

Collaborative Professional Learning Cycle at Fort McMurray Public Schools

By Annalee Nutter and Scott Barr, Fort McMurray Public School District

Fort McMurray Public School District (FMPSD) is a learning community based on a foundation of strong professional learning opportunities and collaboration amongst staff. We believe in lifelong learning for all staff and realize that a data-driven, proactive plan on how to accomplish that is key to ensuring the largest impact on our staff and students. By ensuring we use both the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) and the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) as the foundation of our professional learning planning, we aim to set up our staff for success.

Our Board has prioritized opportunities for professional learning for staff by allocating time within the school calendar for several years (11-13 days per year). This collaborative professional learning time has allowed staff to build knowledge and skills to address students' diverse learning needs.

We have worked to continuously improve our planning process to aim to provide for high quality professional learning opportunities that meet staff needs, board priorities and address student learning. Our process is called the collaborative professional learning cycle and includes division and school plans that incorporate one district professional learning development day and 13 professional learning Fridays

"We believe in continuous improvement of the professional expertise and competence of our staff."

FMPSD Beliefs – Annual Education Results Report 2022.¹

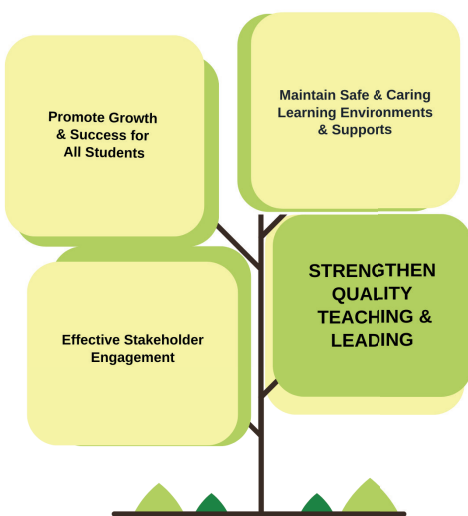
(PLF). During the 13 PLF days staff collaborate in system-wide grade-level teams and school-based instructional teams to enhance pedagogical skills and content knowledge for educating a diverse student body. Survey data consistently shares that an aspect that makes the professional learning time meaningful is the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues that occur because of the PLF days and structures.

Decades of research has identified teacher/staff quality as the most direct school-based influence on improving student learning. We know professional learning opportunities are essential to enhancing teaching practice and growth. Effective professional learning must engage teachers in opportunities that are supportive, job-embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative, and ongoing.^{2,3,4,5,6,7} Our professional learning planning is addressing this research as well as our knowledge of our local context and needs. (e.g., learning based on reviewing student learning data, collaborative school-based time provided to accommodate teacher needs). FMPSD student achievement

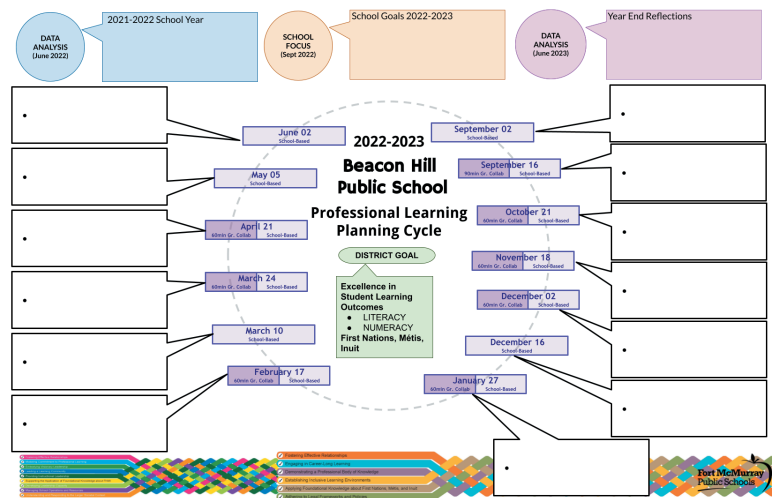
results for the last five years indicate that student learning has improved, a causal connection to the professional learning time being provided to teachers can be made.

School leaders work with their staff to review student learning data, identify school goals that are coherent with division focus and student learning results, and plan for learning opportunities for the year that address their local context which includes staff needs and input. Based on this comprehensive analysis, a yearly plan for professional learning is completed. Plans are shared with school communities and available for the public to share that intentional professional learning plans are in place based on student learning needs.

To know if our professional learning Fridays and professional learning plans are having an impact we continuously seek, summarize, and follow up on feedback from staff. We wanted to know, through our surveys, "How does PLF contribute to continuous improvement of teaching and learning?" A consistent set of survey questions, with data collected for the past number of years, has helped us to know if our professional learning time has supported teacher and leader practice and as a result, student learning. The information also allows us to make continuous improvements to our approaches, report to our board and assure



For McMurray Public School priority graphic.



Beacon Hill Public School Professional Learning Planning Cycle. Graphics courtesy of Annalee Nutter.

all involved, including our community, that time and resources spent on professional learning is having an impact on student learning. We are also better positioned to report back to our staff about follow up actions and steps for improvement and classroom supports.

Sharing our survey results through conversations with all stakeholders, and by developing a summary infographic, we have contributed to a culture that models the importance of professional growth. We believe that the intentional and thoughtful design of the professional learning Fridays, and a focus on consistently measuring impact, has created a collective efficacy focused on supporting staff growth. We communicate the value of staff learning and highlight the connection to student growth through our actions represented in the structure of PLF and sharing and acting on survey data.

Hattie described collective efficacy as “the collective belief of teachers in their ability

to positively affect students.”⁶ The FMPSD collaborative professional learning cycle has assisted our system work in contributing to improvement of teaching and learning. Next steps include a heightened focus on communications so that we can assure that the professional collaborative learning cycle and PLF days continue to have an impact on student learning. We will do this through our efforts to continuously improve based on review, analysis, and sharing survey data.

We believe that when teachers and leaders learn, then students achieve. Our collaborative professional learning cycle includes

intentional planning and design and a focus on measuring impact and supports teacher and leader growth and optimum learning for all students. ■

Annalee Nutter is Superintendent for FMPSD. She is an advocate for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students, ensuring they have what they need to be successful, including Land Based Learning Camp.

Scott Barr is Director of HR and Administration for FMPSD and has been teaching in Fort McMurray Public Schools for 26 years now, 20 in administration.

References

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For more information on funding for school authorities, visit: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/8f3b4972-4c47-4009-a090-5b470e68d633/resource/e7865589-6774-4ba8-89b5-a61ca2f36843/download/edc-funding-manual-2022-2023-school-year.pdf>.



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