Investigations That Build Trust

Fair Process, Progressive Response, and Transparent Communication in Schools

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ACKNOWLEDGING AND HONOURING THE LAND



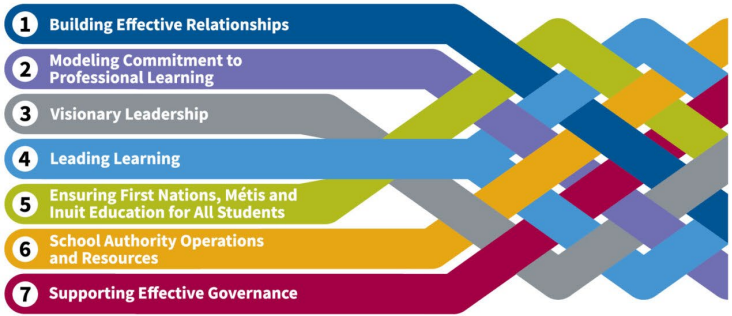
CASS College of Alberta School Superintendents

WELLNESS

Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard

Quality superintendent leadership occurs when the superintendent's ongoing analysis of the context, and the superintendent's decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality school leadership, quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in the school authority.

ALBERTA EDUCATION MINISTERIAL ORDER #003/2020



Leadership Quality Standard

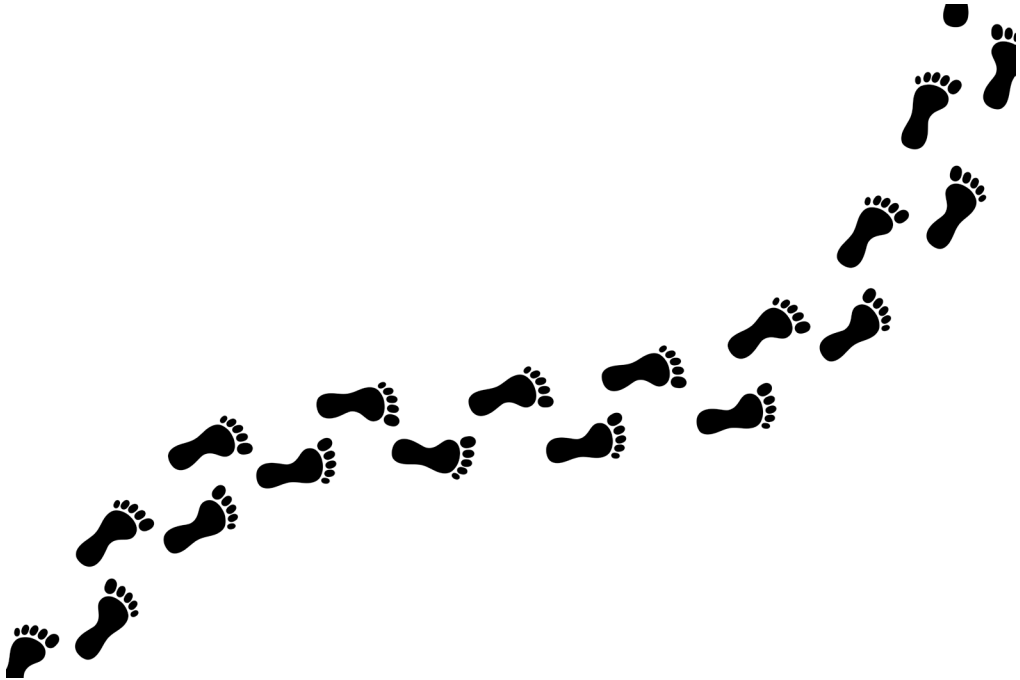
Quality leadership occurs when the leader's ongoing analysis of the context, and decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality teaching and optimum learning for all school students.

ALBERTA EDUCATION MINISTERIAL ORDER #002/2020



*Investigation

- “In” into
- “vestigare” to track or trace
- “vestigium” footprint or track



Investigation in the School Setting

- **Investigation** can be a loaded word because of its association to the **justice system** (chain of custody, interrogation, burden of proof, penalties, consequences).
- **Investigation** in the **school setting** is very different. Primary objective is to **help students grow** through their experience whether they are the victim or the aggressor.

Investigation in the Justice System

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Investigation in the School Setting

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The Conversation

- Investing in the relationship BEFORE the event
- Hallways, school library
- Cafeteria
- Outside
- Rink, field, gym, skate park
- Peripheral benefit of understanding their nonverbals

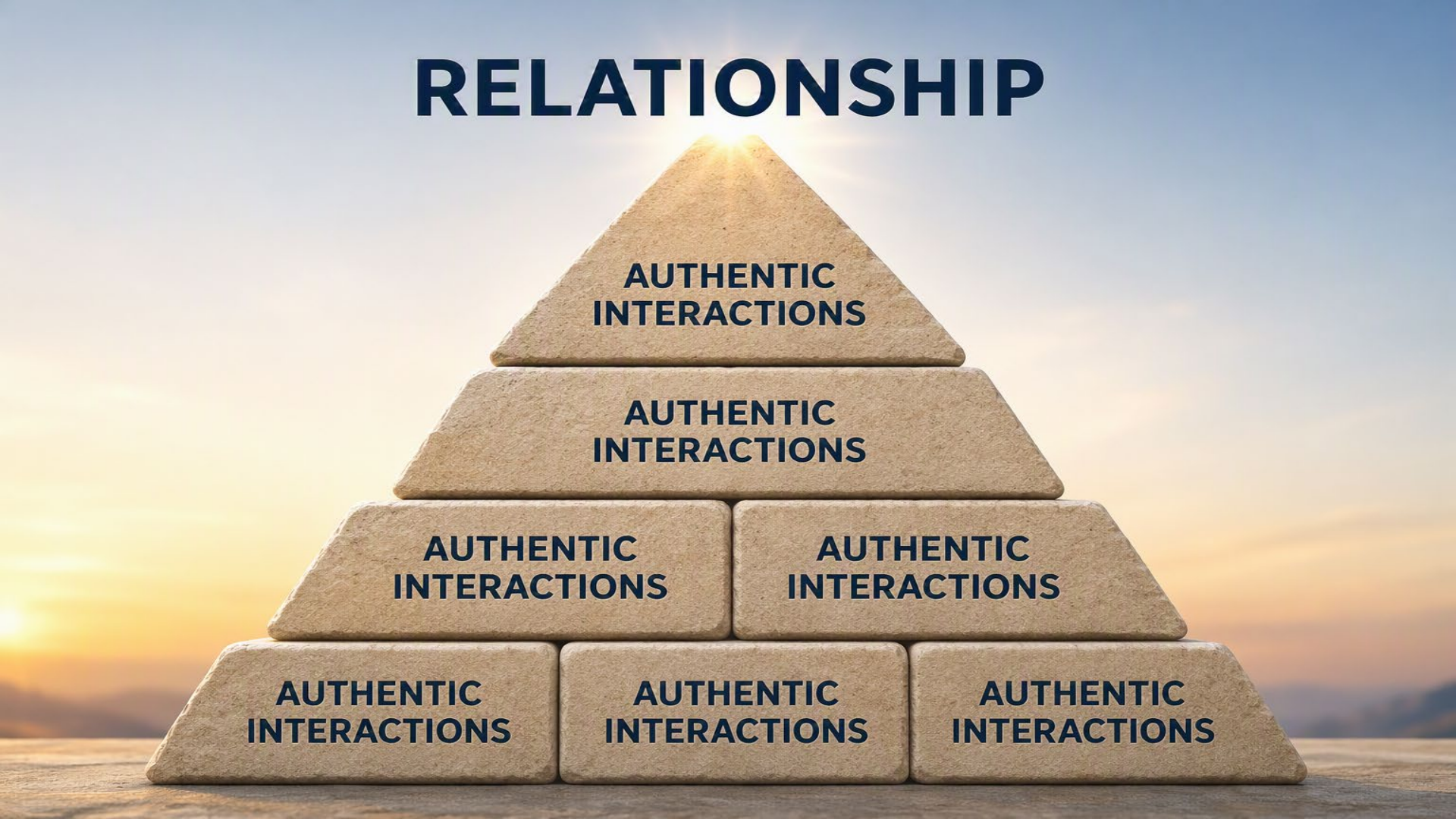




Non-Verbal Communication in Pop Culture

The Dakelh Language




RELATIONSHIP
AUTHENTIC INTERACTIONS
AUTHENTIC INTERACTIONS
AUTHENTIC INTERACTIONS
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Pointers for Reading Nonverbals

The higher the stakes, the more physiological cues there will be (clusters of cues).

No such thing as a giveaway cue.

No competition, no confrontation, no ego.

Remember your objective: GROWTH

Analytical Rigour and Patience



Microexpressions

Lie Detection - Prof. Paul Eckman

Factors to Consider

Several factors can affect one's perception, recollection, and reporting of an event:

- Age
- Culture
- Literacy
- Past experiences
- Biases
- Emotions (fear, anger, anxiety, **stress** can inhibit memory)
- Neurodiversity



Think of the last time you had a conversation with a student that DID NOT go well.

What does discomfort look like?



1. What is a truth?
2. Related to a fact.
3. Misrepresentation of the truth.
4. Brain sends a message to convey something that is contrary to what it perceives as reality.
5. Creates a physiological discomfort.
6. **What does physiological discomfort look like?**

Vulnerability

FULL: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau testifies before the Foreign Interference Commission

Setting the Table

- Do not invade personal space, but avoid a barrier.
- Collaboration has a look and a feel.
- Paper, pen, position.
- What types of words to use?
- Super important to know their motivation (stakes)

Quick Demonstration

- **Comfort Topics**
- Weekend
- Children
- Pastimes
- Planned vacations
- Articles of clothing
- Food
- Sports

- **Stressful Topics**
- Conflict (labour unrest)
- School Council mtgs
- Staff mtgs
- Deadlines
- Finance (school budget)
- Talk about something extremely boring

Basic Principles of Investigation

Start with the objective of systematically re-constructing the event **chronologically**.

The re-construction should be based on the accounts of as many sources as possible (human or tech)

Reconstruction of the event should be as comprehensive and factual as possible.

Sources may not always have first-hand account, but they can be used to corroborate or contradict details from other accounts.

Corroboration can help establish one source's credibility over another.

Pointers for Questioning

Do you remember any specific words that were used? How were they used?

Details not directly related to the event (for corroboration, but also because they may have trouble remembering details that they have not rehearsed)

Where were witnesses positioned? Can you draw me a map?

Use time as your ally because details that corroborate are harder to remember after a few days (but make sure that you document what you have heard so that your recollection is accurate)

Who was sitting? Who was standing?

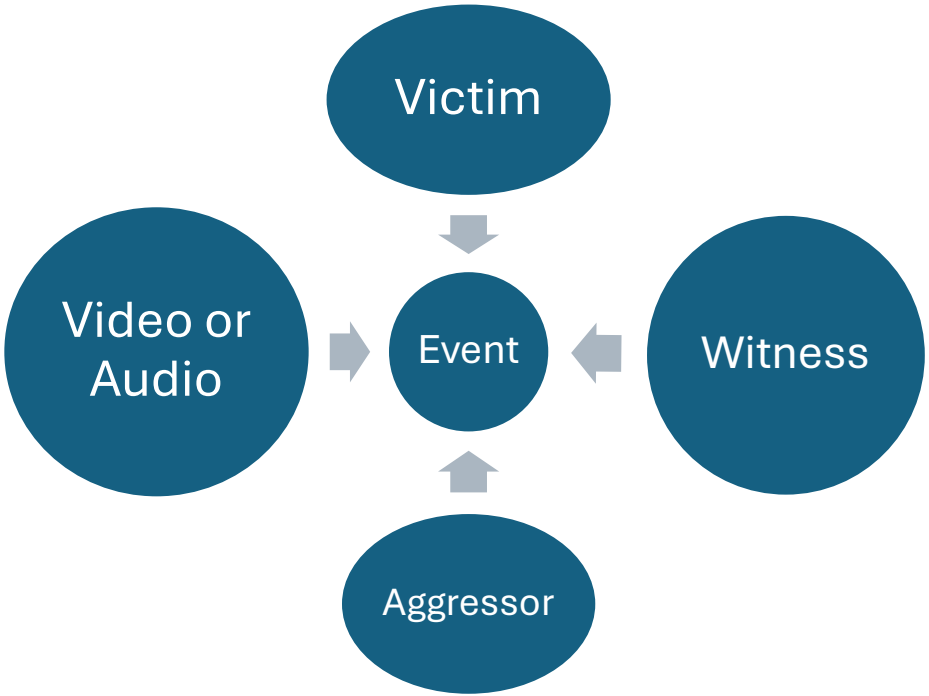
Two Versions of the Event



Three Versions of the Event



Four Versions of the Same Event



And so on.....



Investigation Report

- Make sure to date (including the year)
- Can be point form
- Should indicate the list of persons met/when
- Allows the investigator to recall the discussion and a person who was not there to understand what was discussed
- Is subject to Access to Information



The investigation may be complete. The leadership challenge is not.

“Facts lead to findings. Findings lead to decisions. Decisions still have to be communicated.”

The report helps establish what can reasonably be known.

The response must be tied to safety, accountability, learning, and support.

The communication must help people understand the process without breaching privacy.

The trust continuum

Investigative competence and communication competence are sequential.



One helps us understand what happened. The other helps others understand why the response can be trusted.

Managing the Message

How the same information can be tailored to the audience, connected to their values, and still stand behind the decision.

Students

Parents

Staff

Trustees

Community

Neuroscience and my own conclusion

We are wired to predict, and not to listen.
Cooney-Horvath

All we are is story.
Richard Wagamese

EFDF

Empathy – Facts – Decision – Forward

There is never a guarantee, but this helps.

One Investigation – one decision - many audiences

One Set of Facts

What can reasonably be established through the investigation

One Decision Logic

Why the response is appropriate based on evidence, context, policy, and educational purpose.

Many Audiences

Students, families, staff, trustees, and community members are listening through different concerns.

Tailoring is not spinning

“Same facts. Same decision. Different emphasis.”

Facts	**Decision logic**	**Integrity**	**Emphasis**
do not change	does not change	does not change	**does change**

People listen through their values

Audience	Often listening for…	Message emphasis
Students	Fairness, belonging, voice	You were heard. Dignity matters.
Parents / caregivers	Safety, dignity, care	We are taking this seriously. Safeguards are in place. Safeguarding dignity.
Staff	Consistency, support, role clarity	A fair process was followed. Expectations are clear. Learning is the work.
Trustees	Governance, risk, public confidence	Policy, legislation, and process guided the response.
Community	Transparency, accountability	We can explain the process while protecting privacy.

Implications to practice

Manage the message

Anticipate the story

A framework for communicating difficult decisions

1 Purpose & values

Why are we acting? What are we protecting?

2 Evidence & context

What informed the decision?

3 Impact & implications

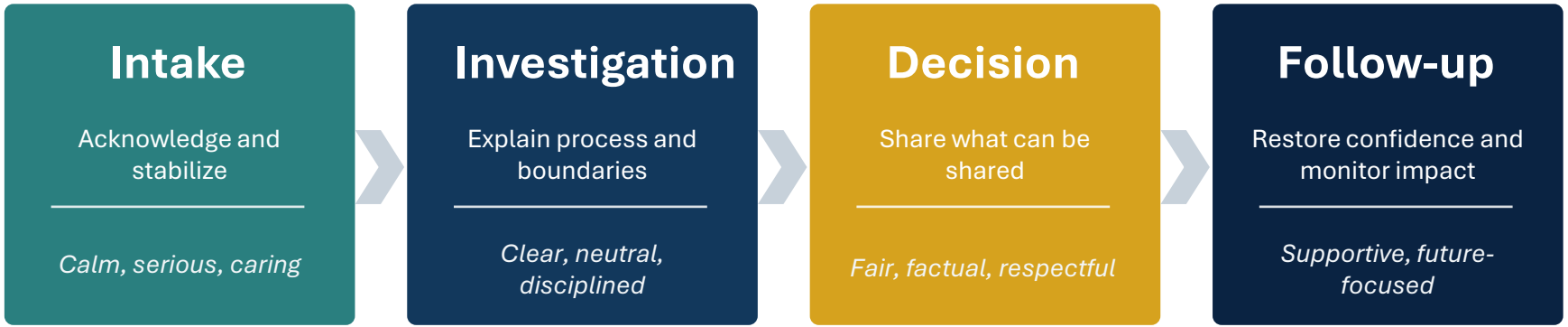
What happens now? What changes?

4 Process & voice

Who was heard? What happens next?

Empathy – Facts – Decision – Forward

Communication across the investigation timeline



Transparency is not the same as disclosure

Transparency

Explain process, values, timelines, safeguards, and next steps.

Confidentiality

Protect personal information, student records, personnel matters, and rights.

A leader can be transparent about process while protecting private details.

What can usually be shared — and what must be protected

Usually share

Process steps
General timelines
Who will be contacted or heard
Safety and supervision measures
Supports available
General policy or procedure

Usually protect

Specific discipline details
Personal information about another student
Personnel information
Speculation before facts are established
Names beyond need-to-know
Details that indirectly identify people

Nine words every school and system leader should know

“I can't share everything, but I can explain our process.”

Why it works:

It acknowledges the question.
It protects privacy.
It shows accountability.
It keeps the conversation focused on what can be discussed.

One decision. Four messages.

Scenario: A bullying investigation has concluded. A response plan is being implemented.

Family of harmed student
Safety • support • monitoring

“We have reviewed the concern, taken appropriate steps, and put supports in place to help your child feel safe and supported.”

Family of responsible student
Accountability • learning • growth

“We are working with your child to understand impact, repair harm where appropriate, and build better ways forward.”

Staff
Consistency • role clarity • safety

“A fair process has been followed. Please continue using agreed safety and supervision plans.”

Trustees
Governance • policy • confidence

“The matter was addressed through appropriate procedures, legislative responsibilities, and our commitment to safe learning environments.”

Empathy – Facts – Decision – Forward

Language that closes trust vs. language that builds it

Instead of…	Try…
“I am bound by confidentiality…”	“I understand why you are asking. I cannot share private details, but I can explain the process we are following.”
“The situation was dealt with ….”	“Appropriate follow-up has occurred to assure safety and to reduce risk an puts student dignity at the center. I cannot discuss another student’s personal circumstances.”
“We investigated and found no issue…”	“We reviewed the concern, gathered relevant information, and made a decision based on what could be established.”

What people are really asking

Did you hear me?

Are you taking this seriously?

Was the process fair?

Is safety being addressed?

What happens next?

Can I trust leadership?

Most conflict is not only about punishment. Much of it is about confidence.

Investigations That Build Trust

Listen
Investigate
Decide
Communicate
Restore Trust

Every difficult situation presents two leadership challenges.

The first is understanding what happened.

The second is helping people understand what happens next.

One requires investigative competence.

The other requires communication competence.

Together, they build confidence in leadership and the school system.

Questions & conversation

What is one thing you'll carry back to your system?

Stay connected

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