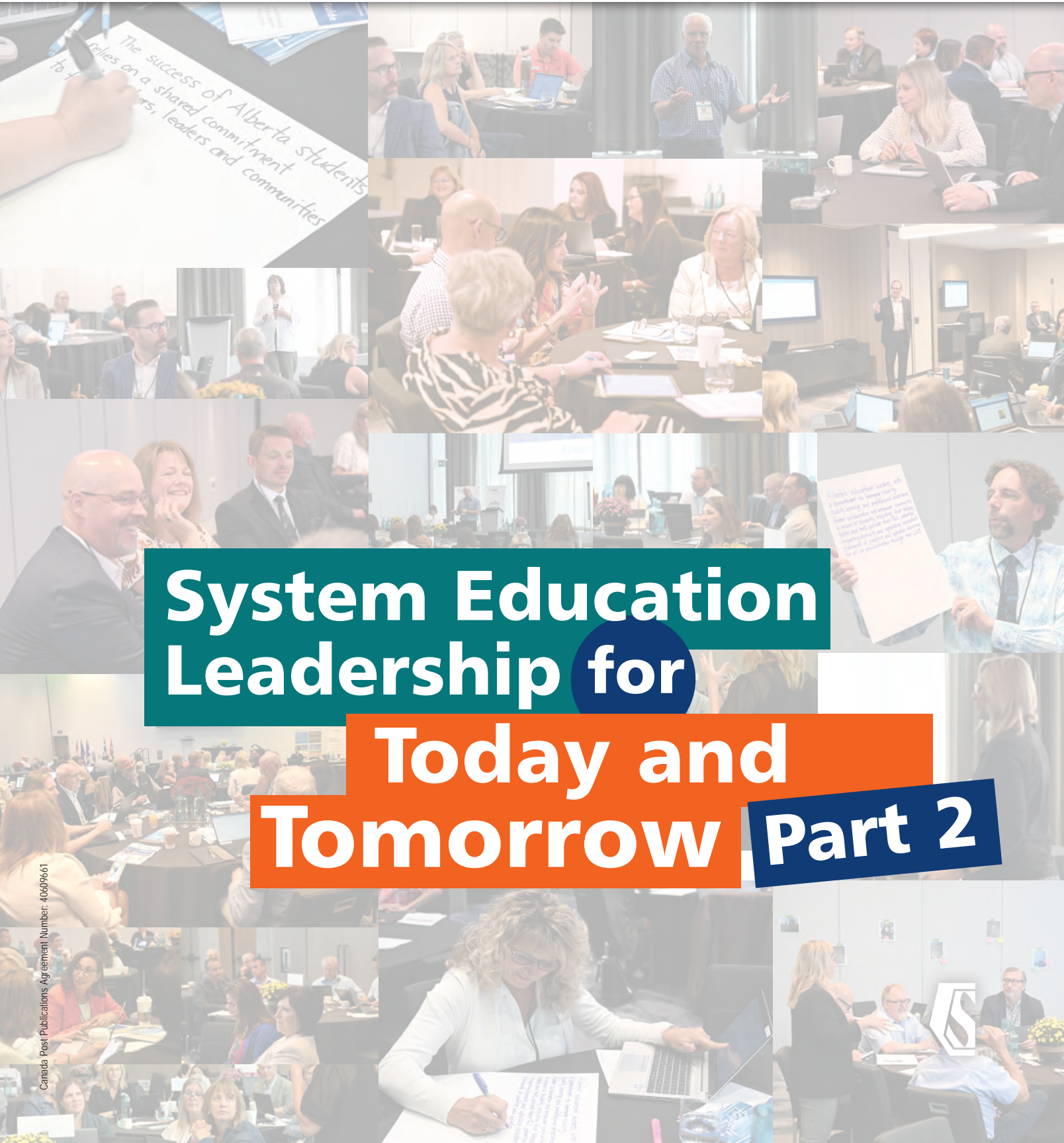


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The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents



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The CASS Connection

The official magazine for the College of
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Fall 2024

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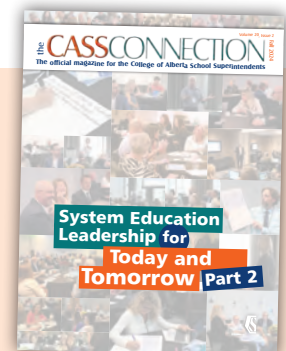
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On the Cover:

This issue's cover features a collage of photos taken during the CASS Conference, featuring CASS leaders in action. Photos courtesy of Claudine Cortes.

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Message from the Minister of Education

Demetrios Nicolaidis, ECA, Ph.D. | College of Alberta School Superintendents

A Bright Future for All Students

Effective leadership is the cornerstone of a strong education system and plays a critical role in preparing our students for the future. As we navigate Alberta's changing landscape, the guidance of school and system leaders like you is essential to creating environments where students can thrive. The College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) and its members have been invaluable partners in this work, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to ensuring students receive an excellent education across the province. Your expertise helps shape policies and practices that equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in a fast-paced world. I truly appreciate your input as we work together to strengthen the education system for Alberta students.

Ensuring students have every opportunity to pursue their career interests and succeed in Alberta's dynamic job market is a top priority for the government. As Minister of Education, my mandate is to ensure students are equipped with the knowledge, skills and guidance they need to find meaningful employment in the future. To support this, we recently established an advisory group to review

dual credit programming and identify ways to remove barriers, improve transferability and expand course offerings. I look forward to seeing how this review will strengthen the excellent career education programs already offered by school authorities and create new opportunities across Alberta. Additionally, we continue to collaborate with Advanced Education to expand apprenticeship education and promote parity of esteem for all forms of post-secondary education.

We are also looking beyond our borders to learn from global education leaders. This summer, I joined a delegation of ministry staff and education partners on a trip to Germany to explore how their career education practices could be adapted to better align Alberta's system with student interests and workforce needs. Findings from this trip will help refine our approach to career education and ensure we are preparing students for the future job market.

In addition to enhancing career education, we are committed to providing students with a modern curriculum that empowers them to be the leaders of tomorrow. This school year, 62 school authorities are piloting the draft K-6 social studies curriculum in more than 470 schools across Alberta. We will consider all

feedback from classroom piloting to finalize the new curriculum before provincial implementation. I look forward to continued collaboration with education leaders to build a comprehensive curriculum that inspires a passion for learning.

Alberta's population is growing rapidly as more people from across Canada and around the world choose to make the province their home. We are addressing the historic growth in student population through the newly created School Construction Accelerator Program, which commits \$8.6 billion towards school infrastructure. This three-year strategy will build more K-12 schools to target Alberta's school space deficit by creating new and updated spaces for students. The program, which will also improve internal government processes to help build schools faster, aims to address the most critical capital needs facing Alberta's school system.

Once again, thank you for the incredible work you do to support Alberta's students. I look forward to our continued partnership in ensuring students receive a high-quality education that enriches their lives and prepares them for future success. Together, we are building a brighter future for all students in Alberta.

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Message from the President

Dr. Clint Moroziuk | College of Alberta School Superintendents

The Critical Role of Education

Welcome to the Fall 2024 edition of *The CASS Connection*. As we reflect on the rapidly changing landscape of education in Alberta, this issue focuses on the theme of innovation in leadership and learning. Across the province, educators are continuously seeking new ways to empower students and lead school systems with creativity, adaptability, and a deep commitment to student success.

In this edition, we explore how system education leaders are navigating today's challenges by creating innovative programs that support student engagement and career readiness. Whether it's through hands-on learning opportunities, developing leadership programs for school administrators, or fostering well-being

initiatives, these stories remind us of the critical role that education plays in preparing students for a future filled with complexity and opportunity.

As system education leaders, we recognize that providing students with diverse pathways to success is essential. Our role in shaping responsive learning environments and supporting both staff and students with the tools they need is central to the mission of educational leadership in Alberta. In the context of increasing technological advancements, societal changes, and diverse student populations, the importance of innovation has never been clearer. This issue highlights the leadership initiatives that not only respond to current needs but also anticipate future trends, ensuring that we are building systems that remain flexible, inclusive, and forward-thinking.

We also reflect on the role of collaboration in our success. Across Alberta, school divisions are working in partnership with post-secondary institutions, industries, and local communities to enhance learning opportunities for students and to create resilient, sustainable educational systems. This spirit of collaboration is central to our mission as leaders, ensuring that the educational experiences we provide are rich, relevant, and rooted in real-world contexts.

As we move forward, let this issue serve as a reminder that our collective commitment to innovation and leadership is the foundation for transforming education in Alberta. I encourage you to reflect on the stories and strategies shared here, and to consider how we can continue to lead with purpose, ensuring that every student is prepared for a future full of promise.

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Message from the Chief Executive Officer

David Keohane | College of Alberta School Superintendents

Learning by Doing: The Path to Future-Ready Education

Though referencing John Dewey's views on education means quoting ideas that are over a century old, his belief that education is essentially "learning by doing" resonates today and will do so well into the future. Whether by focusing on adaptive practices to meet specific learning needs or ensuring students gain the skills and experiences necessary for rewarding careers and healthy lives, the stories of practice in this edition of *The CASS Connection* exemplify what future-ready programming is all about. Congratulations to each contributor for sharing your most valuable stories of practice!

This year marks a defining moment in the College of Alberta School Superintendents' (CASS) 66-year history of promoting professional networks and learning that are essential to enhancing system education leadership in K-12 education. Guided by the *CASS Act*, each CASS member will now make a public commitment to continuous professional learning as a key component of system leadership. By pursuing shared accreditation goals through professional development, our regulated members will demonstrate that applying new knowledge to professional practice is another example of "learning by doing." When those who lead in classrooms, schools, and school authorities

collectively commit to learning for the sake of optimal student outcomes, the future of education in our province looks bright indeed.

Many large-scale reforms in education have come and gone, often because agendas and change processes were externally imposed. However, when our professional practice standards guide our growth, and we remain curious about the opportunities for meaningful development, we create a self-driven agenda for transforming our educational system. Meaningful change

happens when we encounter the work of others, and this interaction responds to our quest for deeper understanding. Perhaps this is why it has been said: "To be a successful professional, you must follow the footsteps of others, while never losing sight of your own path."

Here's to the combined effect of CASS' accreditation model for professional learning and the stories of practice that will continue to inspire member contributions to this magazine for years to come!

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Implementing a Continuous Education Program for System Education Leaders

By Vincent Behm, Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools; David Keohane and Dr. Gloria Antifaiff, CASS; and Dr. Santiago Rincón-Gallardo, Liberating Learning

September 1, 2024, marked a historic day for the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) and Alberta's system education leaders with the launch of the new CASS Continuing Education Program (CEP). Developed in response to CASS's legislative obligations under the *CASS Act* (2021),¹ which established CASS as a legislated professional organization, the CEP addresses both compliance requirements and the professional learning needs of system education leaders. The program balances regulatory adherence with the ongoing professional learning essential for system education leaders, ensuring they remain engaged with current research, content, and colleagues, all in alignment with the Alberta Professional Practice Standards.

The CEP is the culmination of years of advocacy to the Ministry, emphasizing the importance of recognizing system education leadership as a distinct profession with unique skills and competencies that differ from those of the teaching profession. This recognition highlights the critical role system education leadership plays in the broader education system.

CASS is well-positioned for this challenge. It is now sufficiently established that continuous learning is a key feature to successful system leadership^{2,3,4,5} and that *leadership from the middle* is emerging as a powerful and promising approach to whole system change.⁶

While most successful districts whose leadership practices have been studied and documented have figured this out intuitively, what's unique about CASS is that it is now creating the infrastructure and organizational culture that makes *leading from the middle* and leadership learning a deliberate focus of system education leaders across an entire province. Furthermore, Alberta is very likely the first jurisdiction in the world to have adopted practice standards for system education leaders that are aligned with professional standards for school leaders and teachers. A nested structure of professional practice standards, which supports continuous learning as the work of everyone in the system, all the way from classrooms to school authorities, provides a powerful basis for the development of unity of purpose⁷ and system coherence.⁸

Development

The CEP implementation plan was developed using the CASS *Planning for Implementation* site, and the research of Fullan and Quinn, who emphasized the importance



System Education Leaders at the latest College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) conference. Photos courtesy of Dr. Gloria Antifaiff.

The launch of the CASS Continuing Education Program is a key milestone in advancing system education leadership in Alberta.

of connecting new knowledge with existing knowledge to create shared purpose.⁸ CASS members' involvement was central from the start, ensuring the program was developed collaboratively rather than imposed.

A CEP Committee, composed of CASS members, was formed to provide accreditation recommendations to the Governance and Nominating Committee, which then presented them to the CASS Board. Research from other regulated professions' continuing education programs and a four-year study on Alberta's professional practice standards informed the program's design.

The program needed to support diverse approaches to professional growth, such as mentorship, professional committee work, creating learning opportunities, and exploring new learning experiences. Offering choice and flexibility, the program honors each member as a professional, capable of contributing knowledge and fostering a shared learning environment.

Program

The CEP offers a variety of professional learning opportunities for regulated system education leaders to meet annual accreditation requirements, serving as evidence of their competence in their roles. Each opportunity is aligned with competencies outlined in the Alberta *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS) and the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* (SLQS). The program is designed to provide CASS regulated members with choice, flexibility, and engagement with current knowledge and relevant research in system education leadership.

The CEP has two main accreditation requirements. First, regulated members must accumulate 30 CEP credits annually through accredited professional learning related to system education leadership. Second, they must complete five CEP courses within five years. During the course-based learning sessions, both experienced and newly appointed system education leaders from various roles share their experiences and insights, creating valuable learning opportunities for all participants. This collaborative approach fosters an understanding of the

work of all executive team members, promotes empathy for each other's challenges, and highlights the collective responsibility of the team in ensuring optimal learning for all students. The learning environment encourages members to strengthen existing relationships or develop their talents for future roles, including the potential to serve as a superintendent.

Next steps

In the first year of the CEP, members are being introduced to an online Accreditation Profile where they can record their professional learning credits, creating a historical archive of their professional development in system education leadership. A new role, the registrar, is being introduced, along with an Accreditation Review Committee to ensure program quality. Additionally, measures of success will be established, including an annual survey, based on the Friesen et al. study,⁹ to gather members' feedback about their CEP experience and how it has influenced their application of their professional practice standard.

These steps ensure that the CEP not only meets legislative requirements but also supports the ongoing professional growth and development of system education leaders in Alberta, positioning them to continue their critical role in the education system.

Conclusion

The launch of the CASS Continuing Education Program is a key milestone in advancing system education leadership in Alberta. By aligning legislative compliance with meaningful professional learning, the CEP equips leaders to meet their roles' challenges. With a focus on choice, flexibility, and collaboration, the program promotes continuous growth, benefiting both leaders and the education system. As the program evolves, it will further emphasize system education leadership as a vital profession, ultimately improving the quality of education for all Alberta students. ■

Vincent Behm is the Chief Deputy Superintendent for Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools. David Keohane is the Chief Executive Officer

and Dr. Gloria Antifaiff is the Principal Leadership Consultant for the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS). Dr. Santiago Rincón-Gallardo is the Director of Liberating Learning.

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BRSD Empowers Students with Meaningful Pathways to Career Readiness

By Rhae-Ann Holoien, Stephen Hoyland, and Anna Radchenko, Battle River School Division



Ray Arc Welding Camrose École Camrose Composite High School Registered Apprenticeship Program student Anna Poole. Photos courtesy of Rhae-Ann Holoien.



Forestburg student Allie Geer, Registered Apprenticeship Program heavy equipment tech.

In the rapidly evolving educational landscape, ensuring student success extends beyond traditional classroom instruction and experience is critical. Recognizing the importance of preparing students for future careers, Battle River School Division (BRSD) has established strong partnerships with local trade industries and businesses. These collaborations not only enhance student engagement and offer essential support, but also bridge the skills gap, providing practical and relevant career pathways.

Strategic collaborations for student success

BRSD's partnerships with trade industries and businesses are multifaceted, involving dual credit programs, Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAP), work experience opportunities, and Green Certificate programs. These opportunities allow students to gain comprehensive experience and earn credits toward both high school graduation and post-secondary education.

Dual credit program

A cornerstone of BRSD's strategy is the dual credit program, supported by a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Olds College. Along with four other school divisions, BRSD has joined the newly formed Alberta Central East Collaborative (ACE-C), and next year, we will expand dual credit opportunities to Lakeland College.

Seven students enrolled in the program, with four having completed the Veterinary Technical Assistant Certificate in June 2024. A dual credit course is an opportunity for our students to get high school credits while simultaneously obtaining post-secondary credits. BRSD was grateful to receive additional grant funding from Alberta Education to be able to offer these dual credit courses to our students.

Apprenticeships and work experience

BRSD's commitment to experiential learning is evident in its robust RAPs and

work experience programs. With 186 students enrolled in work experience across the division, BRSD highlights the importance of these programs being designed to provide students with real-world exposure and hands-on learning opportunities.

Through partnerships with local businesses and industries, students can engage in apprenticeships that allow them to work alongside skilled professionals. This mentorship model helps students develop technical skills while instilling a strong work ethic and professional demeanor.

Similarly, RAPs allow students to spend a portion of their time in school while working in industry as registered apprentices in one of the trades.

Over the past few years, BRSD had RAP carpentry and plumbing trade students involved with construction of the newly built Chester Ronning School in Camrose. Last year, two female BRSD students apprenticed: one in Welding and the other as a Heavy Equipment Technician. Battle River has seen the fields of Agriculture Equipment Technician, Auto Body Technician, Heavy Equipment Technician, and Electrician become sought after programs amongst our students. BRSD currently has 42 RAP students.

Green Certificate Program

The Green Certificate Program is another opportunity which provides students with access to the first level of agricultural apprenticeship; BRSD has 15 students registered in this program. Upon completion, students receive 16 credits in high school and a certificate from Alberta Agriculture.



Dual credit Veterinarian Technician Assistant Program students.

In 2024, three BRSD students received their Alberta Agriculture Technician Green Certificate.

During the 2023/2024 school year, 300 BRSD students participated in off-campus programming. We are proud that BRSD students are finding great success with their achievements through these innovative programs and wish to extend a huge thank you to all businesses that support BRSD students.

Fostering resilience and adaptability

Through students' engagement in dual credit programs, apprenticeships, work experience, and Green Certificate programs, students learn to navigate challenges, solve problems creatively, and adapt to changing environments, strengthening skills that are invaluable in any career. The dynamic nature of trades requires individuals to continuously learn and adapt to new technologies and methodologies.

Conclusion

BRSD's innovative approach to education through partnerships with trade industries sets a benchmark for preparing students for the future. By integrating dual credit programs, RAPs, work experience opportunities, and Green Certificate programs, BRSD not only enhances student engagement and success but also addresses the skills gap in the local economy. These initiatives exemplify how educational institutions can collaborate with industry partners to create meaningful career pathways; thus, fostering an adaptable workforce and dynamic world where each student will achieve resiliency and thrive throughout their journey toward success. ■

Rhae-Ann Holoien is the Superintendent, Stephen Hoyland the Assistant Superintendent, and Anna Radchenko is the Communications Officer for Battle River School Division.


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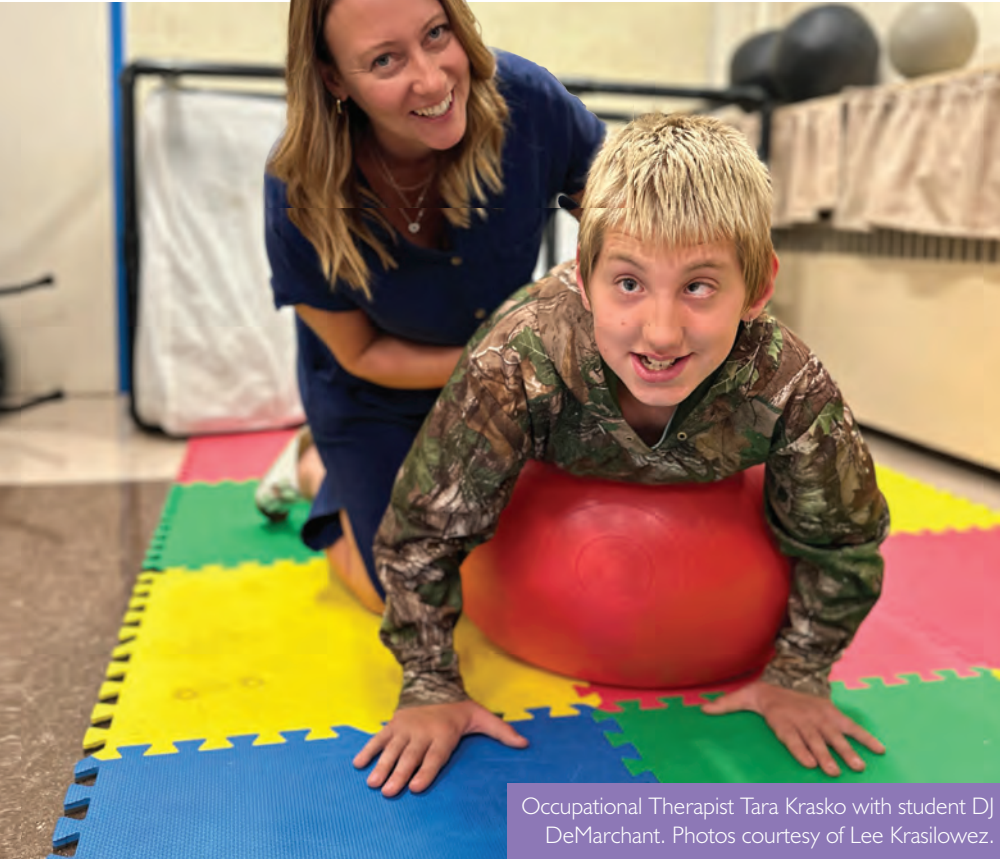


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One Student, One Program, At a Time

By Dr. Cody Edwards, Tracy Hensel, and
Chelsea Hallick, Medicine Hat Public School Division



Occupational Therapist Tara Krasko with student DJ DeMarchant. Photos courtesy of Lee Krasilowez.

Medicine Hat Public School Division's (MHPSD) Alternative Learning Team (ALT) was created in the 2017/2018 school year to provide responsive support for teachers programming for complex student behaviors. Since its inception, past and current members have modeled adaptive leadership skills as they adjust their practice and services based on stakeholder feedback. The ALT offers a three-tiered continuum of support by which school teams select collaboration, consultation, or coaching services.

In a typical school year, the team will directly serve approximately 40 students and indirectly over 150 staff. The multi-disciplinary team includes teacher consultants, educational assistant coaches, and an occupational therapist. The Coordinator of Diverse Learning Services leads the team, attends programming meetings, provides site-embedded coaching, and is the central contact in the referral process.

A driving principle behind the team's development is creating opportunities for

THREE PILLAR CONTINUUM OF SUPPORTS

Collaboration

- Support the collaborative response process by attending teacher collaborative time, program team meetings and/or case conferences.
- Provision of school-based professional development, as requested.
- Short term support

Consultation

- Focus is on an individual student or small group of students with a similar profile.
- Formal observation and/or assessment with recommendations shared in consultation report.
- Short term support (1-2 days)

Coaching

- Focus is on an individual student.
- Direct intervention and modeling strategies.
- Collaborate with school staff to develop evidence-informed and strength-based individualized programming.
- Occupational Therapist assessment provided.
- Coaching report developed throughout length of stay.
- Exit survey administered to school staff, to inform ALT's learning and development.
- Long term support (10-12 days)

Three Pillar Continuum of Supports.

school and division staff to walk together in the problem-solving process, thus allowing school personnel to step out of their day-to-day responsibilities and examine from a distance their current reality. Heifetz and Linsky discuss this practitioner strategy of moving back and forth between “the dance floor” and “balcony” in their description of Adaptive Leadership.¹ In the Alternative Learning Team context, this involves collecting varied perspectives through ongoing classroom observations, reviewing the student record, past programming meetings, and reflective conversations with school team members. External to the school community, the ALT enters the partnership respecting past and current school efforts, offering a new lens to diagnose behavioral triggers and explore new strategies alongside the student’s team.

The coaching process draws upon the team’s vast knowledge, expertise, and training. Each person understands and applies theory and strategies from Dr. Bruce Perry’s Neurosequential Model, Dr. Ross Greene’s Collaborative Problem-Solving Framework, Dr. Stuart Shanker’s Self-Regulation Framework, Positive Behaviour Supports, Differentiated Instruction, sensory learning spaces, and more. The theoretical foundation is a system asset shared with schools accessing coaching services and all division staff through after-school professional learning. Still, the coaching relationship is only as effective as the level of established trust. Consequently, ALT members are purposeful in their interactions with staff, always striving to be approachable, humble, accepting, empathetic, and effective listeners. They are flexible to each situation and relentlessly optimistic about finding student and staff pathways to success.

Asking for help can be difficult for anyone, regardless of profession, and requires vulnerability. If classroom teachers, administrators, and school teams react to challenging student behaviours and do not experience improved circumstances, there is predictably a negative impact on individual and collective efficacy. Under these circumstances, schools will reach out for ALT support. One MHPSD teacher gave insight into their coaching experience:

“They made sure that after escalations we felt supported and that we were doing the right things. There was never a moment that I was made to feel inadequate or incompetent. They kept encouraging all of us to try some strategies and what power when they actually worked!”—MHPSD Teacher.



(Left to Right:) Carie Czember, Rachel Lesko, and Jennifer Nicoll.

Within the comment, there is an observed feeling of teacher safety created through collaboration with the wrap-around team that facilitates reflection, risk-taking, and a willingness to try new strategies. The Alternative Learning Team coaching model is a powerful example of effective professional collaboration for all organizational levels. A partnership that exhibits the type of relational trust, communication, and perceived competence we hope to see amongst school staff, teachers and students, and between students themselves.

Near the completion of the coaching residency, programming responsibilities progressively transition back to school staff to ensure their confidence in implementation. An exit meeting takes place to review the OT assessment and summary coaching report developed and refined throughout the process. The debrief is a chance to celebrate observed progress and success, facilitating participant reflection on new learnings for future practice and program development. The team further supplements observational data and one-on-one conversational feedback with a school survey. The exit survey is a tool to collect opinions, perceptions, and feelings about the coaching model the school staff has recently traversed.

Receiving critical feedback is never easy; however, if the team requires teachers to look inward and reflect on their instructional

beliefs, paradigms, and practices, it necessitates ALT members do the same. The “walk the talk” approach is an essential component of the coaching process, with ALT staff attending recess supervision, observing lunchtime interactions, or meeting the student at bus arrival. The Alternative Learning Team has continuously evolved, searching for new ways to connect with teams, collect feedback, and meet individualized teacher and student needs. From Heifetz and Linsky’s balcony view,¹ the ALT structure reimagines student behaviors as an entry point or vehicle for adult and team learning. It is a shared experience that holds the potential to open doors to transformed ways of thinking, acting, and adult life-long learning. One student, one program, at a time. ■

Dr. Cody Edwards is the Associate Superintendent of Student Services, Tracy Hensel is the Superintendent, and Chelsea Hallick is the Coordinator of Diverse Learning Services of Medicine Hat Public School Division.

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Learning on the Move

By Kelly Ehalt and Jim Taplin, East Central Alberta Catholic School Division

East Central Alberta Catholic School Division (ECCS) takes pride in its unique approach to education, bringing the classroom to our students through the Career Technology Foundations and Career Technology Studies (CTF/CTS) mobile trailer. This innovative method has engaged our students in hands-on learning activities and paves the way for their future career choices. The successful implementation of this initiative is a testament to the untapped potential of a mobile learning lab.

The opportunity to engage students in relevant hands-on activities is a fantastic reality when educating within a mobile learning lab. Hands-on learning increases motivation, provides real-world opportunities, expands student interests, facilitates retention, and improves academic performance. The real impact of

hands-on style learning is that it expands student interests and is appropriate for all age groups. Students enjoy being in the 'driver's seat' of their knowledge, which provides other ways of knowing that is different from traditional classroom learning methodologies.

The CTF/CTS mobile lab, purchased in 2019, has proven to be a versatile tool, serving as a classroom on wheels. It offers junior and senior high students various subjects, including an introduction to carpentry, small engine mechanics, leather working, sewing, and drone programming. The labs are tailored to our teachers' experiences, abilities, and certifications, enriching the trimester-based schedule in Castor, Stettler, and Provost schools.

From a logistical standpoint, the mobile learning lab is a 53-foot-long trailer with two slide-outs, which, when

fully expanded, create a 1,000-square-foot classroom. It is wheelchair accessible and has internal heating and cooling systems, single and three-phase electrical capability, and six collapsible aluminum tables. The trailer also features six working stations, accommodating up to 24 students, enough space to ensure a comfortable and conducive learning environment.

We also wish to inform you about the essential considerations involved in hosting a mobile learning lab. Schools must have paved parking pads and accessible electrical hookup locations near the trailer. The provision of these foundational site requirements typically incurs costs ranging between 80 to 100,000 dollars. Annually, the trailer is relocated twice, with each move costing approximately six thousand dollars. This expense covers services such as electrical connection/disconnection, coordination of set-up and



Career Technology Foundations and Career Technology Studies mobile learning lab. Photos courtesy of Kelly Ehalt.



The Career Technology Foundations students working.

to the mobile learning lab's benefits for the school and its wider community are worth reading.

Successes

One of the greatest successes of ECCS is its capability to offer CTF/CTS options that assist in maintaining rural school sustainability. The ability to provide additional courses assists with offering a more comprehensive range of options. The need for tradespeople within the current realities of our province has never been higher. Many businesses are seeking tradespeople within a plethora of occupations. Through local survey feedback, students and parents appreciate the additional courses and the possibilities they provide. We are also pleased with the fact that Dual Credit courses can be facilitated, and this also provides students with college or university credit possibilities. Career exploration, local community context, working alongside community agencies within the lab, and general creation of excitement for programming possibilities are highlights. Also worth mentioning is that the mobile lab reduces the need for facility space usage within brick-and-mortar schools.

Challenges

It would be remiss if there were no mention of the challenges of the mobile learning lab. Careful consideration needs to be given to the financial sustainability of the trailer. Budget costs for the maintenance, transport, equipment supply, and

upkeep of the equipment are sometimes necessary and can be expensive. Another critical challenge is finding teachers with the confidence, knowledge, and skills to offer courses. In today's reality, finding certified teachers who specialize in providing CTF/CTS courses can often be difficult. Commonly, staff members must be called upon to give options for students to enroll.

Opportunities

The mobile learning lab creates numerous possibilities within each community. Opportunities include involving outside agencies, bringing in trade representatives, and collaborative working relations with local businesses and other interest groups. Town events such as school showcases, corporate sponsorships, and trade recognition days are great ways to build school and community connections.

Conclusion

Implementing the CTF/CTS mobile learning lab has been a tremendous success for the division and, most importantly, the students we serve. Providing educational experiences that inspire and promote student interests, abilities, and talents is a tremendous responsibility and a wonderful gift. If you wish to learn more, please feel free to contact us. ■

Kelly Ehalt is the Deputy Superintendent, and Jim Taplin is the Superintendent for East Central Alberta Catholic School Division.

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Empowering Students:

Bridging the Skills Gap through Hands-On Education

By Helmut Kaiser and Greg Masterson, Calgary Catholic School District

In today's rapidly evolving world, equipping students with the technical skills and hands-on experience required to thrive in the workforce is more important than ever. The Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) recognizes this need and has taken proactive steps to prepare its students for meaningful careers. Through a valuable collaboration with the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT), Olds College, The Educational Partnership Foundation (TEPF), and the Canadian Welding Bureau (CWB), the district offers students opportunities that go beyond traditional classroom learning.

These partnerships not only enhance students' technical abilities but also helps to bridge the skills gap in industries that are crucial to Alberta's economy.

The power of collaboration

The collaboration between CCSD, SAIT, TEPF, and the CWB is built on a shared commitment to student success and workforce readiness. Each partner brings unique expertise and resources to the table,

creating a comprehensive program that addresses both the educational and practical needs of students.

SAIT, a renowned technical institute, provides state-of-the-art facilities and industry-standard equipment, ensuring that students receive training that is both current and relevant. SAIT's instructors, who are experts in their fields, offer mentorship and guidance, helping students develop the skills necessary for success in technical careers.

Our students not only benefit from SAIT instructors, but our construction teachers who support our students are provided with professional growth opportunities to



ensure currency of skills and safe practices to maximize learning opportunities for our students. This involves training in safe use of equipment, equipment maintenance, and carpentry skills and techniques at the SAIT campus.

The Educational Partnership Foundation plays a crucial role in facilitating the partnership. TEPF's mission is to create and support educational initiatives that prepare students for the workforce. By connecting schools with industry partners, TEPF ensures that students have access to the tools and opportunities they need to succeed.

Another organisation that CCSD partners with, the Canadian Welding Bureau, as a national accreditation body, ensures that the welding programs meet industry standards. In addition to providing teacher training and ticketing so that more teachers can offer early exposure to introductory welding in Grades 8 and 9, the CWB's involvement also guarantees that students not only learn the necessary technical skills but also gain certifications that are recognized across the country. This certification is a significant advantage for students as they transition from school to the workforce.

Bridging the gap between education and employment

One of the most significant benefits of this partnership is the practical, hands-on experience that students gain. In many educational settings, there is a gap between what is taught in the classroom and the skills required in the workplace. This partnership seeks to close that gap by providing students with real-world experience that is directly applicable to their future careers.

Students participating in the program have the opportunity to work with the same equipment and materials they would encounter in a professional setting. This exposure to industry-standard tools and techniques is invaluable, as it allows students to develop a deep understanding of the skills they are learning. Moreover, the hands-on nature of the program ensures that students are not just learning in theory but are also able to apply their knowledge in practical situations.

For example, TEPF offers our students a range of hands-on exploratory courses in conjunction with local trades organizations

including the boilermakers, ironworkers, carpentry trades, pipe trades, electrical trades, insulators (heat and frost) and culinary arts. TEPF provides these exceptional hands-on opportunities at no cost to CCSD and our students.

Additionally, hands-on, experiential Dual Credit offerings with SAIT include pre-employment carpentry, welding, pipe fitting, foundations in culinary trades, Health Care Career Essentials, and Pharmacy Assistant.

One additional partner, Olds College, through their Veterinary Technical Assistant (VTA) program, students are provided the opportunity to experience working alongside veterinary professionals, animal health technicians, and shelter staff at the college and the VCA Calgary Animal Referral and Emergency Care facility. Here theoretical knowledge is translated into real-world, practical experiences.

In partnership with CWB, CCSD offers a yearly weeklong "Mind Over Matter" summer welding camp for Grade 9 students to promote interest in further pursuing welding at the high school level.

By working on actual projects and receiving feedback from experienced professionals, students can hone their skills in a way that traditional classroom learning cannot provide.

Ensuring student safety and preparedness

Safety is a top priority in any technical field, and this partnership places a strong emphasis on teaching students the importance of personal protective equipment (PPE). Through partnership with CWB and the Calgary Construction Association (CAA), funding is provided for students to remove barriers to participation. Students are provided with PPE such as steel-toed boots and safety glasses which they keep and can use as they pursue further training and employment in their trade.

Providing students with PPE not only ensures their safety during training but also instills in them a culture of safety that will be crucial throughout their careers. Understanding how to properly use and maintain PPE is an essential skill in many technical fields, and by making this a fundamental part of the training program, the partnership is helping to prepare students for the realities of the workplace.

Preparing students for meaningful careers

The ultimate goal of these multi-faceted partnerships is to prepare students for meaningful and rewarding careers. By providing them with the technical skills, hands-on experience, and industry certifications they need, these collaborative efforts are opening doors to a wide range of career opportunities.

Welding, for example, is a field with significant demand in Canada. Skilled welders are essential in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and energy, all of which are vital to the country's economy. By earning a CWB certification, students are not only gaining a valuable credential but are also positioning themselves for success in a field with strong job prospects.

Furthermore, the skills learned through this program are transferable to other technical careers. Whether students choose to pursue a career in welding or explore other technical fields, the foundation they build through this partnership will serve them well.

Addressing the skills gap

One of the most pressing challenges facing Canada's workforce today is the skills gap. As industries become more specialized and technology continues to advance, there is an increasing demand for workers with technical skills. Unfortunately, there are not always enough qualified individuals to meet this demand.

By partnering with SAIT, TEPF, the CWB and Olds College, the Calgary Catholic School District is actively working to address this issue. The program not only prepares students for careers in high-demand fields but also helps to ensure that the workforce is equipped with the skills needed to support economic growth.

The Calgary Catholic Schools district values its collaboration for student success with our partners as we collectively help students gain the practical skills and knowledge that will set them up for meaningful careers in the future. ■

Helmut Kaiser is the Director, Learning Services, and Greg Masterson is the Supervisor, Learning Services at Calgary Catholic School District.

Post-Secondary Partnership to Power Rural Student Experience

By Michelle Webb and James Trodden, Buffalo Trail Public Schools

The longstanding partnership between Buffalo Trail Public Schools (BTPS) and Lakeland College has become a cornerstone of the robust learning opportunities offered across our rural school division. This partnership is providing students with unparalleled opportunities to excel in both trades and university pathways. This collaboration has allowed BTPS to offer a wide variety of Career and Technology Studies (CTS) programs, encompassing Mechanics, Carpentry, Welding, Interior Design, Electrical, Hair Styling, and Esthetics, to students in Grades 10 to 12.

For Grade 12 students, the partnership offers even more substantial opportunities. They can participate in two university transfer courses in Psychology and Sociology, effectively bridging the gap between high school and university. Additionally, the Dual Credit program provides over 300 hours of Year One Apprenticeship Training in specialized fields like welding, automotive technician, and carpentry. The success of this program is evident, as students are well-prepared to take the year one AIT exam, which further solidifies their future career prospects.

As shared by Superintendent Michelle Webb, “We’re fortunate to have Lakeland Community College within our division. They provide robust career and technology training to students in Grades 10 to 12.”

This sentiment is echoed by Board Chair Kara Jackson. “Lakeland College provides our students with valuable opportunities to enroll in diverse courses, enhancing their academic and career prospects,” she states. The richness of the partnership has Lakeland invested in the success of students and the value of the program.

“We are proud of our ongoing collaboration with Buffalo Trail Public Schools to provide opportunities for high school



Students who are a part of the Lakeland College Dual Credit Automotive Service Technician program for 2025. Photo courtesy of James Trodden.

students in our region to explore their interests and maximize their opportunities,” says Dave King, Dean of Lakeland’s School of Trades and Technology.

As a rural school division, the challenge of providing access to specialized facilities and expert instruction underscores the critical importance of partnerships with post-secondary institutions. These collaborations are not merely beneficial; they are essential in bridging the gap between limited local resources and the comprehensive educational experiences students require. The involvement of well-equipped facilities, journeyman instructors, and university professors ensures that students receive a level of education and practical experience that would otherwise be unattainable in a rural setting.

Furthermore, as we prepare students for life beyond the K-12 system, these partnerships facilitate a seamless transition to post-secondary education by offering them an early exposure to the rigor and expectations of higher learning. The unprecedented quality of these experiences fosters a supportive environment that equips students with the



A student participating in the welding program.

confidence and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of post-secondary education successfully.

At the heart of this partnership lies the invaluable learning opportunities and enriching experiences that students gain. The true impact of this collaboration is best reflected in the voices of the students themselves, who have shared a range of insights about their experiences. One student noted, “I got to be with like-minded kids, which helped to motivate me, and I got to do something that I enjoy.” Another remarked, “I received an actual college-level education with actual college instructors while still in high school – pretty cool.” Others highlighted personal growth, with one student sharing, “I have learned a lot and discovered how to balance my life and focus on what I need to do instead of what I want to do.” Another student expressed academic achievement and future aspirations: “I completed Psychology with an 80 per cent and felt as if my writing really developed throughout the course. I would love to maintain or push the limits of this skill, so I would like to take any other Dual Credit course because they really help you



Carpentry students in action.

to focus on the small things you will need in future situations.”

One of the three division priorities at BTPS is building strong collaborations with the outcome that students benefit from strong collaborations with families, our rural communities and external partners. The partnership

with Lakeland College is the power that drives the experience for students. ■

Superintendent Michelle Webb is the Superintendent, and James Trodden is the Assistant Superintendent of Learning for Buffalo Trail Public Schools.



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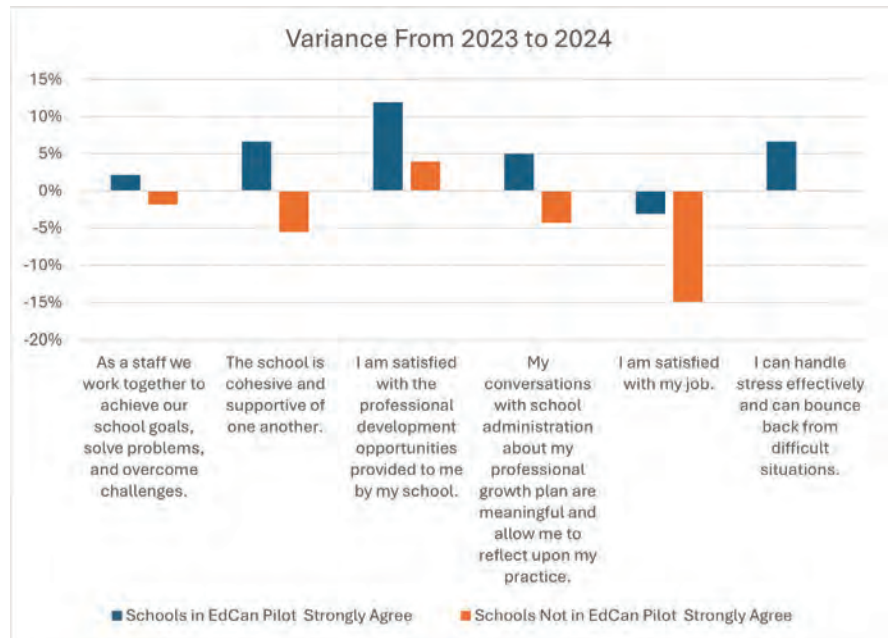
By Dr. Wilco Tymensen, Horizon School Division Superintendent; and Kathleen Lane, EdCan Network Executive Director



Meaningful change requires new approaches in and out of the classroom. Photo and graphic courtesy of Kathleen Lane.

In the last decade, reported rates of mental health problems including anxiety and depression have increased.¹ Within Alberta, teachers and school leaders are reporting increased rates of mental health problems.^{2,3} Extensive efforts to enhance public understanding about mental health have reduced stigma,⁴ improved mental health literacy⁵ and increased help-seeking intentions,⁶ but have not necessarily improved people's mental health. In fact, there are some studies that would suggest that "awareness efforts are leading some individuals to interpret and report milder forms of distress as mental health problems."⁷ This may lead to some individuals experiencing increased symptoms, because "labelling distress as a mental health problem can affect an individual's self-concept and behaviour in a way that is ultimately self-fulfilling."⁷

Meaningful change required new approaches. The common practice of sharing information about research findings is proving to be ineffective for changing teacher's behavior.⁸ People are understandably resistant to research that is critical of what they have been doing,⁹ does not agree with their expectations, values, and experiences,¹⁰ or threatens the stability of cherished beliefs and viewpoints.¹¹ Reluctance may also be due to a lack of actual support



Focusing on principal well-being impacts staff.

for implementing change. Given the complex nature of wellness, we can draw upon complexity theory as a way to understand how systems can learn and co-create change more effectively given that "successful and sustainable improvement can never be done to or even for teachers. It can only ever be achieved by and with them."¹² This applies at all levels of our education system.

Complexity theory is premised upon the view that our reality is socially constructed. It assumes that an individual's constructs are influenced by his or her context, and are subject to influence by prior knowledge, peers, learning experiences, and interactions with others. Given this understanding, and recognizing the strong connection between student and staff well-being and the important role principals have in shaping the school environment, the Horizon School Division (HSD) and Prairie Rose Public Schools (PRPS) partnered with EdCan Network to create a

generative listening experience for our principals to answer the question: could we improve the mental health and well-being of students by creating collaborative professional learning opportunities for principals?¹³

Our experience showed that principal well-being was enhanced when they were engaged within collaborative social networks built around common objectives and trusting relationships. We found that these social networks allowed new knowledge to be shared, interpreted, reframed, and implemented which led to changes in practice and enhanced principal and teacher wellness.

We approached the work with the mindset that wellness is a shared responsibility that can be improved with the aid of others, and we wanted the experience to be attentive to context, connections, and a with focus on listening, participating, and engaging, as improvement is not as simple as instructing about optimal practices.¹⁴ Our project was broken into two

phases. Phase one included the co-design of a series of six full-day professional learning modules. It quickly became apparent that the decision to co-design the program was significant. Principals participating in the co-design process shared comments such as, “*This is by far the best PD I have attended where you leave inspired*” and “*I always walk away with a renewed sense of well-being and a revived energy for this work and its importance in education.*”¹³

We found that the more opportunities for input and genuine involvement people have, the more engaged they were. Since participation was optional, we recognize that there may be self-selection bias, however our findings showed that principal participation in this project was positively linked to improvements in teacher well-being.

A review of the provincial assurance data suggests that the one-year timeframe was not long enough for these results to be reflected at the student level. Given how complex well-being is, the fact that this trend is not yet reflected in the student data is not surprising.

As we continue to focus on wellness, we know that wellness doesn’t improve by accident, we must intentionally focus on it. We know that we need human-driven solutions embodied by our school communities. In addition to building capacity, co-design creates opportunities for involvement and influence, which are two workplace factors known to foster well-being; not just as an outcome but via the process itself, which in turn, sustains this important work. ■

Dr. Wilco Tymensen is the Horizon School Division Superintendent; and Kathleen Lane is the EdCan Network Executive Director.

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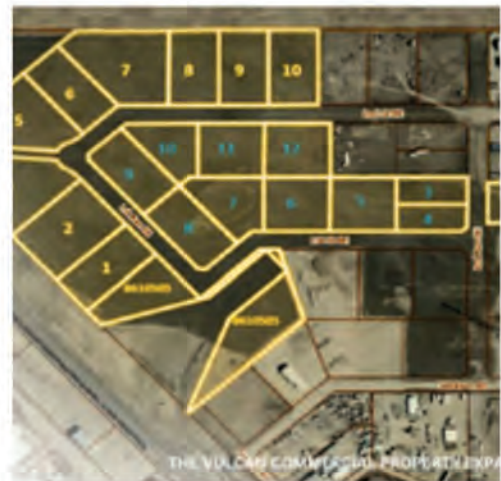
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The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is an employee life and health trust governed by 10 Trustees. It offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for more than 64,000 covered members and their dependants.

At ASEBP, fostering future-ready students goes hand-in-hand with supporting education workers and the communities they work in. From a covered member's first year to their well-deserved retirement, we are committed to promoting, protecting, improving and sustaining their health and that of their dependants. Speaking of dependants, many covered members have children who may grow up to be future educators or school employees. This means our comprehensive benefits must not only support current needs but also invest in the next generation of educational leaders.

Whether it be picking out their first pair of glasses or visiting the dentist for an annual cleaning, ASEBP's holistic health benefits, programs, and services are there so education workers can focus on the vital role they play in students' lives. ASEBP highlights these invaluable contributions each November during its Education Worker Recognition Week, when community members are encouraged to share a



By Jocelyn-Plakas Lock, ASEBP

story or recognition message on ASEBP's social media channels. It is always inspiring to read through submissions and see the impact education workers are making in their classrooms, schools, and communities.

Covered members may experience mental health challenges throughout their life, emphasizing the need for proactive measures and support systems to promote well-being and resilience. For the last several years, mental health has been the top reason for taking a sick leave of absence among Alberta education workers.

In January 2025, ASEBP will enhance current return-to-work services for employees

including coordination of medical assessments and treatment services, such as physiotherapy, mental health support, and substance use treatment. By supporting employees earlier in their leave, ASEBP aims to reduce Extended Disability Benefit conversion and recurrence. This enables employers to retain their highly skilled workforce and more accurately plan for staffing needs.

Employees receiving support earlier in their leave are connected to community-based health practitioners and medical specialists, whenever possible, to get rehabilitation support to help them recover, heal, and live a full life. Leaning on their ASEBP benefits and other supports can also help ease some of the financial weight of recovery and assist with restoring their well-being.

ASEBP recently developed a series of return-to-work supports for employers, supervisors, and employees, available on the Employer Services Portal. These materials focus on the positive role employers and supervisors can play in an employee's recovery and return to the workplace. Employee checklists offer considerations at different points of their leave, including when they are preparing to return to work and how to ease back into a work routine.

ASEBP's existing Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) connects covered members and dependants with a network of over 100 different types of practitioners in

work, health, and life. This includes clinical mental health professionals, registered nurses and dietitians, occupational therapists, adult and pediatric sleep coaches, legal and financial experts, and more. The program is designed to reduce out-of-pocket expenses for mental health support services and provides below market rates for psychological services.

Additionally, our Workplace Wellness Consultants work directly with leaders and wellness champions in their respective schools to assess, plan, and grow employee wellness. They provide tools and resources, facilitate connections with other organizations, share

ASEBP health data specific to each employer, and assist in strategy development and implementation for healthy workplace culture.

As education workers set their sights on retirement, ASEBP's Early Retiree benefits and MyRetiree Plan recognize that everyone's benefit needs are different and the importance of providing choice. During the spring, ASEBP hosts a retirement seminar and information sessions to support attendees through their retirement planning journey and prepare for the transition.

ASEBP is also dedicated to nurturing the communities that covered members and

students live and work in. Through employee programs, we support a variety of organizations including Tools for Schools, Food for Thought, Big Brothers and Sisters of Canada, Youth Empowerment and Support Services, the Canadian Mental Health Association, and more.

Developing future-ready students begins with the health of education workers and each stage of a covered member's personal and workplace wellness journey is important to ASEBP. Our benefit plans and services cover the full spectrum of health while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Plan so we can be responsive to the needs of Alberta's education sector for many years to come. ■

Jocelyn Plakas-Lock is the Acting Chief Executive Officer at the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP), overseeing daily operations of the organization and ensuring its alignment with the strategic direction. She has more than 25 years working in the not-for-profit sector, with 13 of those years being in the benefits industry specifically. Jocelyn holds a Bachelor of Science with Specialization in Psychology from the University of Alberta and a Master of Social Science (Human Services) from the Queensland University of Technology.

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