goal was to ensure that the most capable people were doing the work, that there were as few constraints as possible on the use of their capacities, and that they had ongoing access to support and opportunities for new learning. Very few high-performing districts in the nine studies did all of these things but most did a significant portion of them.

Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2003) description of reform initiatives in San Diego indicated very significant organizational and administrative changes in order to align the work of all staff in the service of improving instruction. For example, the district overhauled its recruitment, hiring, placement and evaluation processes in order to attract and retain the highest quality teachers and administrators while counselling out those unable to meet district expectations. The administration of the system was entirely redesigned, as well:

- Area superintendents were replaced with instructional leaders who worked closely with Principals to improve instruction;
- Principals were charged with focused evaluation and support of instruction;
- Central office staff were downsized to help create more money for improvement efforts;
- Paraprofessionals were downsized to hire more fully qualified teachers; and
- Aggressive teacher recruitment practices were put in place.

In their study of NYC's District #2, Elmore and Burney (1998) describe how, as district leaders detected a future problem in staffing schools with Principals capable of doing the work now expected by the district, they began a systematic effort to recruit, develop, and place new administrators in schools. This effort began with the design of a new initial preparation program in partnership with a local university with much of it case-based and co-taught by District #2 Principals. A year-long internship was part of this program. New Principals were then mentored by experienced Principals during their initial appointment. Principals identified as mentors received a $10,000 supplement for their work. A similar program was established for teacher mentors.

Snyder's (2001) description of the teacher quality system developed by the New Haven Unified School District is among the most impressive cases of a district turnaround reported in the literature. Thirty-one years ago, this district demonstrated all the usual characteristics of a low performing system serving disadvantaged students – a terrible reputation in its community, a dysfunctional board of education, and very low levels of student achievement, for example. Beginning about 20 years ago, with the appointment of the leadership team current at the time of the study, this 11-school system began its evolution into what was, at the time of Snyder's report, among the most highly regarded districts in California, if not across the U.S. While still a low wealth district, all of its schools had received important state or national awards for their quality and performance, and the demand for entry into those schools far exceeded their capacity. Student success, whether measured by state tests, entry into elite post-secondary institutions, or students' engagement in school, was exemplary.

The remarkable turnaround in this district, according to Snyder (2001), was largely a function of its 'teacher quality system'. From the outset, the district's leadership team focused its efforts on improving the quality of teaching in the district. Eventually, this amounted to a comprehensive system for both training and recruiting new teachers, inducting and mentoring them once in their schools, implementing an evaluation policy aimed at the elimination of poor teachers, fostering the ongoing learning of excellent teachers, creating

school conditions to support teachers' learning, and providing school- and district-wide opportunities for teachers to use their knowledge and skills to help further develop their organizations. These initiatives and opportunities amounted to the creation of 'hybrid' roles for teachers. Once hired, high quality teachers were paid well, and they were given access to superb technology to assist them with their work, along with the support required to use the technology effectively. These conditions resulted in very high levels of teacher retention.

A set of district teaching standards aligned with the state's standards served to create high expectations for teachers' work, and to let teachers know that their work was to ensure that all students were successful. Although New Haven's schools were relatively large, they were personalized by an uncommon level of staff attention to each student, and by the development of structures ('houses') and activities (clubs) within schools thus creating more community-like environments, which greatly increased the chances of developing close ties among teachers, parents and students. A comment from a middle school Principal quoted by Snyder illustrates the disposition staff brought to their work: "Every life here is precious … they are not teenagers, they are confused angels" (p. 72).

While evidence from a qualitative study of four New York City sub-units by Iatarola and Fruchter (2004) suggested few differences in the recruitment, hiring and retention of teachers, these districts did differ significantly with respect to school leaders. The two high-performing sub-units were more likely than their low performing counterparts to hire from a pool of school leadership candidates within the sub-unit. The high-performing units also actively recruited and developed potential leaders from among their own teachers, worked closely with local colleges to develop leadership development programs, and had better developed local leadership development activities.

The four high-performing districts in Skrla et al.'s (2000) study had a prior history of making personnel appointments, especially Principal appointments, that had been influenced by political pressure and community popularity. That approach changed as they began their improvement efforts.

Appointments were made on the basis of people's capacity to improve student performance. These districts tied "performance evaluations and salary increases for Principals and central office staff to the performance of students in the schools they served. Several districts offered bonuses that were available to teachers and other campus staff based on the performance ratings of the campuses where they worked" (p. 28).

Florian's (2000) study of four districts able to sustain their reform efforts over significant periods of time found that they supported their reforms by "creating new positions and restructuring responsibilities of existing positions, establishing new committees, modifying hiring practices" (p. 18); overall, this meant changing hiring policies designed to support the reform effort. Most of these districts evaluated teachers using professional standards associated with standards-based reform. In a second study of high-performing districts, Florian et al. (2000)found that these districts built their instructional capacities, in significant measure, through hiring highly qualified staff who were knowledgeable about the district's reform efforts.

The personnel policies and practices described in each of these studies seem likely to foster both teacher and administrator retention, a factor which some evidence suggests, also contributes to a district's performance. For example, in the New Haven case reported by Snyder (2001), the senior leadership team had been in place over the 20 year period that New Haven's teacher quality system had been evolving. Teacher turnover also was quite low by state standards. Similarly, Iatarola and Fruchter (2004) found that, as compared with low performing New York sub-units, high-performing sub-units "were the beneficiaries of many years of stable school board and superintendent leadership" (p. 508).

Although such evidence about the positive effects of long tenure is consistent with the wider body of research on succession effects, there is some disconfirming evidence in the Skrla et al. (2000) study. While superintendents in several of the high-performing districts in this study were long serving, reform effort in others had been successfully maintained over several senior leadership successions, perhaps due to the belief, shared widely across the districts, in the importance of the district's mission.

Two studies included as part of the review offered insights about quite specific personnel issues and their effects on district performance. First, Goodman and Young (2006) examined the effects on district performance of allocating extracurricular support to the hiring of psychologists as compared with school counsellors. They noted that the type and amount of such support provided by districts is highly variable. Results of their study indicated that the number of psychologists employed by a district "demonstrated a significant and decisive impact on achievement" (p. 3). The authors explain that, as compared with counsellors, psychologists are more interventionist-oriented and more assessment-driven.

The second more narrowly focused study was an evaluation of the implementation and impact on students of two programs encompassed by California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program and the Achieving/ Improving Schools Program) (O'Day & Bitter (2003). One of the important implications of this evaluation was that districts should target underperforming schools and classes for the placement of their most effective administrators and teachers.

## 3. Organizational Alignment with Student Learning Goals

Eight of the thirty-one studies in Leithwood (2008) explicitly mentioned features of the districts' organizational structures, or changes to such structures, as explanations for high performance. These changes included greater decentralization, increases in instructional time, and realignment of structures to support instruction.

Four studies associated improved student achievement with increased decentralization or site-based decision making. For example, 11 of the 15 high-performing districts in Florian's (2001) study implemented site-based decision making teams responsible for such functions as staff development, action research, data-driven decision making, and team facilitation. The four Texas districts included in the Skrla et al. studies (Koschoreck, 2001; Skrla et al., 2000; 2001) had also moved toward greater site-based decision making. The single district selected from the four, for more detailed analysis by

Koschoreck (2001) also used both horizontal and vertical teams for decision making. Cawelti's (2001) six high-performing districts had moved toward more school-based management, including responsibilities for budgeting. These districts linked individuals to results, and created teams to monitor student performance data and to plan for improvements. Each Principal in these districts was held accountable for his or her school's student achievement results.

Two studies described changes in district structures designed to make more time available for instruction over the school year. Conducted in Wisconsin, Sims' (2008) study examined the effects on student achievement of low scoring districts advancing the school start dates in order to increase instructional time for students. This change was associated with small increases in math scores for Grade 4 students, but not average reading or language scores; extra instructional time also may have increased Grade 3 reading scores for high-performing students. Elmore and Burney's (1998) evidence from New York City's District #2 pointed to the creation of an extended day and extended year instructional program to help improve the achievement especially for students scoring in the District's lowest achievement quartile.

Evidence from studies of both NYC's District #2 and San Diego indicates that these districts made significant structural changes in order to better align the organization with the districts' laser-like focus on instructional improvement. In District #2, for example, many middle management roles in schools and in the central office were eliminated to create the money needed for the extensive professional development efforts of the district (Elmore & Burney, 1998). San Diego's alignment efforts involved, for example, replacing area superintendents with instructional leaders who worked with teams of Principals, creating three central office divisions – the Institute for Learning, Administrative and Operational Support, and the Center for Collaborative Activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003).

## 4. Allocated Resources for Leader and Teacher Professional Learning

 High-performing districts, the evidence suggests, do not just claim to award the professional development of staff a central priority, they reflect this priority in the time and resources they devote to professional development (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The district budget, for example, has a line item designated professional development (Pritchard & Marshall, 2002).

A longitudinal study by Stringfield and his colleagues (2005) provides exceptionally compelling evidence about the importance of districts allocating a high priority to professional development. This was a longitudinal study (1992-2003) of achievement trajectories in the Baltimore City Public School system, examining the trajectories through three phases of accountability introduced by state or federal governments.

The achievement trajectories showed small changes in response to accountability policies which introduced high stakes testing, but provided few or no new resources, or added little to the district's human capital. However, more comprehensive approaches to accountability, which included not only high stakes testing but also infused new resources and promoted increases in the capacities of teachers and administrators, were associated with significant gains in the achievement of students, a very high proportion of whom were disadvantaged. One of the central implications of the study, according to the authors, is that the future success of the district will depend on "the multifaceted professional development of current staff and the hiring of increasingly qualified administrators and teachers" (Stringfield et al., p. 68). At least three other studies among the 31 included in this review speak to the general importance of establishing professional development as a district priority.

The four improving districts in Maguire's (2003) study demonstrated significant efforts and devoted significant resources to classroom-embedded teacher development programs. They had "successful implementation of a curriculum-based, collaboratively developed and instructionally-embedded model of staff development" (p. 10).

The four high-performing districts in Skrla et al.'s (2000) research devoted considerable effort and resources to helping teachers develop the capacities they needed to be successful with all students. Similar help was given to school administrators so that they could help support their teachers. Superintendents' meetings with Principals were refocused on instructional issues and became professional development opportunities for Principals.

The six high-performing districts in Cawelti's (2001) study gave a high priority to staff development of both teachers and administrators. The goal was to ensure that teachers "routinely are able to assess skills before introducing new material, differentiate instruction for students at different levels, providing both enrichment and tutorial help, and reinforce learning skills throughout the year to ensure retention" (p. 3).

## Dimension 11: System Improvement

In addition to focusing ongoing system efforts to continuously align organizational structures and processes with teaching and learning goals, it is also important to foster a culture of continuous improvement throughout the school system. Following a short summary of recent research on system improvement, the five key strategies listed in Table 5.2 and addressed in four sub-sections: Coherent, Sustained Attention to a Small Number of Goals; Limit Initiatives and Build the Internal Capacities of Schools; Shared Goals, Clear Frameworks and Explicit Practices; and Integrate New Initiatives into Existing Routines and Practices.

### Table 5.2 Dimension Eleven: System Improvement

1. The system's approach to improvement is coherent. A small number of key improvement goals are consistently pursued over sustained periods of time in manageable steps.

2. Schools are not overloaded with excessive numbers of initiatives.

3. Considerable effort is made to build the capacities needed by school staffs for successful school improvement.

4. Improvement efforts in schools are guided by explicit and well-tested frameworks, policies and practices, as well as widely shared goals that permit local adaptation. All stakeholders have clearly defined roles to play in this approach to school improvement.

5. The district integrates new initiatives into existing routines and practices. Established structures and procedures are maintained and built on. Care is taken to ensure continuity and extension of core values.

Stephen Anderson and Karen Seashore Louis conclude their "The 'District Difference'" chapter in Leithwood and Louis (2012) *Linking Leadership to Student Learning* with the following five implications for district policy and practice:

- District leaders need to establish clear expectations across multiple dimensions of improvement activity as the bases for increasing coherence, coordination, and synergy in the effectiveness of district improvement efforts over time.
- District leaders should combine a common core of support for efforts to implement district expectations with differentiated support aligned to the needs of individual schools.
- District leaders should appreciate that effective school-leadership practices can be acquired through intentional leadership-development efforts that include both formal professional development activities and collegial work.
- Districts should strive for continuity in district leadership. Such continuity is integral to the development and implementation of a coherent and effective support system for improving and sustaining the quality of student and school performance.
- District leaders should take steps to monitor and sustain high-level student performance wherever it is found, and to set ambitious goals for student learning that go beyond proficiency levels on standardized tests. Focusing improvement efforts solely on low-performing schools and students is not a productive strategy for continual improvement in a district. (p. 202)

## 1. Focusing on a Small Number of Goals

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins (2001) illustrates the importance of focusing in moving organizations from 'good to great' with a metaphor of the hedgehog and fox:

> Foxes pursue many ends at the same time and see the world in all its complexity. They are scattered or diffused, moving on many levels. Hedgehogs, on the other hand, simplify a complex world

into a single organizing idea, a basic principle or concept that unifies and guides everything (p. 91).

Maguire's (2003) findings also support the importance of focusing on a limited number of goals to school district success:

In the districts where the jurisdictions priorities were well known throughout the organization, it was evident that the messages from the board and superintendent were focused on student achievement and growth as the highest priority and were communicated persistently in the jurisdictions literature throughout the planning and reporting cycle and in the public comments of officials and Trustees at both community and school events and meetings (p.122).

The staging of improvement efforts is usually designed to reduce the complexity of the improvement task while ensuring that, in the long run, improvement is extended to the entire district. Some high-performing districts approached the staging task by "creating a set schedule with defined consequences" (Snipes et al., 2002, p. xviii). These districts began with their elementary schools before moving on to their secondary schools, and provided intensive instruction in reading and math to their students even if it meant reducing attention to other parts of the curriculum. Many studies reported that high-performing districts began their improvement efforts by focusing on underperforming students first.

Among the most complex approaches to staging reported in the Leithwood (2008) review were to be found in NYC's District #2. All of the district's improvement efforts were focused initially on improving literacy, and then moved at a second stage to add improvements in math instruction. The strategy began with a focus on instructional improvement, and then added a focus on standards of student performance in order to better meet the needs of underperforming students. Among the key elements of District 2's approach to improvement were:

- Maintaining and building on established structures and procedures rather than beginning new procedures every time a new need was

identified. District 2 stresses "continuity and extension of core values and existing institutional structures… into new problems." (Snipes et al., p. 33);

- Continually raising the bar for student achievement on the assumption that "all levels of performance can be improved continuously" (Snipes et al., p. 33-34);
- Shortening the improvement cycle: this means let the improvement cycle be driven by the problem not the school calendar;
- Creating open and public debate about new initiatives; and
- Making the resources follow the problems.

Fink and Resnick's (1999) account of the professional development provided by District #2 to its Principals also sheds light on another dimension of the district's staging efforts. This professional development included coaching by senior district leaders on the development of school goals and plans for improving instruction. The authors describe this as a process of negotiation in which Principals "develop their goals in multiple iterations, conferring with the Deputy [superintendent] herself, as well as their mentor Principals and other peers in the process" (p. 18). This work continues until an acceptable plan for the improvement of instruction is arrived at and funded.

## 2. Limit Initiatives and Build the Internal Capacities Of Schools

Fullan (2001) uses the concept of 'coherence making' to emphasize the importance of focus. In his view, "the main problem is not the absence of innovations but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects" (p. 109).

O'Day and Bitter's (2003) evaluation helps to justify attention to internal capacity development as a key part of district approaches to school improvement. This was an evaluation of the implementation of and impact on students of two programs associated with California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 (the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program and the Achieving/Improving Schools Program). One of the important implications from the evaluation was that school improvement

efforts and support from external agents should adopt, as a goal, helping schools develop internal capacity and a coherent instructional program. Improvement efforts should aim, as well, to develop professional communities within schools that are focused on improving student learning, a strategy for sustaining improvements over the long term.

School-level capacity development can take many forms. For example, the four improving districts in Maguire's (2003) study awarded considerable value to action research as a strategy for school improvement, a strategy that complements district programmatic efforts to improve instruction and increase assessment literacy by expanding local capacity for both determining improvement needs and monitoring their progress.

### 3. Shared Goals, Clear Frameworks and Explicit Practices

The four districts in the Skrla studies of high-performing Texas districts (Skrla et al., 2000; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001) undertook many different actions to improve the achievement of low SES and minority children. But the authors argue that the success of these actions depended, as well, on the widely-held view in the district that improvement efforts were ethically driven. That is, people truly believed that not to do whatever it took to accomplish equitable outcomes for all children would be ethically wrong. This ethical imperative infused their actions with significant energy and urgency.

Emerging from this view of improvement as an ethical matter, the Skrla team reported that a key part of the improvement strategy used by the exemplary districts was 'proactive redundancy'. This meant that the districts introduced multiple ways to ensure student achievement. So, for example, area superintendents in one district:

> expected Principals to use data to help teachers identify students who had not yet mastered objectives and refine teaching practices accordingly. At the same time, however, the curriculum director supervised a team of instructional specialists who reviewed the same data. When teachers ....were not achieving expected results with all of their students, the instructional specialists were

assigned to work with the teachers (along with the Principal) to help teachers improve student performance. (Koschoreck, 2001, p. 31)

One of the important findings reported by O'Day and Bitter (2003) was that districts significantly influence the quality of instruction and levels of achievement in low performing schools. This influence was attributed to the instructionally related policies of the district for all underperforming schools. The authors concluded with four implications for districts interacting with state accountability initiatives:

- Districts should give priority to helping schools develop internal capacity and a coherent instructional program;
- School improvement efforts and support from external agents should adopt this as a goal;
- Improvement efforts should aim to develop professional communities within schools focused on improving student learning; and
- Districts should target underperforming schools and classes for the placement of their most effective administrators and teachers.

Leithwood (2008) proposes the following in support of a 'less is more' improvement approach:

- Improvement efforts begin small, in a very targeted manner, in one area of the curriculum, for instance
- Resources are deliberately unequally distributed to better address challenging schools and classes
- initiatives are consistent with local needs and priorities
- Eventually spread to all schools
- Focus sustained over a number of years.

Leithwood (2008) further suggests both Strategic and Organic approaches to school improvement are important. Strategic approaches feature specific goals, relatively short-term and specific timelines, pre-planned or designed interventions, assigned responsibilities, explicitly monitored progress and budgeted costs. Generally, strategic improvement efforts are characterized by relative certainty about goals and effectiveness of interventions and significant degrees of managerial control.

Organic approaches, on the other hand, feature more general goals, longer time frames, flexible and emerging interventions and build on other initiatives. Costs are mostly covered by existing funds. Such approaches are often associated with a relatively weak organizational 'infrastructure', significant degrees of uncertainty about most important goals for attention and the best strategies for accomplishing them. Managerial control is not viewed as so important in these system leadership settings.

## 4. Integrate New Initiatives into Existing Routines and Practices

Florian's (2000) study of districts able to sustain their reform efforts after a decade points to the importance of districts integrating new initiatives into existing routines and practices. This integrative approach was also characteristic of the improvement efforts in NYC's District #2. Its aim was to maintain and build on established structures and procedures rather than creating a new procedure every time a new initiative was begun. This district stressed "continuity and extension of core values and existing institutional structures… into new problems" (p. 33).

Follow-up efforts in San Diego were in many respects very similar to District 2 – a tight focus on the improvement of instruction, heavy investment in hiring, developing teacher and administrator expertise, and complete alignment of policies and resources in service of the instructional improvement mission. But these efforts were not evolutionary and it seems unlikely that educators at the school level would have viewed them as integrative, either. This is because, while District 2 took many years to accomplish its goals, San Diego was attempting to duplicate those results in a very compressed time frame (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003; Hightower, 2002). Evidence from the first four years of this effort neither confirmed nor disconfirmed the success of this speeded-up approach.

## Dimension 12: Leveraging Technology

Like the other eleven components of the Framework, the Twelfth Dimension draws upon the best available research evidence ('public knowledge') in combination with the 'practitioner knowledge' of Alberta educational leaders and partner stakeholders to generate 'new knowledge' – knowledge created together through collaborative work and inquiry toward the creation of school jurisdictions as knowledge-building organizations (NCSL, 2006). Based to a large extent on the CASS commissioned study: *Characteristics of High-performing Jurisdictions in the Application of 21st Century Learning Technologies* (Friesen & Lock, 2010), this Dimension is comprised of three system leadership strategies. These are outlined in table 5.2 below.

### Table 5.2 Dimension Twelve: Leveraging Technology

1. School and system leaders focus on the instructional core and the ways in which changes in emerging technologies impact, change, threaten, enrich or enhance the instructional core.

2. The district provides proactive leadership and support for the implementation of technology within a strong vision for learning.

3. Senior leaders employ IT governance approaches to align the system's strategic IT direction with the district's goals, to manage IT risks and to ensure that resources are used appropriately responsibly.

### 1. School Systems as Learning Focused Knowledge-Building Organizations

Creating schools and school districts for today requires educators who are attuned to the demands of a knowledge society (UNESCO, 2005b). The research is clear that attending to the instructional core is essential but needs to be contextually situated within the knowledge building organization. Mulford (2007) contends that "changing the organization, and leading schools and school systems, so they become communities of professional learners is not for the faint of heart".

There are many challenges in creating knowledge-building organizations. Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000) challenge us to create 21st century classrooms that are knowledge-centred, assessment-centred and learning-centred. They argue that digital technologies are resources that support these activities within community-centred collaborative learning environments. Peck, Cuban and Kirkpatrick (2002) posit that returns on IT investment are affected by a host of factors that have nothing to do with the technology itself – such things as subject compartmentalization and lack of comfort with working in teams. Structures, practices and processes designed to educate students for an industrial society are major impediments. What remains clear is that while a significant amount of resources, in terms of hardware, software, networking, personnel and professional learning, have gone into the effective use of teaching and learning with technology over the past fifteen years, teachers and administrators, schools and districts, are still at the beginning stages of creating truly 21st century classrooms.

To point the way forward, we can learn from the seven top performing school jurisdiction initiatives identified in the research literature by Friesen and Lock (2010). To be included as one of the seven, the study needed to provide evidence of the application of learning technologies in service of:

1.  building 21st century competencies in the ways identified by Dede (2007b) by all adults and students alike, across the school district and

2.  creating innovation and creativity through collaborative knowledge building activity as identified by the learning sciences (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Gilbert, 2005; Hargreaves, Jardine, Friesen & Clifford, 2006; Papert, 2004; Sawyer, 2008; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003; UNESCO, 2005b; Wagner, 2004).

Research from the seven initiatives reported by Friesen and Lock (2010) informs our understanding of school systems as knowledge-building organizations focused on the instructional core. A complex systems-based approach was evident in the seven initiatives. Leaders in these districts understood that to create change of the magnitude they were envisioning required

•   paying attention to what was emerging and evolving which necessitated collecting evidence along the way and making decisions informed by both

*The Alberta Framework*

research and evidence.

- creating structures and processes that were adaptable.
- understanding at the deepest level that a knowledge-building organization is created through its connections and relationships, not its flow chart. This led to a mindset of inquiry, not certitude.
- setting in motion short term processes towards the vision, collecting relevant and timely evidence at every step throughout the project, which they then used to monitor progress and create the next steps towards the vision, fully responsive to what was emerging.

Leaders in the seven systems (Friesen & Lock, 2010) utilized a number of specific strategies to move their organizations forward. They collaboratively created a shared vision. There was proactive leadership and support for the implementation of technology within a strong vision for learning. Districts, schools and states that experienced the greatest gains had clearly articulated a vision of learning from the learning sciences. In each case they ensured that those involved in the iniative

- had access to current networked digital technologies, software and telecommunications.
- were skilled in the use of technology for learning.
- had consistent access to professional development to support technology use in teaching and learning.
- were provided with technical assistance for maintaining and using the technology.
- were knowledgeable in their subject matter and current in the content standards and teaching methodologies in their discipline(s).

Leaders in these seven systems

- ensured that teaching in all settings encompassed student-centred approaches to learning.
- ensured there was continuous assessment of the effectiveness of technology for learning by creating a collaborative community involving researchers.
- garnered and maintained community support throughout the initiative.
- ensured policies were in place to sustain and strengthen the initiative.

## 2. Implementing New Technologies within a Strong Focus on Learning

In her study of technology and education in Alberta, Brooks (2010) invites previously disengaged leaders to initiate dialogue and action to ensure the potential of technology to support student learning does not go unrealized. These significant changes in learning and teaching call for transformational approaches to educational leadership. Transformational approaches "emphasize emotions and values, and share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development" (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2009, p. 38). "Technical solutions won't transform education, people will. The transformation is about discernment, professional responsibility and trust" (Brooks, 2010).

The research strongly suggests that district and school leaders attend closely to matters related to the instructional core and the ways in which technology impacts teaching and learning. The practice of leaders requires the ability to form strong leading and learning relationships through the work of building strong learning organizations – knowledge society organizations (Elmore, 2006; Harris, 2008; Stoll, 2009). For district leaders this means guiding and coaching school leaders and teachers to build stronger, and different, practices. Throughout an organization, attention needs to be paid to research from the learning sciences regarding 21st century learning environments (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Sawyer, 2008; Scardamalia, et.al., 2010).

Friesen and Lock (2010) found that teachers in the seven school systems that were consciously transforming into knowledge building organizations conceived of teaching as design. Teachers as designers in this study

- developed strong authentic discipline-based inquiry work for students.
- scaffolded student work with robust instructional practices that conformed to the learners and assessment practices that assisted and aided each child to improve, grow and thrive.
- called upon networked digital technologies to create knowledge-building classrooms.

- created strong relationships with their students and other teachers and created processes so that students built strong relationships with each other and with experts in the field as they learned together.
- worked with peers to critically reflect on their practice and work on improving their practice in the company of their peers.

Hollingsworth's (2008) study of three leading Alberta school systems found that each superintendent placed a high value on student learning and that this value permeated the jurisdiction's culture. In addition, leadership at the district IT level consistently focussed on the importance of student learning. In turn, the system IT leader's focus on student learning influenced the approach of technical staff members. The study further highlighted the importance of collaboration and "articulating the urgency for propelling student learning forward through the wise application of learning technology" as broader leadership approaches that accelerated technology infusion.

## 3.  IT Governance

Building the technology infrastructure is not a one-time financial investment or event. Rather, it is the ability to grow the infrastructure in fiscally and educationally responsible ways that support the teaching and learning and administrative demands of a knowledge organization. While networked digital technologies are a necessary part of 21st century learning, they, in and of themselves, do not necessarily guarantee the kind of learning advocated by the learning sciences (Friesen & Lock, 2010). Hollingsworth (2008) determined that financial outlays are comparatively reasonable, but not excessive in high-performing school districts and that fiscally adept IT leadership is an important component.

IT governance is a set of responsibilities and practices exercised by senior jurisdiction leaders with the goals of
- providing and aligning the strategic IT direction with the jurisdictions objectives,

- ensuring that IT goals are achieved,
- ascertaining that risks are managed appropriately; and
- verifying that the jurisdiction's resources are used responsibly.

It is important for district leaders to attend to emerging technologies as they consider ways in which they lead and support their organizations to become 21st century knowledge-intensive organizations. In the highest form of IT governance, IT and education are inextricably intertwined, education relies on IT and IT has little value if it is not supporting the organizational strategy. There is only a single strategy and it incorporates both IT and education.

Findings from Alberta based research into leadership in three high-performing jurisdictions support these IT governance fundamentals (Hollingsworth, 2008). In the three cases, IT leaders and superintendents see technology as a collaborative tool to further district goals. Moreover, in each case, the superintendent's vision and the district IT leader's vision are articulated as part of the larger district vision.

Senior school system leaders need to focus on the instructional core and the ways in which changes in emerging technologies impact, change, threaten, enrich or enhance the instructional core (Friesen & Lock, 2010, p. 16). To move onto this new 21st century learning landscape requires a shift in thinking and practice and the ways it is enabled, supported, enriched and deepened by technology and the infrastructure. Becta (2009a) indicates that it is not sustainable to use a blocking and banning approach designed to limit exposure to risk. Rather, informed senior leaders "focus on a model of empowerment; equipping learners with the skills and knowledge they need to use technology safely and responsibly and managing the risks, whenever and wherever they go online; and to promote safe and responsible behaviours in using technology" (Becta, 2009a, p. 2).

## A System Design Snapshot: System Improvement In St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division #38

For the past several years St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Schools (STAR) have been on a journey of continuous school improvement (CSI) focused on student achievement. This small division touches both rural and urban realities in the communities of Beaumont, Drayton Valley, Lacombe, Leduc, Ponoka and Wetaskiwin. They are proud of their results regarding student achievement and engagement expressed below in their Accountability Pillar Summary Achievement Results and Schollie Student Satisfaction Survey Results:

| Summary of Achievement Results: | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PAT: Acceptable – | 76.8 | 76.0 | 78.8 | 79.2 | 84.1 |
| PAT: Excellence – | 16.4 | 17.8 | 17.5 | 17.6 | 19.7 |
| Diploma: Acceptable – | 76.0 | 76.9 | 79.8 | 84.0 | 83.0 |
| Diploma: Excellence – | 16.2 | 19.7 | 16.0 | 16.3 | 20.5 |

| Student Satisfaction Results: | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variety of approaches to help me learn – | 77% | 80% | 81% | 84% | 87% |
| Many different learning activities – | 79% | 81% | 79% | 84% | 84% |
| Activities are interesting and meaningful – | 75% | 78% | 77% | 79% | 80% |
| Technology at school helps me learn – | 75% | 80% | 85% | 88% | 91% |

In addition to these measurable improvements over time, division-wide relationships have also been nurtured by encouraging a sense of community focused on improved student achievement and pride in the division.

Realizing that the most important role of division leaders is to work with the purposeful intention of creating schools where all students succeed,

where teachers are professionally challenged, where administrators are instructional leaders and where parents are supportive – the challenge has been to build a culture of intention by increasing leadership capacity. This was begun by developing a Leadership Capacity-Building Administrative Procedure (AP) which directed a staff educational subsidy program to support life-long learning and graduate study. As well, administrative meetings and retreats focused on instructional leadership, exemplary teaching and high yield learning strategies based on the research of Lambert, Garver, Antonetti, Marzano, Schlechty, Fullan, Hully and Tate. This leadership capacity initiative also encouraged site and division-wide initiation of Professional Learning Communities, Curriculum Implementation Teams, AISI Teams, Special Education Teams, Technology Real-time Learning Projects, Classroom Walkthroughs, Class websites, Synrevoice parent callout systems and a web-based Home Logic parent reporting system.

Specific activities that have been implemented to support the division's expectations are division-wide collaborative grade or subject specific lesson planning, common exam development, exam banks, centralized Special Education program delivery, Reading Recovery, Precision Reading, Benchmark Assessments, division and ERLC curriculum implementation sessions. Administrators have also adapted a student learning focused professional development component in their staff meetings.

STAR Catholic has an expectation of increased teacher supervision in relation to the Teacher Quality Standard and reflective practice strategies by division and school administrators to assure accountability for student learning and quality teaching. These improvement efforts are monitored through spring and fall CSI meetings where school administrators share their successes and challenges with senior administrators.

Through building leadership capacity and instructional leadership, as well as defining a clear and focused mission with a climate of high expectations and strong relationships, STAR Catholic is finding its voice and inspiring others to find theirs.

## Summary

Chapter Five addressed the important 21st century leadership practice of system design, with attention to system alignment, system learning and leveraging technology. The four system design guidelines for leaders are now summarized to complete our treatment of the four core areas of system leadership practice. Chapter Six addresses the significant challenge of sustaining system leadership.

### Table 5.4 System Design: Guidelines for System Leaders

1. Successful senior leaders understand that moving onto a 21st century learning, knowledge-building landscape requires a shift in thinking and practice that are enabled, supported, enriched and deepened by digital technology and the infrastructure.

2. School and senior leaders focus on equipping learners with the skills and knowledge they need to use technology safely and responsibly and managing the risks, whenever and wherever they go online; and to promote safe and responsible behaviours in using technology.

3. Knowledge-building organizations ensure that teachers are skilled in the use of technology for learning and that they have consistent access to professional development to support technology use in teaching and learning.

4. Knowledge-building organizations continuously assess the effectiveness of technology for learning by creating a collaborative community involving researchers.

Leithwood, 2011

# Sustaining System Leadership

6

## Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate one of the important ways in which the Alberta Framework for School System Success is being used to build the system leadership capacity in the province. We focus on the New Superintendent Induction Program (NSIP) developed in the summer of 2009 under the leadership of CASS Executive Director, Kath Rhyason. The superintendents' organization is employing design-based participatory research to examine and improve the nuanced and differentiated supports that have been provided to new superintendents in 26 school districts over the past four years.

Following a brief overview of the CASS approach to design-based research through the 2009–2012 period, we summarize research informed leadership induction. Next, the origins and adoption of the NSIP are chronicled and assessment findings are conveyed. The implementation phase is then analyzed in greater detail. Key events and features of each of the three

implementation years are conveyed. New and mentor superintendent reflections are shared. Findings and program adaptations are outlined. We conclude the chapter with a summary of six meaningful outcomes and major lessons learned.

## Research Informed Leadership Induction

Designed-based research studies an innovation as it is being implemented, refined and adjusted based on the interpretation of emergent data (Dai, 2012). Six sources of evidence have been gathered over a three year period to shape and adapt the New Superintendent Induction Program:

1.  online participant surveys in 2010,
2.  semi-structured interviews in 2010 and 2011;
3.  written participant reflections from 2010, 2011 and 2012;
4.  focus group interviews during 2010 and 2011
5.  document analysis; and
6.  three years of participant observation by all three investigators.

Evidence from these sources along with that generated from periodic attention to external leadership induction research was analyzed and applied with three simple questions in mind:

1.  What is working well in the program?
2.  What could be done more effectively?
3.  In what ways can the program be refined through ongoing assessment?

The design of this induction program for new superintendents was informed by the extensive body of research in the areas of leadership induction and development (Couvier, Brandon, & Prasow, 2006; Elmore & Burney, 2000; Hargreaves, & Fink, 2006; Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Lipton & Wellman, 2003). This research suggests a five component program:

1.  standards based design,
2.  orientation,
3.  trained mentorship,
4.  like-group support and
5.  large-group support.

**Table 6.1: Research Designed Leadership Induction**

Standards Based Design

Orientation

Trained Mentorship

Like Group Support

Large Group Support

## Origins and Adoption of the Leadership Induction Program

Though the CASS New Superintendent Program did not get underway until the fall of 2009, the seeds of its origin were sewn during the process culminating in the *Alberta Commission on Learning Report* (ACOL) in 2003. Recommendation 79 pointed to the need to

> Develop a comprehensive, targeted program for preparing superintendents and providing ongoing professional development to support them in their role as CEO's of school jurisdictions. (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003)

In preparation for implementing the ACOL recommendation, CASS commissioned two research papers (Gunderson, 2004; Lorenz, 2005), which laid the foundations upon which the current program has been established. It was not until the spring of 2009 that the Alberta superintendents' organization was in a position to act upon the ideas outlined in the two papers. As one condition of government funding for the second cycle of the College's leadership capacity building initiative, Moving and Improving, the development of an induction program for new superintendents was identified as a deliverable. By mid September of the same year, 10 novice superintendents and their mentors were convening the inaugural CASS induction cohort learning session over dinner in an Edmonton hotel.

The program that emerged through the efforts of the CASS Executive Director (ED), the newly hired Director of Leadership Capacity Building

(DLCB) and others on the organization's executive relied on three main sources for their design blueprint. In addition to the Lorenz and Gunderson papers, a number of recent induction studies were consulted (Couvier, Brandon, & Prasow, 2006; Elmore & Burney, 2000; Hargreaves, & Fink, 2006; Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Lipton & Wellman, 2003) and lessons learned from district level induction programs for teachers and school leaders were applied. Though timelines were too short for mentorship training, it was determined that the expertise, sophistication and experience of the superintendents selected to serve as NSIP mentors provided a sound rationale to move forward.

Over the following two years, all five of the elements of research informed leadership induction programming were adopted and then implemented. Trained colleague mentors now support novices. Cohort learning is based in part on the practice standard to which superintendents are accountable. The chief additional curriculum source is the Framework for School System Success, a leading edge collection of the best available leadership research in action. An extensive orientation program based on this curriculum is provided for participant engagement over two and a half days each fall. Moreover, the members of CASS, as a professional learning organization, continue to serve as a supportive community of practice. The organization is highly welcoming to new members.

## Implementation of the Leadership Induction Program

The 2011–2012 iteration of the CASS New Superintendent Induction Program has benefited from the application of research derived program learning during the first two years. This section begins with a review of the basic features of the current NSIP. We then highlight the key program elements in each year and share mentor and new superintendent reflections on their induction experiences.

The present incarnation of the NSIP links each new superintendent with an experienced colleague who has been trained as a mentor. In addition

to these one-to-one connections, novices and mentors are provided with opportunities to actively engage in four half day cohort sessions over the year. Some cohort sessions are scheduled with other superintendent association events and all sessions are made available to cohort participants across the province through video conferencing. Induction program content is based on the four major themes blended from key ideas from CASS Practice Standard and the Framework for School System Success. Along with other new central office leaders, beginning superintendents participate in an evening and a day and a half orientation that focuses on these four major themes from the Practice Standard and the Framework. One distinct feature of the cohort and orientation learning is the fact that one or more practicing or recently retired CASS colleagues lead each session. Collaborative design and facilitation by respected colleagues have become hallmarks of the program. Another characteristic of NSIP sessions is the degree to which participants engage in problem solving, dialogue and transparent inquiry into authentic problems of practice. A quite remarkable degree of openness is evident in these sessions.

## Implementation as Learning Year One 2009-2010

The steps taken to get the NSIP up and running in August and September of 2009 reflect all three of the CASS Moving and Improving pillars: leadership, research and, most notably, "a bias for action" (Brandon, 2008). Through informal conversations with new superintendents and prospective mentors during the CASS Zone Summer Conferences all ten mentor-novice pairings were established by the end of the month. The notion of bringing new superintendents and mentors together for four half day cohort sessions was discussed and agreed to in a first evening session that was scheduled to coincide with a special meeting of all members on the following day in the provincial capital.

Two fundamentals of the program emerged in the inaugural session. First, a great deal of care was taken to develop a set of group commitments that emphasized open and confidential sharing of leadership practice. Second, it quickly became clear that cohort sessions could provide valuable forums

for deep learning about important (and previously underexplored) areas of practice with and from all participants (novices as well as mentors).

Three other important program components were developed and implemented during the 2009-2010 year. First, the CASS Summer Academy was planned and delivered in Banff in early July by four of the 10 first year mentors in collaboration with the DLCB. The program focused on the four major themes, Vision and Direction Setting; Capacity Building; Relationships; Managing the Knowledge Organization, blended from CASS Practice Standard and the Framework for School System Success (Morrow & Schmold, 2009). While the location and program content were positively reviewed, the summer timeframe was seen to be problematic. Second, two of the mentors were contracted to work with Lyle Lorenz to develop a mentorship training session for delivery early in year two. Third, the DLCB worked with Lyle Lorenz to develop a CASS Induction Program Handbook to support mentor training and new superintendent orientation.

The overall response to the first year of the program was very positive. Session evaluations, participant reflections, and an informal online survey generated four major insights that we subsequently translated into the program adaptions noted in Table 5 below. Preceding the summary table are the reflections of a 2009-2010 mentor and a 2009-2010 new superintendent followed by a series of shorter anecdotal comments from other 2009-2010 participants.

## A 2009-2010 Mentor Superintendent's Reflections

As an experienced superintendent of more than ten years it was my pleasure to be asked, by CASS, to serve as a mentor for a new superintendent. It was clear that CASS was purposeful in its selection of mentors based upon experience, demographics and potential relationships. In my experience many mentorship programs do not take the time to make clear the expectations of being a mentor, but in this case CASS provided mentor training and demonstrated the alignment of the mentorship program with the goals of the broader, CASS Induction Program.

The outcomes were clearly focused on building relationships, modeling professionalism, providing feedback and 'seeking first to understand' – not providing answers but guiding through reflective conversation. The emphasis on developing the leader within and creating a cohort of support is indicative of the culture within CASS. As a mentor, I was reminded of my early days as superintendent and my struggles – often alone. A purposeful program such as this would have been of great benefit. I also understood the importance of my truly 'being there', a commitment of time and timely responsiveness in helping to develop system leaders just as others had helped me to grow.

The benefits to new superintendents were both in having a formal mentor, but also in being part of a cohort of 'newbies' who could compare their successes and challenges and come to understand the complexities of the position and the need for the broad support provided within CASS. The strengths of this program are many with the greatest challenge, shared by many new superintendents, described as a feeling of lack of preparedness for working with a school board. (Anonymous personal correspondence, March 1, 2012)

A 2009-2010 New Superintendent's Reflections

One of the most challenging aspects of being a beginning superintendent is the need to learn how to be a superintendent at the same time that you are expected to be a superintendent usually within an immediate support environment of one. There are no colleagues in the building (or division) doing a similar job with whom a beginner can share challenges and explore options so the development of craft knowledge is often largely a solitary endeavor. This, coupled with the complex and demanding nature of the job makes for a less than optimum environment for learning, unless there is a some mechanism to allow a new superintendent, deliberately, to be part of something larger than one. Herein lies the power of the mentorship program.

While most new superintendents have informal networks of expertise on which they can draw there are often at least two problems associated with such networks. First, they tend to include few individuals who have had experience as superintendents and, second, as they are informal, there is often a sense of imposing on others who must take time away from doing their own busy work lives to provide assistance. As a result, there is some reluctance to be needy. The The mentorship program, for me, addressed both of these issues. Not only did it provide me with direct access to someone committed to support my development as a superintendent, it connected me to a network of other beginners who were wrestling with similar problems as well as to a larger group of experienced superintendents all of whom were there because they were committed to helping and supporting us as we learned to navigate the world of the superintendency.

Perhaps the one suggestion I would have for improvement would be that the program might have benefitted from a bit more structure around expectations on both sides of the relationship along with some 'must address' topics since, a couple of times, I found that I did not know what I did not know until I needed to know it. That said, the opportunity to interact formally and informally with the mentors was tremendously helpful when addressing both the routine and the not so routine aspects of the first year. (Anonymous personal correspondence, March 16, 2012)

Table 6.2 summarizes the first year findings (what we learned from the first year of implementation in year one) in the left column and the design adaptations made to the program on the basis of our learning in the right column.

**Table 6.2: Implementation as Learning Year One Findings – Year Two Adaptations**

| Through our research we learned that | As we moved forward we |
|---|---|
| • cohort sessions<br>• were open, collaborative and useful.<br>• benefitted mentors and novices.<br>• were strengthened by standard specific, practitioner-led presentations and conversations. | • continued to employ these approaches. |
| • while participants appreciated the program supports, time to participate was an issue. | • continued with the program, but began to use video conferencing more frequently. |
| • additional mentor capacity was needed. | • developed and implemented a mentor training program.<br>• added Level 2 support for those requiring additional assistance. |
| • mentoring relationships were more effective when<br>  – the colleagues had some form of previous professional relationship.<br>  – their system offices were reasonably close to each other. | • strived to provide more opportunities for novices to be involved in selecting their mentors.<br>• tried to ensure district offices were reasonably close to each other. |
| • a more in-depth orientation would be beneficial. | • expanded our one-day fall orientation to a two and a half day standards based summer academy. |

## Implementation as Learning Year Two 2010-2011

Each new superintendent in the 2010-2011 school year was invited to participate in a telephone interview with a contracted research consultant during the summer of 2011. The following three questions were distributed in advance and were addressed in each interview:

1. In what ways did the NSIP help you as a beginning superintendent?
2. What could CASS have done to better support your practice as a beginning superintendent?
3. What other comments would you like to make about your transition into the position of Superintendent of Schools?

Several themes emerged from these conversations. Responses to question one made it clear that each new Superintendent found the program to be very beneficial. Responses further indicated that the cohort meetings were of great value, perhaps the most valuable component of the program. Most respondents found their relationship with their mentor to be of great value. Two respondents spoke to the importance of either selecting their own mentor or ensuring that their mentor was a good fit for them.

Two themes emerged in response to question two. Several respondents spoke to the necessity of gaining more clarity around the learning associated with superintendent – school board relations. The complexities of this area of practice caught many of them by surprise. These respondents did not feel they knew how to function very well in this new aspect of their work at the beginning. More support would have been greatly appreciated. Secondly, the issue of Superintendent contract development was cited by many as an issue. These new superintendents noted that more help in this area would also have been appreciated.

Responses to question three similarly centred on superintendent – school board relations. The politics of the superintendency emerged as a central point of discussion throughout the interviews. Superintendent evaluation practices were flagged as an issue by one respondent as an area worthy of more support from CASS. Two respondents expressed surprise at the intensity of the immediate pressures and the constant political demands of

their new work as the Chief Executive Officer of their school system. Related to this emerging understanding was the realization that the new position kept them more distant from many of the operational leadership activities that had previously served as sources of accomplishment for them.

The overall response to the second year of the program was positive. Session evaluations, participant reflections, and an informal online survey generated further insights that we subsequently translated into the program adaptations noted in Table 6. Two items precede the summary table: the reflections of one 2010-2011 mentor and the reflections of one 2010-2011 new superintendent.

### A 2010-2011 Mentor Superintendent's Reflections

I have found my experiences as a mentor to a new superintendent in each of the past two years extremely fulfilling. When discussing issues/questions with a beginning superintendent, I was provided an opportunity for reflection about practices that I and our District used.

Despite the fact that the superintendents were in their first year, they did possess a wealth of experiences and this enabled me to ask questions of them; therefore the relationship was very much a two-way sharing of information and practices.

I also enjoyed the opportunities for group meetings/conversations with other beginning superintendents and mentors. I have always felt that the best professional learning is conversation with colleagues.

A key point that I would emphasize (which is also emphasized in the program) is to establish regular communication times between mentor and new superintendents. In both years we have set up a time of 7:30 – 8:00 a.m. every second Wednesday to call each other. Whether the conversations are short or longer, this regular check-in ensures that the relationship doesn't get lost in very hectic schedules. (Anonymous personal correspondence, February 22, 2012)

A 2010-2011 New Superintendent's Reflections

Assuming the position of chief superintendent brings a host of new responsibilities and experiences. These include such things as working with an elected Board of Trustees, leading the senior leadership team, setting and protecting the vision for the school jurisdiction, working through Principals to accomplish the goals of the jurisdiction and coming to understand all aspects of the operations of a multi-million dollar enterprise. No matter what other position an individual may have held in a school jurisdiction, there is little that truly prepares you to take on this challenging role.

The CASS superintendent mentorship program provided support as I began my role as a new superintendent. The opportunity to have a 'lifeline' to an experienced superintendent was invaluable. There are situations that arise where everyone looks to the superintendent for guidance or decision-making. It is not always possible for a new superintendent to seek advice on all matters from other senior leaders or school board Trustees. The option of phoning a mentor in the same role to seek advice on various matters certainly made me a stronger and more effective superintendent in my first year.

One important element of the mentorship program is regular ongoing contact. Telephone or skype sessions should be scheduled on a regular basis to simply touch base and establish the relationship. This type of regular contact makes it more comfortable for the protégé to approach the mentor with sensitive issues.

**Table 6.3: Implementation as Learning Year 2 Findings –
Year 3 Adaptations**

| Through our research we learned that | As we move forward we |
|---|---|
| • cohort sessions<br>   – were open, collaborative and useful<br>   – benefitted mentors and novices<br>   – were strengthened by standard specific, practitioner led presentations and conversations.<br>   – should place even greater emphasis on the CEO as instructional leader and school board governance | • continued to employ and refine these approaches.<br>• are placing even greater emphasis on the CEO as instructional leader and governance in both the cohort sessions and in the general CASS sessions for all members. |
| • making time to participate continued to be a challenge. | • began to use video conferencing as the primary approach for most of the cohort sessions. |
| • mentoring relationships were not as successful in a few cases. | • consistently involved novices in selecting their mentors.<br>• began to provide more deliberate ongoing support to the program by regularly 'checking in' with mentors and novices. |
| • members appreciated the 3 day standards based summer academy, but were concerned about the summer timing and Banff location. | • moved to an evening evening, one day and a half fall academy in Edmonton. |

An improvement to the mentorship program would be seeking input from the protégé on potential mentors. Mentors were assigned to protégés in the CASS mentorship program. Since this relationship is intended to be close, personal and supportive, the needs of the protégé need to be considered when selecting a mentor. A more collaborative approach to selecting the mentor would provide the protégé with input and a sense of ownership of the relationship. (Anonymous, personal correspondence, February 14, 2012)

## Implementation as Learning Year Three 2011-2012

The third year of this program saw a change in leadership as the previous DLCB left to take a position at the University of Calgary and the name of the position was changed to Director of Leadership Learning (DLL). The new Director used the findings from Year Two to make adaptations that continued to move the program forward.

The new mentor-novice pairings were established by mid-August allowing each pairing to meet informally to set up regular scheduled times to meet one-to-one throughout the year either by phone or face to face. Regular check-in ensures that the relationship dosen't get lost in the busyness of the superintendency. A schedule of the four cohort sessions for 2011-2012 was developed and distributed to all cohort members.

New superintendents, along with other new central office leaders, participated in the evening and day and a half Academy in late September that was led by practicing and recently retired CASS colleagues. The location and program content was positively reviewed and all participants expressed appreciation of holding this event in the fall rather than the summer.

Agendas for the four cohort sessions were developed in consolidation with the mentors and new superintendents. Agenda topics continued to be structured around the four major themes blended from CASS Practice Standard and the Framework for School System Success. Board governance appeared on each session agenda. All sessions continued to be open and collaborative while allowing confidential sharing of practice and information. The trusting and supportive environment of the cohort sessions allowed new superintendents to bring forward emergent problems and concerns to the session for discussion and problem solving. The professional dialogue around these authentic problems was robust and created a learning opportunity for both mentors and new superintendents.

Those attending the cohort sessions through video conferencing did not appear to be hampered by the technology. All video conference participants remained as engaged in the sessions as those attending face to face. Video

conferencing is used so much more than in the past and participants are much more comfortable interacting through the use of this technology.

As we near the completion of the third year of the program the signs continue to be positive. Session evaluations, participant reflections and participant observations are generating further insights that we are subsequently translating into program adaptations. Below are the reflections of one 2011-2012 mentor and the reflections of one 2011-2012 new superintendent.

### A 2011-2012 Mentor Superintendent's Reflections

Acquiring two esteemed new friends has been the greatest benefit of being a mentor in our Superintendent Induction Program. I find being a mentor is more about listening and learning than it is about giving advice, my protégés are accomplished educators who simply haven't occupied the superintendent chair as long as I have. Each experience and scenario that is discussed causes me to reflect on my own practice and problem solving resulting in me being more effective. I hope that I am providing a parallel experience for my protégé.

I have found that predetermining meeting times in my second mentorship has been more beneficial than periodic or as needed meetings for they provide more continuity and flow to our conversations. Predetermined meetings also afford the opportunity to provide work plan timelines and forecasting of upcoming events and annual milestones. Our beginning conversations were goal focused to respect each other's demanding schedule but as a friendship develops conversations become more informal. It is always imperative to check before getting into a conversation that this is a good time for the protégé as well as being honest if it not a good time for you because your lack of attention and listening will become apparent. (Anonymous personal correspondence, February 12, 2012)

A 2011-2012 New Superintendent's Reflections

As a newcomer to the position of Superintendent it quickly became apparent that a complex and steep learning curve was going to be a critical and daunting element of my first year in this position. School system leadership, while at times similar to being a school-based leader, offered an extremely broad range of duties often happening in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment. The increasingly multifaceted nature of school system educational leadership, political advocacy, public and government expectations, system dynamics, and the establishment of meaningful relationships in a new sphere of influence presented many diverse and unique opportunities and challenges.

Thankfully the CASS induction program was available to assist me in my survival and success as a first year superintendent. One of the first notable advantages of participating in this superintendent induction program was the formalization and articulation of a resource/support group. It was reassuring to know that not only was an assigned mentor available to provide guidance and assistance but all other mentors and mentees of the induction program were simply a phone call away as well. It was encouraging to know that this safety net was in place and that colleagues from around the province were actively invested in providing mentorship to ensure my survival, success and establishment of appropriate work habits and practices to be refined and further developed in the future.

Another important component of this induction program was the opportunity to dialogue, ask questions, and seek guidance in a safe and secure environment. Many delicate and intricate situations were discussed during our various meetings and these conversations could not have occurred if a trusting and supportive environment did not exist. The establishment of this type of climate was integral to the success of this program.

If I could offer one suggestion for the implementation of future induction programs it would be to strive to create a roadmap

or template of items or issues that new superintendents will be confronted with during their first year. Having this type of template will assist in keeping surprises to a minimum, help in the preparation of initiatives or tasks that need to be completed, and allow the new superintendent to be better aware of the diversity of challenges ahead and begin to consult with colleagues how best to address these. (Anonymous personal correspondence, February 14, 2012)

## Implementation as Learning

In each of the first three program years findings from design-based research were thoughtfully utilized to adapt the program to better meet the expressed needs of new superintendents. At the core of the CASS New Superintendent Induction Program is the notion of evidence informed practice through the artful and intentional union of experience, judgement and expertise with the best available research evidence. These approaches tie well to recent research findings that educational change initiatives enhance their chances of success when they conceive of implementation as an ongoing learning and improvement process (Fullan, 2010a, 2010b; Brandon, 2005). Rather than getting everything perfect from the beginning, reform agendas are better served by action-oriented approaches that adapt, adjust and build support as they unfold.

The NSIP is a good example of an initiative with an implementation as learning theory of action. Three years into the program, the evidence indicates that the following six meaningful outcomes have been achieved.

1. The superintendents' association's theory of action – leadership research in action (Brandon, 2008) – is being realized through the application of the CASS Practice Standard and the CASS Framework for School System Success as the curriculum for new superintendents. The Fall Orientation and ongoing cohort learning sessions use material from these research informed documents to deepen understanding of leadership practices that positively influence student learning. Participants learn with and from one another through dialogue, presentations and shared problem solving with respect to authentic issues and meaningful practice related scenarios.

2.  New superintendents appreciate the support provided by more experienced colleagues trained in the mentoring process. At least three factors contribute to success in these relationships: committing to a regular communication schedule, relatively close geographic proximity and mentee participation in the selection of the mentor.

3.  Both mentors and new superintendents report they have benefited from the open and collaborative consideration of important aspects of their practice through the cohort learning sessions. This finding is reflective of a more wide-spread evolution in the visibility and de-privatization of superintendent practice.

4.  New generation Alberta superintendents are building strengths in two important areas: instructional leadership and effective governance.

5.  Induction programming has been adapted to more fully integrate findings from this assessment for learning conducted during each of the first three years of the program.

6.  Twenty-five of the twenty-six superintendents who have entered the program since 2009 continue in their positions and report varying degrees of satisfaction with their new roles. The non-continuing participant returned to his Deputy Superintendent position when the Superintendent returned from a one-year leave as planned.

## Conclusion

The chapter focused one example of the CASS leadership research in action approach to building member capacity in its New Superintendent Induction Program. The importance of this strategy is underlined by the fact that 26 of the 62 Alberta superintendents are new to their positions in the past three years. Moreover, when the number of mentors involved in the program is taken into account, it means that eighty-three percent of the province's superintendents have been given the opportunity to deeply engage in reflection and dialogue leading to the use of research informed district leadership practices in the Alberta Framework for School System Success. We next examine other leadership research in action strategies in our concluding chapter.

# Conclusion

**7**

## Introduction

The Alberta Framework for School System Success was designed to support the collective work of school system leadership teams. As the foregoing chapters in this volume have shown, the Framework is founded on the best available evidence on the district leadership practices that positively impact student learning. In this concluding chapter, we look at the CASS theory of action that is guiding our work with our colleagues to apply aspects of the Framework in a variety of settings across the province. Leadership, research and a bias for action are driving the Alberta approach to building system leadership capacity, enhancing school system success and fostering stronger research-oriented linkages among superintendents and the provincial leadership research community.

# Leadership Research in Action

The CASS theory of action is based on three key elements identified in *Moving and Improving: Building System Leadership Capacity* (Brandon, 2008):

1.  respected educational leadership,
2.  research-informed strategies and
3.  a bias for action.

## Respected Educational Leadership

Element one took three forms. First, CASS established a new Director of Leadership Learning position to provide overall leadership to the initiative. Second, credible and internationally respected researchers have been contracted to consultant to the initiative, including Amanda Datnow, Sharon Friesen, Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves, Ken Leithwood, Ben Levin, Lynn Sharatt and Dennis Shirley. Expectations for their work were noted thus:

> The consultants must have a track record of successful work and research in the areas of leadership capacity building for school improvement. The consultant will suggest networks, readings, resources and research; participate in strategic development through think tanks; facilitate pilot projects and conferences; support needs assessment and conduct evaluations. (Brandon, 2008, p.3)

Third, provincial partners were invited to serve on a leadership panel, which was designed to "provide ongoing advice to the initiative, offer feedback to help monitor progress and recommend course adjustments along the way" (Brandon, 2008, p.3)

## Research Informed Strategies

Element two of the theory of action is research-based collaboration. Strategies were developed and adopted based on

1.  established leadership and system improvement research,
2.  promising leadership practices from Alberta school jurisdictions and

3.   relevant leadership practices from the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) findings.

The three founding elements expressed in the Overview Paper were based on CASS beliefs that school system improvement is most productively viewed as an ongoing process-based collective inquiry, capacity building and a focus on strong learning results for all students (Fullan, 2006; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Elmore, 2004; Burger et. al, 2001). In fact, the name 'Moving and Improving' was selected to underline the CASS support of the Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) position that "genuine accountability brings no surprises. Fundamentally, it is about moving and improving, not about shaming and blaming" (p. 95).

Four important ideas from Fullan (2006) have been emphasized in the initiative:
- Tap into people's dignity and sense of respect.
- Recognize that all successful strategies are socially based and action-oriented – change by doing rather than by elaborate planning.
- Assume that lack of capacity is the initial problem and then work on it continuously.
- Stay the course through continuity of good direction by leveraging leadership. (pp. 44–45)

## A Bias for Action

The bias for action has been a foundational element of our theory of action. This action-oriented approach was justified in two ways. First, it adheres to the 'ready-fire-aim' strategy expressed in the recent literature on educational change (Fullan 2010a, 2010b, 2007, 2006 deriving from Peters & Waterman, 1982). Such 'change by doing' advocates for action based on initial planning which is increasingly refined as an initiative progresses.

CASS action strategies now include
- accessing international, national and provincial leadership expertise to support current and future initiatives that aim to improve student learning through actions at the school system level

- engaging university and education partners in the provision of advice and support
- enhancing school district, university and education partner linkages in the fields of leadership and leadership development
- facilitating dialogue and inquiry on evidence-based leadership practice and system improvement through a variety of face-to-face and online means
- engaging district teams in Framework focussed lateral capacity building cohorts
- supporting beginning superintendents through research informed induction

## Lateral Learning Networks

The CASS collective capacity building program based on the Framework has been underway in various forms since the fall of 2008. Participating system leadership teams come together three to four times over the year to work toward their jurisdiction and team goals through supported application of the Framework. CASS lateral learning networks focus on jurisdiction implementation of core instructional priorities and their links to student engagement and learning. The leading educators consultants noted in the previous section have provided sustained consulting support. Teams learn with and from other Alberta school jurisdictions about strategies to better meet current and future system leadership challenges and to foster the continuing development and application of evidence-informed leadership competencies.

Working with these leading international researcher-consultants, Alberta superintendents are continuing to use the Framework to improve a broad cross section of system results including traditional measures of student achievement along with other indicators that point to what students should be prepared for if they are to have personally satisfying lives, as well as being responsible citizens and productive members of the workforce. In addition, a Network of 21st Century School Systems has been operating since

October of 2010. It has been relying on internal expertise through system-to-system sharing and is offered at no cost to systems through a Leadership for Learning Technology grant from the Ministry of Education. Systems participating in this network are committed to working with each other to deepen their understanding of learning technology leadership aimed at helping students meet the challenges of living, learning and working in today's complex, challenging and connected world.

In addition to these ongoing lateral leadership-learning networks, CASS has also brought together leadership teams in an annual Team Leadership Academy in Banff for the past four years. These lateral learning academies have provided valuable and well received forums for building the collective capacity of leadership teams through a change theory-in-action approach (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009). Participants engage with their own team or system planning challenges and benefit from the inspiration, insights and support of three internationally renowned educators who are well versed in the current Alberta context. The Academy addresses questions such as "How do we do the right things well, not get distracted by the wrong things, involve and include everyone who is affected, keep the momentum and the impact going, and prevent burnout by ensuring the change agenda is manageable and coherent?" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 3).

The notion of team learning stems from the work of Senge (1990) and ties clearly to the tenets of complexity leadership theory. The discipline of team learning starts with 'dialogue', the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine 'thinking together'. Senge contends that team learning is vital because teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organizations. Without a shared language for dealing with complexity, team learning is limited. Learning teams learn how to learn together.

## Collaborating with Provincial Partners

Collaboration with the graduate educational leadership programs of the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge is another important feature. More than 85 Alberta-based research presentations have been provided to inform system leadership practice in four major research symposia jointly sponsored by the universities and CASS since the inaugural Research Symposium on November 13 and 14, 2008 at the University of Calgary. This symposium, the first of its kind in Alberta, attracted approximately 115 participants who came to listen to and discuss 26 research presentations, 24 of which were centred on practices or issues in Alberta schools and school jurisdictions. Symposium participants included school jurisdiction educators, university faculty members and Alberta Education personnel.

At this first symposium Ken Leithwood articulated three goals for collaborative research engagement between the universities and CASS:
1.  to increase collective knowledge about Alberta's current and potential future leadership research initiatives.
2.  to explore the relationship between Alberta's research initiatives and Alberta Framework for School System Success.
3.  to provide an opportunity for participants to think about and discuss how the province's education system could be dramatically improved.

The second Research Symposium was held in partnership with the Alberta Education's School Improvement Branch and featured presentations from a variety of international and Alberta-based scholars and practitioners. Over 300 participants engaged with research ideas related to leadership as well as school and system improvement. Sessions were organized with a roundtable format to optimize discussion and possible follow up opportunities related to each paper presented. During the past two years, the research symposium has utilized this same format and has been very successfully integrated into the CASS Fall Conference.

The CASS – university partnership has entered a new phase with the publication of *Vision in Action: Seven Approaches to School System Success*

(Brandon, Hanna & Rhyason, 2013). The book focuses on seven CASS commissioned case studies of Alberta system leadership practice. The University of Lethbridge team of George Bedard, Carmen Mombourquette and Art Aitken studied leadership approaches in two rural systems as well as in the province's third largest urban district. The University of Alberta's Frank Peters investigated practices of two systems in the Edmonton region. Sharon Friesen and Jennifer Lock focused their inquiry on efforts underway in one rural and one suburban school system in central Alberta focusing on 21st century teaching and learning. Each of the cases provides valuable contributions to the fuller understanding of the impact of system leadership practice on student learning in Alberta.

## Concluding Thoughts

We have done our best in the foregoing pages to present a coherent and manageable approach to evidence informed school system leadership. In the final analysis, a framework such as this is only as useful as the guidance it provides to educators who actually translate key ideas into contextually appropriate actions that enhance teaching and learning. In keeping with our advice to focus on a few rather than many strategies, we suggest that system leaders consider four larger questions as they move forward:

1. Are we resolute and persistent in our overall system focus on teaching and learning?
2. Are we devoting sustained attention to collective capacity building in our system?
3. Are we tapping into the power of positive relationships through effective engagement approaches in our system?
4. Are we attending to matters of system design so that we are most effectively using resources to educate all students well?

*The Alberta Framework*

# Appendix A:
# The Blueprint of the
# Alberta Framework
# for School System Success

This Framework for School System Success describes the qualities of school systems that are exceptionally effective at educating all students well. It is based on systematic reviews of relevant empirical evidence completed for the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) by Dr. Ken Leithwood in 2008 along with selected subsequent studies of district leadership. This outline summary of the second edition of the *Framework* is prepared for the information of CASS members and other education stakeholders in the province.

The Framework includes four categories of district characteristics – vision and direction setting, capacity building, relationships and system design. Each category encompasses three specific dimensions, 12 in total. Guidelines for the work of district leadership teams are provided at the end of each category. The first three sets of guidelines are based on the work of Ken Leithwood. The CASS Dimension 12 Task Force contributed to the guidelines in the final section.

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# A. Vision and Direction Setting

### Dimension 1: Focus on Student Learning

1.  The school system has developed a widely shared vision and beliefs about student learning and well being in the 21st Century that falls within the parameters set by the province.
2.  The vision includes a focus on nurturing student engagement and welfare.
3.  The vision includes a focus on 'closing the achievement gap' as well as 'raising the achievement bar'.
4.  The school system's vision and beliefs for students are understood and shared by almost all staff.

### Dimension 2: Curriculum and Instruction

The school system and its staff

1.  strongly support the efforts of schools to implement curricula that foster deep understandings of 'big ideas' and to develop the basic competencies students need to acquire such understandings.
2.  work effectively with schools to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.
3.  work effectively with schools to help establish ambitious, but realistic student performance standards.
4.  work with schools to align curriculum, instruction, assessment and teaching resources in an extensive and ongoing manner.
5.  include teachers in a majority of schools in the district's instructional improvement work and assists teachers in developing sophisticated understandings of powerful instruction for students.

## Dimension 3: Uses of Evidence

The school system

1.    has an efficient information management system.
2.    provides schools with relevant data and assists them in using data to improve performance.
3.    creates collaborative structures and opportunities for the interpretation of data in schools, including the use of external expertise when needed.
4.    uses appropriate data for accounting to stakeholders.
5.    makes effective use of existing research to guide policy making and planning.

### Vision and Direction Setting: Guidelines for System Leaders

1.    Spend whatever time it takes to ensure that the mission, vision and goals (directions) of the system are widely known, understood and shared by all members of your organization.

2.    Insist on the use of your system's directions as fundamental criteria for virtually all decisions: you are the chief  'stewards' of these directions.

3.    Develop and implement board and school improvement plans interactively and collaboratively with your school leaders.

4.    Build your system's capacity and disposition for using systematically-collected data to inform as many decisions as possible. Train Principals and staff on the use of data and research literature to sustain decision-making.

5.    Make flexible, adaptive use of provincial initiatives and frameworks ensuring that they contribute to, rather than detract from, accomplishing your system's directions

## B. Capacity Building

### Dimension 4: System-wide Efficacy

The school system

1.  provides extensive opportunities for staff to develop expertise relevant to achieving the district's goals.
2.  creates organizational structures and settings that support and enhance staff's work and learning.

### Dimension 5: Leadership for Learning

The school system

1.  has well-designed and carefully implemented procedures for identifying, recruiting, selecting and appraising, and retaining school-level leaders.
2.  implements procedures for transferring school-level leaders that does no harm and, whenever possible, adds value to improvement efforts underway in schools.
3.  ensures that the most skilled leaders in the system are placed where they are most needed.
4.  encourages school-level leaders, when useful, to supplement their own capacities with system-level expertise.
5.  expect Principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction. This is a central criterion for selecting school leaders and for their performance appraisal.
6.  keeps the central office staff focused on learning and they support Principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure high levels of learning for all students. The system assumes responsibility for significantly improving instructional leadership in schools.
7.  expects system-level leaders to reflect the practices identified in the CASS Professional Practice Competencies for System Educational Leaders, as well as such other practices as might be deemed critical for local district purposes.

8. expects school-level leaders to reflect the practices and competences identified in Alberta's Professional Practice Competencies for School Principals, as well as such other practices as might be deemed critical for local district purposes.

9. encourages coordinated forms of leadership distribution throughout the system and its schools.

## Dimension 6: Professional Learning

1. Very little time is devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and Principals. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional learning.

2. Most professional learning is carefully aligned with district and school improvement initiatives.

3. Differentiated professional learning opportunities are provided in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.

4. Extensive opportunities are provided for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.

5. Almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.

6. All system-sponsored professional learning is closely aligned with the best evidence about how people learn.

## C. Relationships

### Dimension 7: System Connections

1.  Central office roles are interconnected; work is undertaken collaboratively in the service of a widely shared set of purposes. Communication among staff is frequent and cordial.

2.  School staffs often participate in system decisions and are in frequent contact with central office staff for support and assistance. Central office staff members are in schools frequently and know most school staff members by name.

3.  Networks and PLCs are well established at both school and system levels and have become the established way of solving problems and taking care of other business

4.  Time and space is provided for the teachers' association and unions to participate in planning system and school improvement efforts;

5.  System and school leaders work with the teachers' association and unions to build trusting relationships

6.  The district communicates regularly with the Ministry, both formally and informally, about system goals and directions and encourages Ministry collaboration in achieving these goals and directions.

7. The district provides feedback to the Ministry about the relevance of its initiatives to district goals and directions has a multi-year plan that explicitly integrates provincial and district priorities.

8. The district supplements government initiatives, when needed, in order to increase their local impact. Problem-solving groups in schools (e.g., PLCs) consider how to implement provincial initiatives in order to get the best results for the school and its students.

## Dimension 8: Parent and Community Engagement

1. The district provides school staffs with helpful opportunities to acquire the capacities needed to productively engage parents in schools.

2. The district provides school staffs with helpful opportunities to acquire the capacities they need to assist parents in creating conditions in the home that support the success of their children at school.

3. The district has a formal policy on parent engagement and conducts periodic audits across schools about the extent to which that policy is being implemented. School staffs and parents are asked for evidence as part of these audits.

4. Community groups are routinely recognized for their contribution and support and consulted on almost all decisions affecting the community. School system staff are regularly members of these groups themselves.

## Dimension 9: School Board Leadership

The Trustees

1. participate in assessing community values and interests and incorporating them into the school system's beliefs and vision for student learning and well being.

2. help mobilize parents and the wider community in developing and supporting the vision.

3. help create a climate of excellence that makes achieving the vision possible.

4. use the board's beliefs and vision for student learning and well being as the foundation for strategic planning and ongoing board evaluation.

5.  focus most policy making on the improvement of student learning and well being consistent with the beliefs and vision.
6.  identify and fund policies and programs that provide rich curricula and engaging forms of instruction for all students and eliminates those that do not.
7.  maintain productive relationships with senior staff, school staffs, community stakeholders and provincial education officials.
8.  provide systematic orientation opportunities for new members and ongoing training for existing members.
9.  support and act, individually, in accordance with decisions made by the Board of Trustees, as a whole.
10. avoid becoming involved in day-to-day operations.
11. organize board practice to foster generative reflection in addition to fiduciary and strategic governance.

## Relationships: Guidelines for System Leaders

1.  The terms 'reciprocal', 'collaborative' and highly 'interactive' begin to capture the most productive type of relationship to be developed between system and school-level leaders.

2.  Ensuring high levels of interaction among school leaders is important for system improvement. These interactions should include all school leaders and be driven by a shared sense of responsibility among school leaders for system improvement

3.  Supporting schools in their parent engagement initiatives will have greater effects on student achievement than system efforts to engage parents.

4.  System/Ministry relationships should feature high level of reciprocity in the interests of achieving both shared and system-specific goals in the context of local system circumstances.

5.  Help Trustees contribute to their system's progress by encouraging them to focus their work on supporting and monitoring progress being made in implementing the system's strategic multi-year plan and by nurturing the wider community's understanding and support for their system's efforts.

6.  Systems adopting a policy governance model should provide ongoing training for all elected board members, system leaders and staff. This approach fosters collaboration and interdependency between professional and elected system leaders.

# D. System Design

### Dimension 10: System Alignment

1. The district has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align its budget with goals for students.
2. The district has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align its personnel policies and procedures with goals for students.
3. The district has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align its organizational structures with staff's instructional improvement work.
4. Adequate amounts of both the time and money have been allocated for the professional learning of both leaders and teachers.

### Dimension 11: System Improvement

1. The system's approach to improvement is coherent. A small number of key improvement goals are consistently pursued over sustained periods of time in manageable steps.
2. Schools are not overloaded with excessive numbers of initiatives. Considerable effort is made to build the capacities needed by school staffs for successful school improvement.
3. Improvement efforts in schools are guided by explicit and well-tested frameworks, policies and practices, as well as widely shared goals that permit local adaptation. All stakeholders have clearly defined roles to play in this approach to school improvement.
4. The district integrates new initiatives into existing routines and practices. Established structures and procedures are maintained and built on. Care is taken to ensure continuity and extension of core values.

### Dimension 12: Leveraging Technology

1. School and system leaders focus on the instructional core and the ways in which changes in emerging technologies impact, change, threaten, enrich or enhance the instructional core.
2. The district provides proactive leadership and support for the implementation of technology within a strong vision for learning.

3. Senior leaders employ IT governance approaches to align the system's strategic IT direction with the district's goals, to manage IT risks and to ensure that resources are used appropriately responsibly.

## System Design: Guidelines for System Leaders

1. Successful senior leaders understand that moving onto a 21st century learning, knowledge-building landscape requires a shift in thinking and practice that are enabled, supported, enriched and deepened by digital technology and the infrastructure.

2. School and senior leaders focus on equipping learners with the skills and knowledge they need to use technology safely and responsibly and managing the risks, whenever and wherever they go online; and to promote safe and responsible behaviours in using technology.

3. Knowledge-building organizations ensure that teachers are skilled in the use of technology for learning and that they have consistent access to professional development to support technology use in teaching and learning.

4. Knowledge-building organizations continuously assess the effectiveness of technology for learning by creating a collaborative community involving researchers.

# Appendix B:
# Comparison of System
# Leadership Frameworks

The table on the next page compares the Alberta Framework For School System Success with Leithwood's (2011) *The Ontario District Effectiveness Framework* and the key elements from *District Leadership that Works: Striking the Right Balance* by Marzano and Waters (2009).

| Albert Framework (2013) | Ontario Framework (2011) | Marzano & Waters (2009) |
|---|---|---|
| **Vision & Direction Setting** 1. Focus on student learning 2. Curriculum & instruction 3. Uses of evidence | **Core Processes** 1. Beliefs and vision for students 2. Curriculum and instruction 3. Uses of evidence | 1. Nonnegotiable achievement and instructional goals |
| **Capacity Development** 4. System efficacy 5. Leadership learning 6. Professional learning | **Supporting Conditions** 4. Professional development 5. Organizational improvement processes 6. Alignment | 2. Leadership support at every level of the system 3. Defined autonomy in a high-reliability system 4. Strong and knowledgeable instructional leadership 5. Resources for professional development |
| **Relationships** 7. System connections 8. Parent & community engagement 9. School board leadership | **Relationships** 7. Internal system and school relationships 8. Parents 9. Local community groups 10. Teacher federations and other staff unions 11. Ministry of Education | 6. Board alignment 7. Stakeholder involvement in collaborative goal setting |
| **System Design** 10. System alignment 11. System improvement 12. Leveraging technology | **Leadership** 12. Professional leadership 13. The leadership of elected officials | 8. Ongoing monitoring for instructional quality 9. Flexibility at the school level to respond quickly and effectively to early indications of error and individual student failure |

# Appendix C:
# Draft Professional Practice Competencies for System Educational Leaders

Membership in the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) requires a commitment to serving the public interest by providing exemplary educational leadership. As an accomplished leader and teacher, the CASS member ensures each student is provided the opportunity to achieve optimum learning.

Every CASS member is expected to:
- fulfill the applicable provincial requirements
- demonstrate the applicable Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders in Alberta (Competencies)
- meet the school authority's requirements for system educational leaders.

The Competencies are an interrelated set of knowledge, skills and attributes that is drawn upon and applied to a particular context for successful performance. They are not presented in rank order. The Indicators that accompany each competency describe how it is demonstrated. School authorities may interpret, refine and add to the Indicators to reflect the local context.

The Competencies:

- apply to Alberta superintendents and other system educational leaders as applicable in their school jurisdiction context;
- identify the basic competencies for effective system educational leadership applicable to all Alberta school contexts;
- frame a system educational leader's career-long responsibility to ensure each student is provided the opportunity to achieve optimum learning;
- represent a professional curriculum for school system leadership preparation, induction and professional learning programs; and
- support school authority policies and processes for system educational leader professional growth, supervision and evaluation.

System educational leaders are accountable for the demonstration of those Competencies that are directly related to their assigned role and leadership designation in their school jurisdiction context.

Reasoned, evidence-based, professional judgment must be used to determine whether the applicable Competencies are demonstrated by a system educational leader.

## Professional Practice Competency #1 – Visionary Leadership

The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership in the development of a school system culture characterized by shared values and beliefs, and a collective vision that focuses on student learning.

### Indicators

1. The school system's culture is collaborative, innovative and supportive of efforts to improve student learning.
2. A collective vision of a preferred future, reflecting shared values and beliefs of the school system community, is clearly articulated.
3. High levels of student achievement and staff performance are promoted.
4. Each student has the opportunity to develop a strong foundation for citizenship, employment and life-long learning.
5. School system planning is evidence-based.

## Professional Practice Competency #2 – Instructional Leadership

The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership in facilitating students' access to services and programs consistent with achieving provincial and school system goals.

Indicators

1. Each student has access to appropriate programming based on his/her learning needs.
2. Each teacher consistently meets the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard.
3. Exemplary instructional practices are identified, implemented and supported.
4. Opportunities are provided for teachers to improve professional practice by engaging in reflective dialogue and collective inquiry about teaching and learning.
5. Teaching strategies and student assessment practices are aligned with the intended learner outcomes in the Program of Studies.
6. Student learning improves through the appropriate application of assessment strategies for, of, and as learning. Reporting of student learning reflects progress towards achieving the intended outcomes in the Program of Studies. Multiple indicators and sources of evidence provide students with balanced opportunities to demonstrate their learning.
7. Student assessment informs and shapes instruction.
8. School administrators provide effective instructional leadership.
9. Student and staff accomplishments are recognized and celebrated.

### Professional Practice Competency #3 – Human Resource Leadership

The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership in the development and sustained implementation of effective staff recruitment, selection, development, supervision and evaluation processes.

Indicators

1. Recruitment strategies lead to the selection of qualified and effective staff.
2. All staff members are supervised and evaluated in accordance with school system requirements.
3. Staff development aligns with provincial, school system, and school education plans.
4. Leadership is developed throughout the school system.
5. Contractual obligations with staff are fulfilled.
6. Principles of natural justice prevail in resolving staff performance issues.
7. Staff accomplishments are recognized and celebrated.


### Professional Practice Competency #4 – Ethical Leadership

The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership by modeling and inspiring ethical behavior that honors the principles of integrity, objectivity, and protection of the public interest.

Indicators

1. Decisions align with the best interests of students and reflect exemplary moral and ethical wisdom.
2. Personal actions are consistent with the CASS Code of Professional Conduct.

## Professional Practice Competency #5 – Effective Relationships

The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership by building trust and effective relationships within the school system community.

Indicators
1. Board decisions and directions are communicated to the school system community in a timely and accurate manner.
2. Trust and respect characterize relationships among staff members, school councils, parents/guardians, Board members, Alberta Education, and other stakeholders.
3. Parents/guardians and community members are meaningfully involved in the school system.
4. Conflict resolution results from effective processes.
5. Collaborative approaches to problem-solving build consensus.

## Professional Practice Competency #6 – Organizational Leadership and Management

The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership by managing the operations and resources of the organization in a manner that creates a responsible and responsive environment.

Indicators
1. System operations comply in a timely way with all statutory, regulatory, and Board requirements.
2. School plant, equipment and support systems operate safely, effectively and efficiently.
3. Human, material and financial resources are secured, allocated and managed in an effective, responsible, and accountable manner.
4. Organizational structures and operational plans provide clear direction.
5. The financial management of the school system is in accordance with the terms and conditions of funding received under the School Act or any other applicable Act or regulation.
6. Organizational performance is monitored and adjusted when necessary.

## Professional Practice Competency #7 – External Influences on Education

The system educational leader provides exemplary leadership by understanding and responding strategically to external influences in education.

### Indicators

1. Consideration is given to external political, economic, legal and cultural contexts affecting the school system.
2. Consideration is given to provincial, national and global issues and trends affecting the school system.
3. The school system demonstrates the benefits of public education.
4. Partnerships enhance public education.

## Professional Practice Competency #8 – Chief Executive and Chief Education Officer Leadership

The Superintendent of Schools, as Chief Executive Officer of the Board and Chief Education Officer of the school system, ensures each student is provided the opportunity to achieve optimum learning.

### Indicators

1. Each staff member is accountable to the Board through the Superintendent.
2. The Board is provided with information, advice and support as necessary to fulfill its governance role. (or The board is provided with the necessary information, advice and support to fulfill its governance role).
3. The Superintendent's relationship with the Board is respectful, collegial and cooperative.
4. Appropriate processes are used to develop and review school system administrative procedures and educational initiatives.
5. Board policies are translated into administrative procedures as required.
6. Service delivery and other operations comply with Board policies and school system administrative procedures.
7. Board policies and school system administrative procedures are congruent with provincial and federal requirements.

# Appendix D:
# CASS Code of
# Professional Conduct

D

## Background

The College of Alberta School Superintendents requires high standards of conduct from its members to maintain the honour and dignity of the profession. It is acknowledged that the actions of CASS members will be viewed and appraised by professional colleagues, Trustees, staff members, students, parents, guardians and the community-at-large. Therefore, the College of Alberta School Superintendents has established a Code of Professional Conduct that makes explicit the principles and obligations of the profession. Violation of the Code may constitute an independent basis for investigation and possible disciplinary action by the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

# Principles

### 1.  Protection of the Public Interest

A distinguishing feature of a profession is acceptance of its responsibility to the public and its commitment to serve and honor the public interest. The public interest, for the purpose of this Code, is defined as the collective well-being of the communities of people served by members of the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

Membership in the College of Alberta School Superintendents requires a commitment to protect the public interest. CASS members must place the public interest above their own at all times.

### 2.  Integrity

Integrity is the fundamental quality from which the public trust derives. CASS members are employed in positions of trust; therefore, integrity must be an element of character of every individual who seeks to practice as a member of the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

CASS members must exemplify high standards of integrity in all interpersonal relationships and in the discharge of professional responsibilities. The trustworthiness of a CASS member must never be in question.

### 3.  Objectivity

Objectivity is a quality that enhances integrity and helps safeguard the public interest. It requires CASS members to be impartial and free from conflicts between their private interests and professional responsibilities.

# Obligations

The principles of the public interest, integrity and objectivity impose the following obligations on each member of the College of Alberta School Superintendents:

### 1. Falsification or Misrepresentation
The CASS member SHALL refrain from engaging in conduct involving falsification or deliberate misrepresentation, including omission or concealment, of a material fact.

### 2. Discrimination
The CASS member SHALL respect the requirements of human rights and constitutional laws in force in Canada. Except where differential treatment is permitted by law, the CASS member SHALL NOT discriminate in professional dealings with any person on grounds including, but not limited to, a person's ancestry, colour, perceived race, nationality, national origin, ethnic background or origin, language, religion, creed or religious belief, religious association or activities, age, gender, physical characteristics, pregnancy, sexual orientation, marital or family status, source of income, political belief/association/activities, or physical or mental disability. [1]

### 3. Sexual Harassment and Harassment
The CASS member SHALL refrain from engaging in vexatious comments or conduct that is known or reasonably to be known to constitute sexual harassment or harassment. Harassment – sexual or otherwise – includes any improper, abusive, or unwelcome conduct that offends, embarrasses, humiliates, or degrades another person.[2]

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1    Canadian Bar Association (2006), *Code of Professional Conduct* (Ottawa, Ontario), 115.
2    Canadian Bar Association (2006), *Code of Professional Conduct* (Ottawa, Ontario), 118.

## 4. Confidentiality

The CASS member SHALL comply with provincial and school system requirements relating to the confidentiality of student, staff and parent/guardian information.

## 5. Personal Interests and Private Gain

The CASS member SHALL refrain from acting in a professional capacity when personal interests or relationships might reasonably be expected to result in private gain or impair objectivity or effectiveness in the discharge of professional responsibilities.

## 6. Fundamental Justice

The CASS member SHALL comply with the principles of fundamental justice in all staff performance issues.

## 7. Contractual Matters

The CASS member SHALL fulfill all of the terms and obligations in his/her employment contract with the Board of Trustees, for the duration of the contract. Furthermore, the CASS member SHALL honour all terms and obligations in the employment contracts of other school system staff.

## 8. Conduct of a Criminal Nature

The CASS member SHALL refrain from engaging in conduct that may lead to being convicted in a court of law of a criminal offense which, in the opinion of the Professional Conduct Committee of CASS, represents serious misconduct relevant to the individual's suitability as a member of the profession.

## 9. Conduct of CASS Colleagues

When concerns arise regarding the professional conduct of a CASS colleague, the CASS member SHALL first advise the colleague of the concern and subsequently attempt to resolve the matter collegially and in a confidential manner. If these attempts at resolution are unsuccessful, the CASS member SHALL file a formal complaint with the College of Alberta

School Superintendents. However, the CASS member SHALL refrain from initiating, participating in, or encouraging the filing of complaints that are malicious, unwarranted or without basis in fact. Furthermore, the CASS member SHALL refrain from knowingly assisting or inducing a colleague to contravene the Code of Professional Conduct.

## 10. Complaint Proceedings

The CASS member SHALL assist in the process of enforcing the Code of Professional Conduct by cooperating with investigations, participating in proceedings, and complying with directives from the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

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