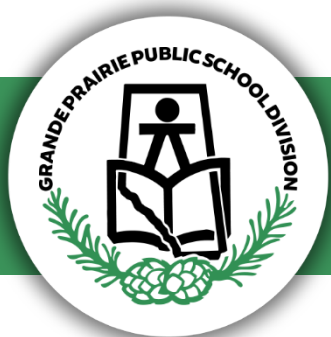


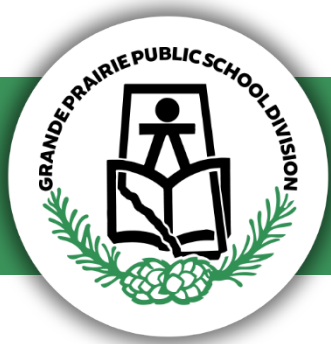


Grande Prairie Public School Division

Leading the Way: Visionary Leadership for System-Wide Impact

Fall CASS Conference

November 2025



Grande Prairie Public School Division



SLQS Visionary Leadership Leading Learning

LQS

**Embodying Visionary Leadership
Providing Instructional Leadership
Developing Leadership Capacity**



Participants will leave the session with strategies that will strengthen:

- ***Visionary leadership***
- ***Reflective dialogue***
- ***Influence, relationships, and continuous improvement***
- ***Collective leadership capabilities***
- ***Coherence, innovation, and shared ownership***
- ***Vision and impact***

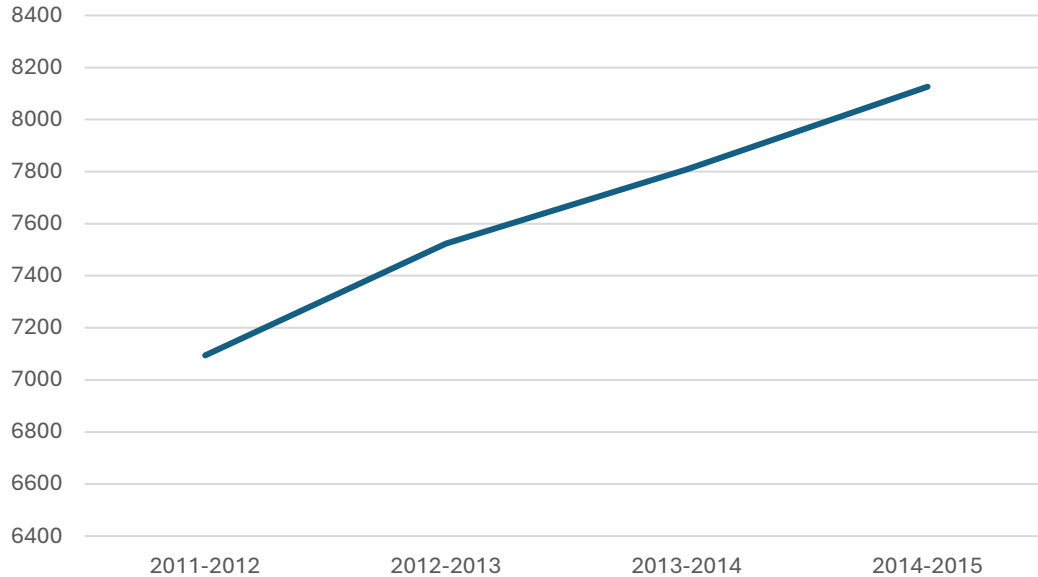


OUR ORIGIN STORY

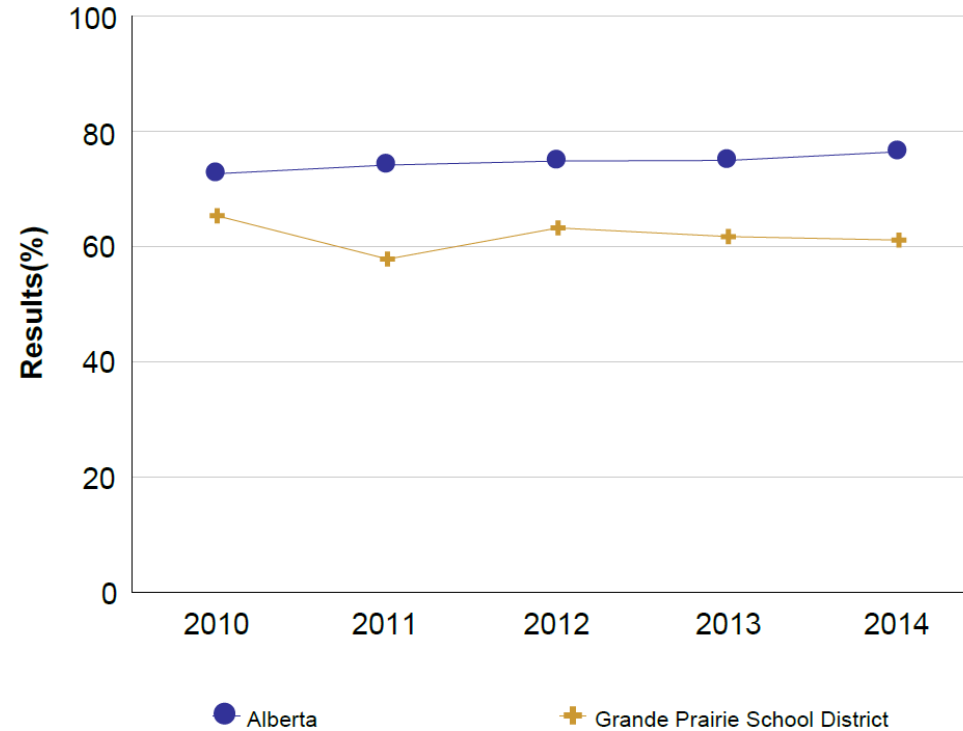


2015 – 2016 in GPPSD

GPPSD Growth from 2011-2012 to 2014-2015



3 Year Completion (%)



15% Enrollment Growth in 4 years

3 Year HS Completion 14% Below Province

High #s of New Teachers, New Staff, New Administration

School Capacity Issues

Stakeholder Confidence Shaky



December, 2015

As the new Superintendent in December 2015, I Wanted Consistent....

- **Improvement, in all areas**
- **Strategy, Structures, and Processes**
- **Understanding of Decision-Making**
- **Focus on instruction**
- **Confidence in our system**



Characteristics of High Performing School Districts

A Review of Empirical Evidence

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Ken Leithwood

1. Establish a broadly shared mission, vision and goals
2. Provide a coherent instructional guidance
3. Build capacity and commitment of staff to use evidence to inform decision making
4. Create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes
5. Provide job-embedded professional learning
6. Align budget, policy, procedure, etc. with division mission, vision, and goals.
7. Use a comprehensive performance management system for leadership development
8. Advocate for, and support, a policy-oriented board of trustees
9. Nurture productive relationships (internal system and school, parents, community groups, ministry)

Prepared for the College of Alberta
School Superintendents,
September 2008



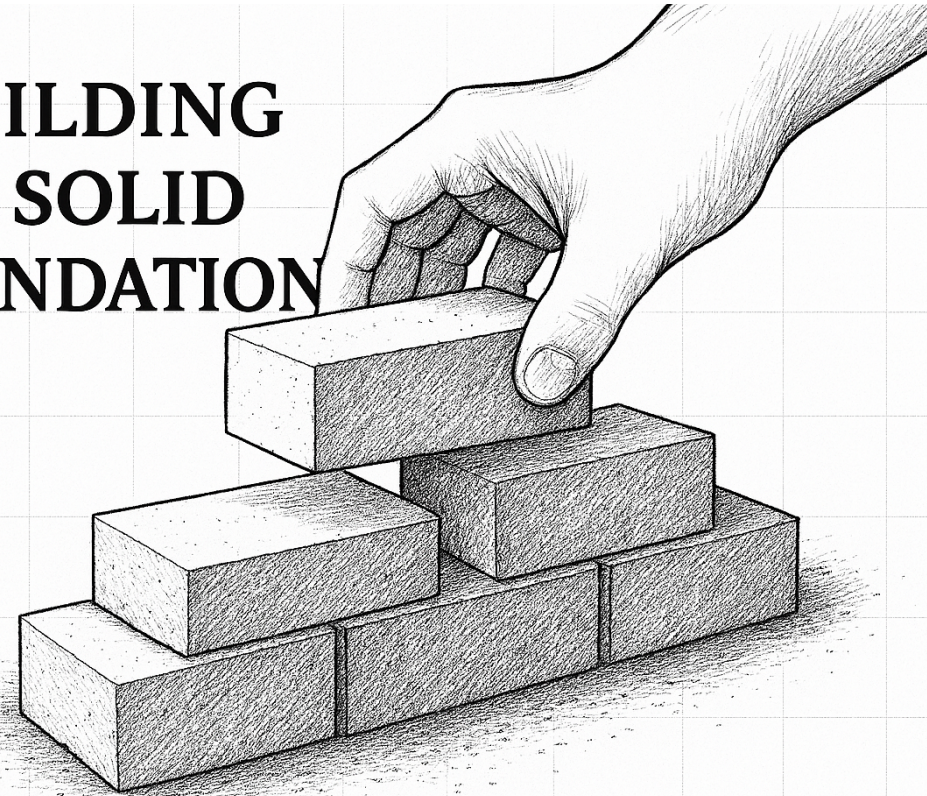
<https://www.edcan.ca/articles/leading-high-performing-school-districts/>



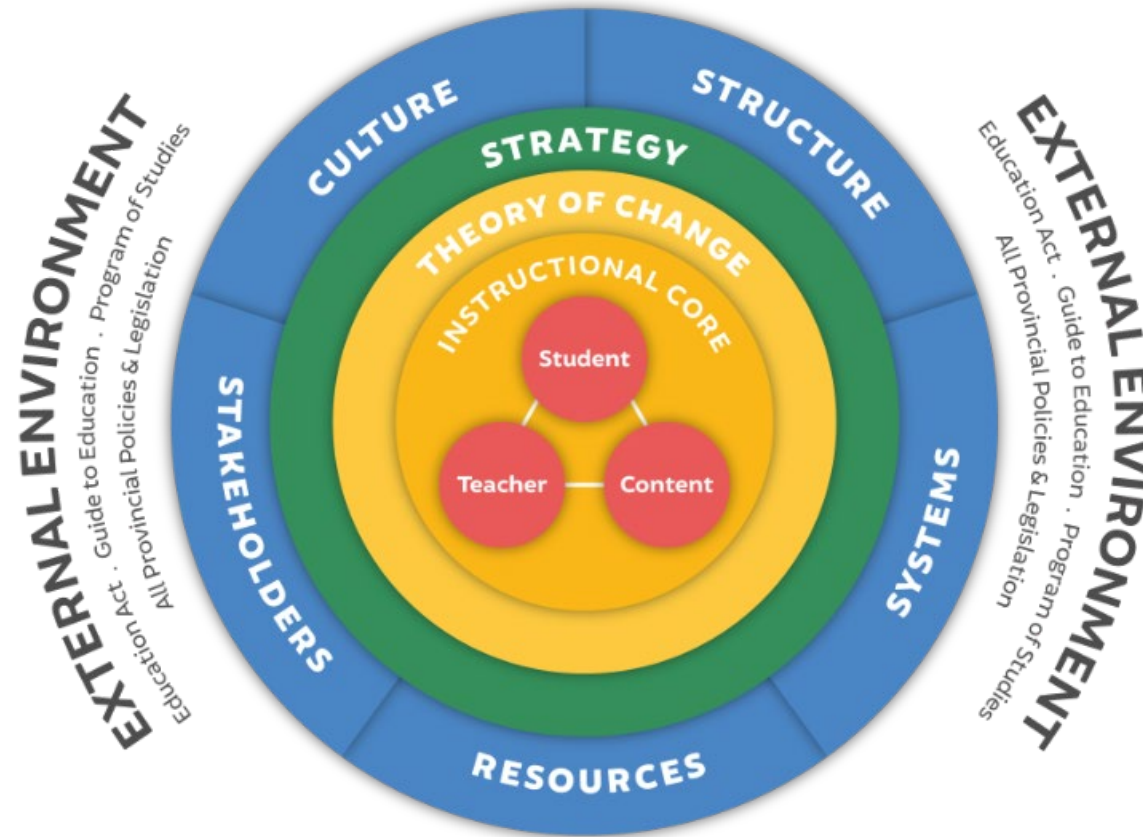
THE FOUNDATION OUR STRATEGY IS BUILT UPON

1. GPPSD is an urban school division that makes it easy for system leaders to be in schools
2. The School Year Calendar has evolved over time and provides 1 Professional Learning Day per month for school leaders to work deliberately with teachers and teacher to learn with teachers.
3. An Alberta Research Network Grant in 2017 built our foundation for collaborative inquiry
4. GPPSD has a policy-oriented board of trustees who work well with system leadership
5. Over time we have developed a high level of clarity about leadership roles and purpose

BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION

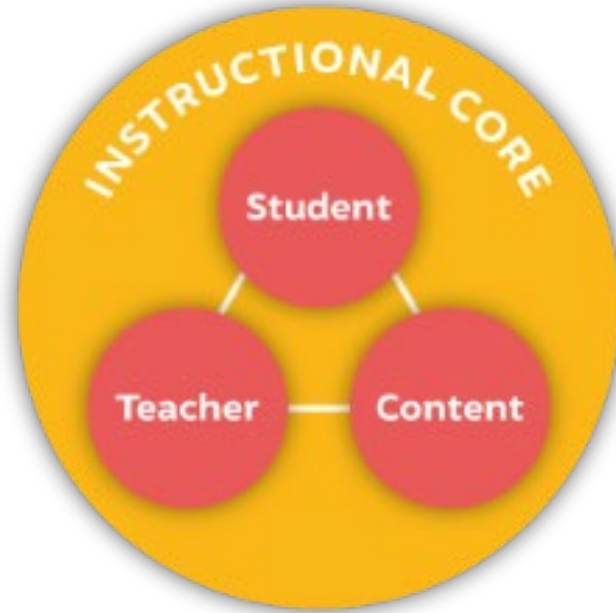


Coherence Framework

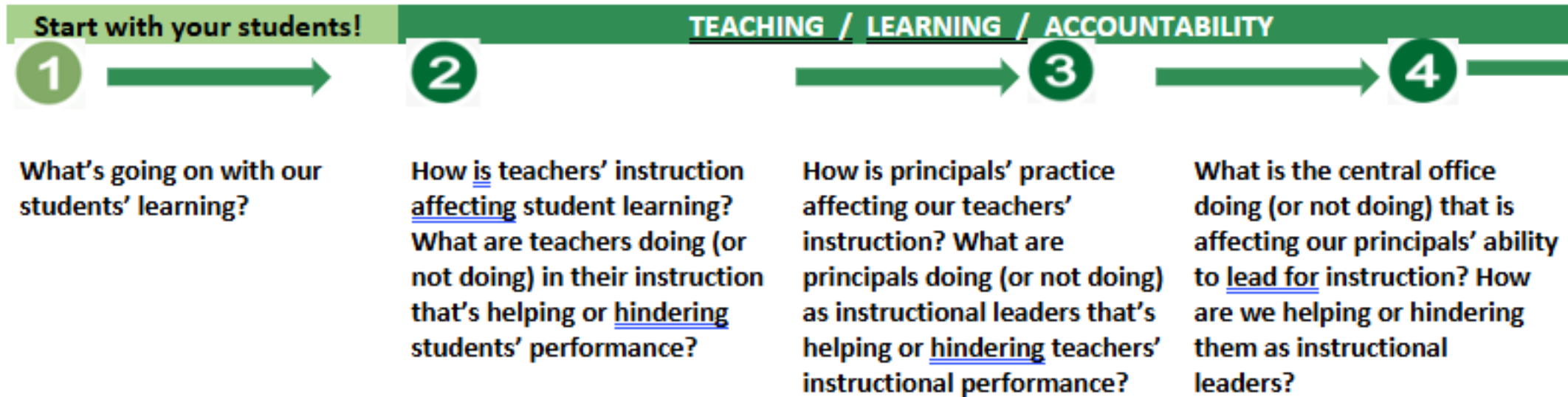


This Coherence Framework is based on work by the Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University (<https://pelp.fas.harvard.edu/coherence-framework>)





Theory of Action



Theory of Action

THEORY OF ACTION STORY (constantly being tested, revised and refined):

Implementation of SLQS/LQS	Implementation of LQS	Implementation of TQS	
"IF the central office does X →	then principals will be able to do Y →	which will help teachers to Z →	which will help students learn at higher levels."



Reflect on a student learning problem of practice in your own division

- **What do you want to impact for students?**
- **What will your teachers need to be doing to actualize that impact?**
- **What do your school leaders need to be able to impact teachers to impact students?**
- **What do you as a system leader(s) need to do?**



Recipe for_____;

Name of Dish_____;

From the Kitchen of_____;

Serves_____;

Ingredients_____”



Recipe for: *Impacting Teacher's Planning for the Diversity in their Classrooms;*

Name of Dish: Quality Teaching: Supporting All Learners;

From the Kitchen of: Inclusive Learning;

Serves: ALL Administrators, ALL teachers, ALL students

Ingredients:

Understanding Needs of the Learners (classroom profiles)

Teachers who can design lessons responding to the needs of the learners.(UDL)

Instructional leaders who can support teachers improving instruction through supporting planning, accessing guiding tools (OLF Companion Document: Planning) and support personnel (Division curriculum coordinator/Educational Programmers) they require to plan to meet the needs of the learner

System Leaders who prioritize the time, learning opportunities and space for the school leaders to become quality instructional leaders.



Recipe for_____;

Name of Dish_____;

From the Kitchen of_____;

Serves_____;

Ingredients_____



What if your great recipe doesn't work?

- Resistance?
- Barriers?
- Not seeing change?

It is important to be able to determining at what level to intervene.



Being-Knowing-Doing Approach



BEING and IDENTITY

The most powerful ways to change behaviors is to change identity (Costa and Garmston). Who we believe we are in relation to others, tasks, and all situations directly influences our perception, attitude, sense-making decision making, and behavioral choices. Identity is the container that holds everything!



Who am I?



Dimension

Being

Core Question

Who am I becoming?

Focus

Identity, values,
purpose, mindset

Outcome

Integrity, authenticity,
purpose



BEING- Identity Reflection



When you think about your role as a **system leader**, who have you been, and who are you now?

What is the experience those who you lead as a **system leader** have in your presence each day?



Knowing- Professional Expertise and Knowledge

Dimension	Core Question	Focus	Outcome
Knowing	<i>What do I understand?</i>	Knowledge, theory, concepts	Understanding and clarity



Doing

Dimension

Doing

Core Question

What actions am I taking?

Focus

Skills,
performance,
behaviors

Outcome

Effective action
and competence



Dimension

Being

Knowing

Doing

In Practice

Sees themselves as a lifelong learner and role model.

Understands pedagogy, curriculum design, and learning theory.

Designs engaging lessons, gives feedback, manages classrooms.



Determining where to intervene:

Step 1- Identify the Problem Level

Level

Environment

Behavior

Capabilities

Beliefs & Values

Identity

Purpose

Diagnostic Clues

“I can’t do it here / with these people.”

“I keep doing the wrong thing.”

“I don’t know how to do it.”

“I don’t think it will work.” or “It’s not important.”

“That’s not who I am.”

“It doesn’t fit with my life’s meaning.”



Determining where to intervene:

Step 2- Choose the Intervention Level

- **If the problem is at a lower level**, sometimes changing the *higher level* (beliefs, identity, purpose) has a stronger and more lasting effect.

For example:

- If someone struggles to exercise (behavior), working on their *belief* (“I’m not athletic”) may be more effective than just scheduling workouts.
- **If the problem is at a higher level**, start with reflection and coaching — not just skills training.
For instance, identity-level conflict (“I’m not a leader”) can’t be fixed with just behavior change.



Directors of Schools

Our identity has adapted to meet the needs of those we serve.



Nested Levels of Learning and change

DILTS MODEL – LOGICAL LEVELS OF CHANGE



Source: <https://www.discoveryinaction.com/au/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/DIAModels-Logical-Levels-of-Change-Dilts.pdf>



Identity: Who are we as Directors?

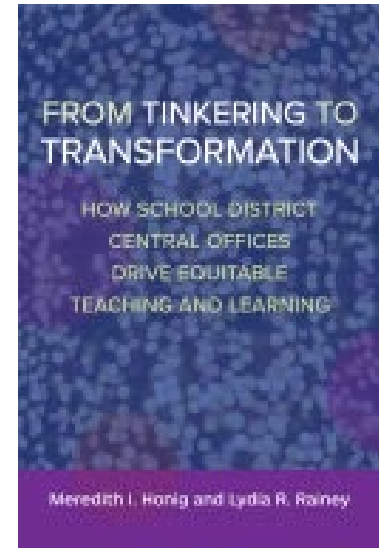
- Who are we, who have we been, who do we want to be?

An org chart is important; it doesn't define our identity.



From Tinkering to Transformation

How school district central offices drive equitable teaching and learning.



Your role is to **develop principal capacity** to function as **instructional leaders** in their schools. Which means that you need to **give feedback, and coach people**. You need to know what it is that principals need to grow their instructional practice. You need to be in school to see how principals are doing these things. (Honig And Rainey, 2023 pg 97)

Who are we, who have we been, who do we want to be?



Mediating thinking....

How much time in a week are you spending coaching school leaders on matters of instructional leadership?



Nested Levels of Learning and change

DILTS MODEL – LOGICAL LEVELS OF CHANGE



Source: <https://www.discoveryinaction.com/au/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/DIAModels-Logical-Levels-of-Change-Dilts.pdf>



Being Adaptive: What?

Adaptivity means shaping our structures around who we serve — not around what has always existed.

Library → Learning Commons

From quiet repositories of books to collaborative learning ecosystems where students co-create, inquire, and interact.



Online Book Retailer → Customer-Centric Platform

Amazon didn't stay a bookstore — it evolved to respond to human behaviour, convenience, personalization, and access.



Shifting from Portfolios to Schools

Director of Portfolio

Project / initiative focused
Expertise siloed in a domain
System-level coordination
Structures drive identity



Director of Schools

School / learner centered
Coaching instructional leadership
Context-responsive, not siloed
Identity clarifies the structure

"Changing form while clarifying identity"



Being Adaptive: Why?

"Changing form while clarifying identity."

Adaptivity is not drift — it is staying anchored to purpose while evolving practice. Our context and those we serve are changing; our identity must become clearer as our structures become more responsive.

🎯 Forces Driving the Need to Adapt

- Changing student needs and complexity of classrooms
- Modern expectations of instructional leadership
- Community expectations for relevance and engagement
- Accountability shifting from "programs" to student experience and outcomes



Being Adaptive: How?

Adaptivity is guided by deliberate inquiry. Identity precedes design. We begin with clarity before action.

🕒 Focusing Questions

- Who are we?
- Why are we doing this?
- Why are we doing this, this way?



Changing Roles, Clarifying Identity

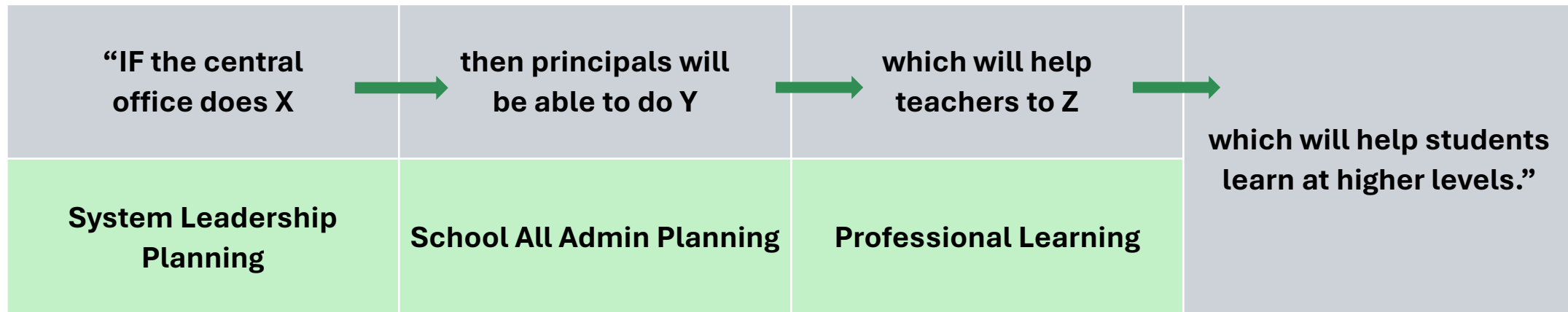
As a leader of **Instructional Leadership**, ask yourself:

Who am I, who have I been, who do I want to be?

Identity clarifies the structure.



GPPSD STRUCTURES AND PROCESS ALIGNED TO THEORY OF ACTION

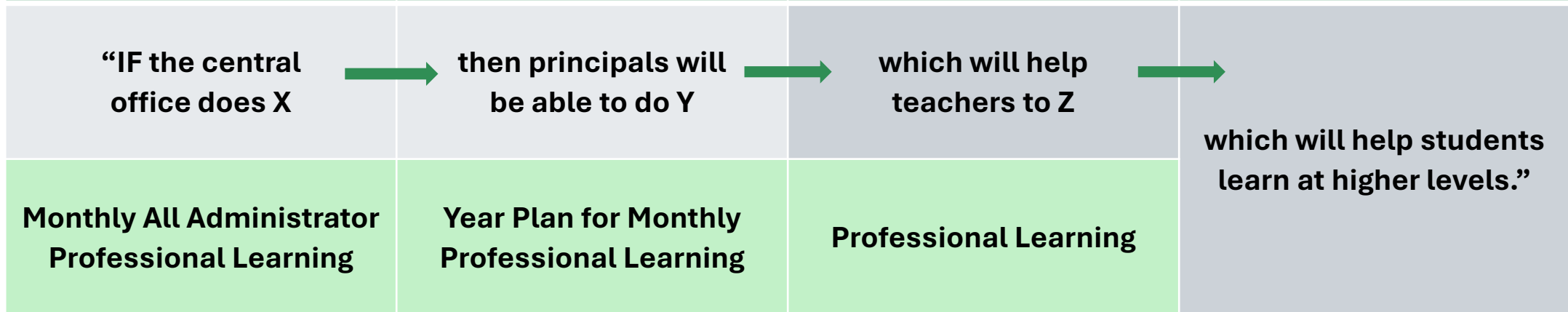


Professional Learning that will help teachers to:

- demonstrate knowledge of curriculum, the learner, responsive planning with assessment and instruction, and incorporates resources
- meet the continuum of student needs through a variety of instructional strategies
- use assessment practices that respond to student needs through planning and instruction



GPPSD STRUCTURES AND PROCESS ALIGNED TO THEORY OF ACTION



Administrator Professional Learning Year Plan

School PL Planning

Technology in Teaching & Learning

Planning & Assessment

Artificial Intelligence

Supporting Indigenous Learners

Supervision & Evaluation

Career Education

Communication

Equity of Learning and High Expectations

Administrative Procedures



Administrator Professional Learning Year Plan 2025 - 2026

	Equity of Learning & High Expectations	Teaching & Learning: Planning & Assessment	Artificial Intelligence	Technology in Teaching & Learning	Evaluation & Supervision	Communication	Indigenous Companion Document	Career Pathways	AP's	School PL Planning
Aug			*		*				*	*
Sept							*	*		*
Oct			*		*	*				*
Nov	*			Principal PM		*				*
Dec		*					*	*		*
Jan			*		*					*
Feb	*				*					*
Mar		*					*	*		*
Apr			*							*
May				*						*
June	Principals Only									

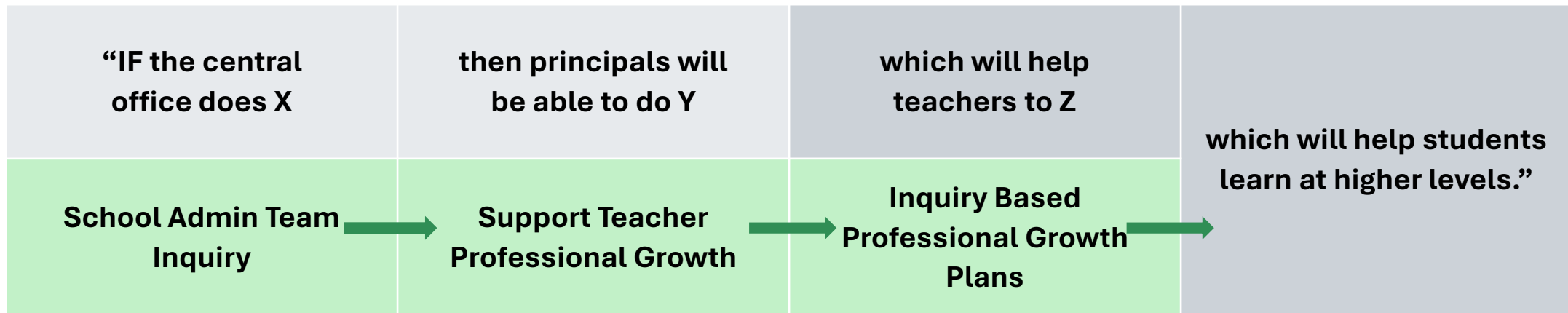
 All Admin All Day



School Based Professional Learning 2025 2026 Planning

Education Plan Priority/Outcome:					
School Education Plan Strategy	Professional Learning Focus	Timeline	Level of Learning (Being/Knowing/Doing)	Evidence Guiding the Focus	Resources & Structures to Support Teachers

GPPSD STRUCTURES AND PROCESS ALIGNED TO THEORY OF ACTION



System Leadership Collaborative Inquiry

In what ways and to what extent will the intentional actions of system leadership support school leaders to continuously improve instructional leadership practice?



School Admin Team Inquiry Focus Questions 2025 2026

Focus on OLF Implementation

In what ways will leadership's focus on the implementation of the OLF create structures and processes to increase graduation rates and course completion?

Evidence-Informed Professional Learning

In what ways and to what extent can quality teaching be supported through the analysis of student evidence and intentional selection of professional learning to meet student's needs?

Leadership Support for Planning

In what ways and to what extent will the leadership team support teacher planning to impact teacher responsiveness to student needs?

Intentional Instructional Leadership

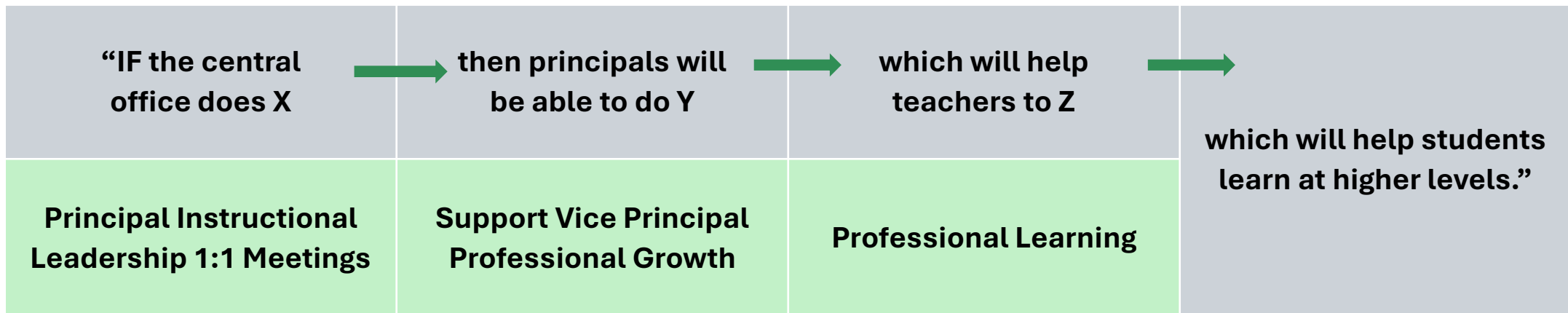
In what ways does our intentional instructional leadership strengthen quality teaching, that is informed by evidence, to ensure optimum learning for all?

Responsive Structures and Processes

In what ways does administration creating and differentiating structures and processes to support teacher responsive planning ensure optimum learning for all students?



GPPSD STRUCTURES AND PROCESS ALIGNED TO THEORY OF ACTION



GPPSD STRUCTURES AND PROCESS ALIGNED TO THEORY OF ACTION

“IF the central office does X	then principals will be able to do Y	which will help teachers to Z	which will help students learn at higher levels.”
Collaborative Development of Education Plan and Results Report	School Education Plan and Results Report	Identify their Role in Actualizing School Education Plan	
Collaborative Development of Frameworks	Implement Frameworks	Professional Learning	



Instructional Leadership Collaboration

September 16 – 18	Inquiry
October 28 – 30	Inquiry
November 18	AERR Working Meeting AM (8:30-11:00): AF, HS, GPC, IV, IC, AV, CP, DT, RS PM (1:00 - 3:30): AG, BN, RB, SW, CS, EM, GPCHS, MC, PM
December 2 – 4	Inquiry
January 22	Assurance Meeting (AG, SW, RB, IC, HS, GPC)
January 29	Assurance Meeting (AF, IV, DT, RS, AV, CP)
February 3 – 5	Inquiry
February 12	Assurance Meeting (GPCH, CS, BN, PS, EM, MC)
March 24	Ed Plan Working Meeting AM (8:30 - 11:00): AG, BN, RB, SW, CS, EM, GPCHS, PM, MC PM (1:00 - 3:30): AF, HS, GPC, IV, IC, AV, CP, DT, RS
April 21 – 23	Inquiry
May 26 – 28	Inquiry



Three Balloons

ADAPTIVE SCHOOLS

Organize & Integrate
"Summarize"



Green – a GPPSD structure or process that is similar to one in your division

Red – a new structure or process that I am curious about

Yellow – a current structure or process we could consider modifying/repurposing



3 Year Education Plan

Deepening Intentionality in Education Planning

In what ways might we engage school leaders in the development of the Division Education plan?

In what ways might our current structures be strengthened to align Education planning for schools and school leaders?

How are school leaders expected to use and execute their school plans?



Evolution of Supporting Principals

How we support the development of Ed plans has changed based on our identity shift.

- ✓ Initially, the focus was on **one-to-one engagement** between principals and the Director of System Planning;
- ✓ Subsequently, the work expanded to **small group sessions**, co-facilitated by the responsible Director and the Director of System Planning; and
- ✓ Most recently, the model has moved to **larger-scale collaborative sessions**, involving **groups of nine schools** engaged in **half-day learning and planning sessions** alongside the **Directors of Schools**.

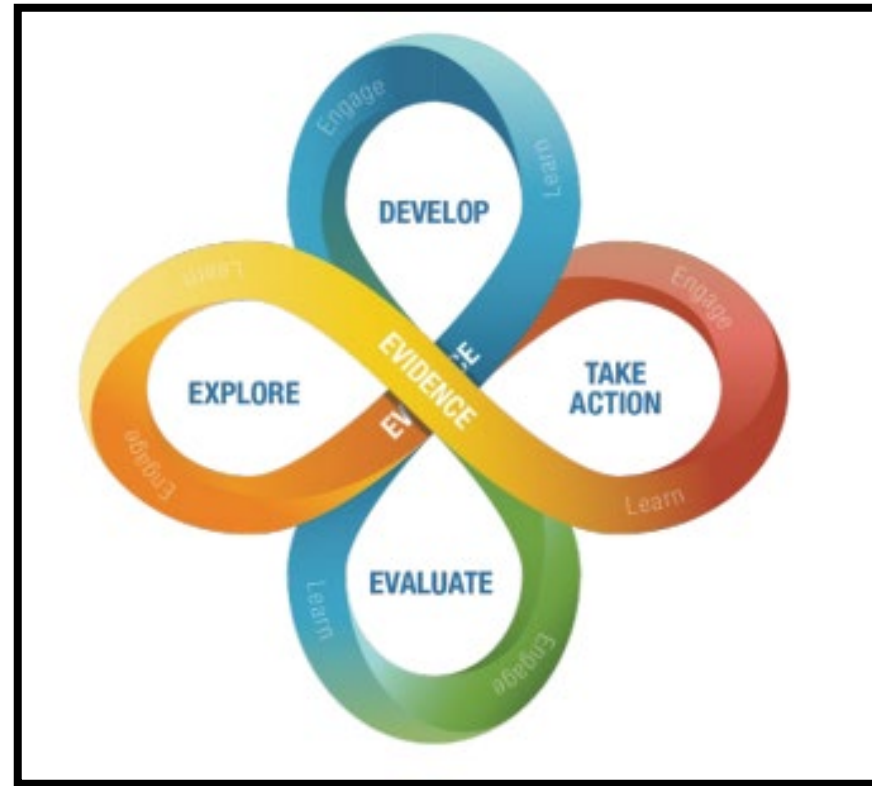


Continuous Improvement Cycle

Refinement:
revisit strategies
& evidence in
years 2 & 3

Develop Plan:
evidence & data

Monitor Progress:
revisit priorities &
outcomes-
intentional with
evidence & data



**Collaborate for
Feedback:**
school leaders

Consistent Integration of School Plans

- ✓ Collaborative Inquiry and Reflection
- ✓ Continuous Monitoring and Evidence Gathering
- ✓ Alignment Between School and Teacher Growth



Consistent Integration of School Plans

- ✓ **Collaborative Inquiry and Reflection**

The plan is central to **inquiry visits**, where school leader teams engage in **generative dialogue** about strategies, progress, and evidence of impact. These conversations foster reflection and shared understanding of effective practices.

- ✓ **Continuous Monitoring and Evidence Gathering**

- ✓ **Alignment Between School and Teacher Growth**



Consistent Integration of School Plans

- ✓ **Collaborative Inquiry and Reflection**
- ✓ **Continuous Monitoring and Evidence Gathering**
Throughout the year, the plan guides **ongoing collection and analysis of evidence**, ensuring that school leaders and their teams stay aligned with division priorities and make data-informed adjustments.
- ✓ **Alignment Between School and Teacher Growth**



Consistent Integration of School Plans

- ✓ **Collaborative Inquiry and Reflection**
- ✓ **Continuous Monitoring and Evidence Gathering**
- ✓ **Alignment Between School and Teacher Growth**
System leaders use the plan to **support principals in connecting school goals to teachers' Professional Growth Plans (PGPs)**, ensuring coherence between **individual, school, and divisional priorities** for student success.



Transformation

Our Education Plan has 3 Priorities:

Priority 1: Teaching and Learning

Outcome 1: Students will be prepared academically, socially, and emotionally to complete high school.

Our focus on quality instruction guides planning and assessment of learning. Strategies include structures and pathways to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students.

What we do:

- Professional learning focuses on curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Planning reflects the academic, social, and emotional growth of students
- Implementation of the Division Indigenous Framework improves student achievement and engagement
- Multiple pathways support high school completion

What we will see:

- Classroom, Division, and Provincial measures improve
- Diploma Exam participation rates continue to improve
- Student attendance rates improve
- High school completion rates improve

Our Education Plan has 3 Priorities:

Priority 1: Teaching and Learning

Outcome: Student success is ensured through quality teaching in optimum learning environments.

- The Optimum Learning Framework outlines expectations for responsive planning, assessment practices, and instruction, aligned to the curriculum, to support the diverse learning needs of all students
- Literacy and Numeracy Guiding Documents identify consistent practices to advance students' literacy and numeracy skills
- Teachers are supported to implement curriculum
- Intentional communication between school and families to support individual student growth and achievement

Outcome: Students are supported to succeed from early learning to high school completion and beyond.

- Multiple pathways and a continuum of supports respond to student needs to prepare them to complete high school
- Students are taught to self-reflect, set goals, and persevere to increase their preparedness to transition through their schooling
- Students and families are provided opportunities to explore career pathways and develop their preparedness to transition to life beyond high school

Outcome: Students who self-identify as Indigenous experience improved achievement.

- Indigenous Education Guiding Document identifies knowledge, processes, and actions that support culturally responsive pedagogy

Measures

Alberta Education Assurance Measures

- PAT & Diploma
- High School Completion Rates
- Student Learning Engagement
- Access to support & services
- Parental Involvement
- Education Quality
- Lifelong Learning
- Successful at work
- Broad Range of Studies

Local Measures

- Early Years Literacy & Numeracy Assessments (All Students & Indigenous Students)
- Coordinated Classroom Assessments (All Students & Indigenous Students)
- Off Campus CTS, online, and Bridge Network credit attainment (All Students & Indigenous Students)
- Access to a continuum of supports and services
- Prepared to complete and for after high school
- Student engagement & satisfaction
- Student Attendance (All Students & Indigenous Students)
- Parental involvement and satisfaction with learner supports
- Student transition structures and processes



OPTIMUM LEARNING

FRAMEWORK

Grande Prairie Public School Division

Every Student
Succeeds.



The Story of the Story

The Importance of Vision

Coherence

Build Understanding

Identity:
Being-Knowing-Doing

Theory of Action

Reflect and Adapt



The Story of the Story

Leading your Leaders:
Directors of Schools

Capabilities over Capacity

Planning and Foundational Documents

Structures

Stability

Succession Planning



Questions



Contact Information

Sandy McDonald	Sandy.McDonald@gppsd.ab.ca	Superintendent
James Robinson	James.Robinson@gppsd.ab.ca	Deputy Superintendent
Corinne Kruse	Corinne.Kruse@gppsd.ab.ca	Director Teaching & Learning
Paul Therrien	Paul.Therrien@gppsd.ab.ca	Director Student Supports
Nancy Gorgichuk	Nancy.Gorgichuk@gppsd.ab.ca	Director Inclusive Learning
Kimberly Frykas	Kimberly.Frykas@gppsd.ab.ca	Director System Planning



References

- Adams, Pamela, et al. (2019). *Leadership in Education: The Power of Generative Dialogue*. Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Honig, M. I., & Rainey, L. R. (2023). *From tinkering to transformation: How school district central offices drive equitable teaching and learning*. Harvard Education Press.
- Honig, M. I., & Rainey, L. R. (2020) . *Supervising Principals for Instructional Leadership*. Harvard Education Press.
- Ppw-Admin. “*Creating a Theory of Action.*” Center for Educational Leadership | University of Washington, 21 Nov. 2024, k-12leadership.org/tools/creating-a-theory-of-action.
- University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, and Meredith I. Honig. *Central Office Transformation Toolkit*. University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, 2013, wallacefoundation.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/Central-Office-Transformation-Toolkit.pdf.
- Public Education Leadership Project. *Coherence Framework*. Harvard University, <https://pelp.fas.harvard.edu/coherence-framework>.
- [Implementing a continuum of supports and services: A resource guide for school and school leaders](#)

