CASS College of Alberta School Superintendents

Strengthening System Education Leadership in Support of Student Mental Health and Well-Being

A LEADERSHIP REFLECTION GUIDE

Continuing Education Program

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Purpose of this Guide

Across Alberta school authorities, student mental health and well-being continue to emerge as central to achieving optimum learning for all students. System education leaders are increasingly called to design, align, and sustain a coordinated continuum of supports that integrates prevention, early identification, and responsive intervention.

This work is complex. It requires navigating competing priorities, responding to diverse student needs, and building coherence across schools, services, and partners. At the same time, it presents an opportunity to lead with greater clarity, alignment, and purpose.

This leadership reflection guide brings together key questions, themes, and insights that have surfaced across multiple mental health community of practice sessions.

It is intended to support system leaders to:

- **Reflect** on current approaches to student mental health and well-being
- **Examine** alignment across the continuum of supports
- **Surface** successes, tensions, and persistent gaps
- **Identify** opportunities for strategic action and system improvement

Engaging in the Process

This guide is designed to support a progression of thinking:

- **Reflect** on current practice
- **Consider** leadership implications
- **Identify** patterns and tensions
- **Determine** strategic next steps

Leaders are encouraged to move beyond describing what is happening toward interpreting what it means, and considering what may need to shift within their school authority.

This guide is not intended to provide answers. Rather, it is an invitation to engage deeply with the complexity of this work, to learn alongside others, and to lead with greater coherence and intention in support of student mental health and well-being.

Acknowledgement

This leadership reflection guide has been made possible through a conditional grant from Alberta Education.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is intended to be used flexibly, depending on context, need, and available time. It can support both individual reflection and collaborative dialogue across system leadership teams.

Individual Use

System education leaders may choose to work through sections independently to deepen their own understanding of current system conditions, identify emerging patterns, and clarify areas for leadership focus. This may be particularly valuable for leaders who are new to roles with responsibility for student mental health and well-being, supporting them in building context, identifying key considerations, and developing a system-level perspective on this work.

Leadership Team Use

Leadership teams can use the guide to structure conversations, ensuring that discussions move beyond sharing updates toward deeper reflection, shared understanding, and coordinated action. Teams may choose to focus on one section at a time or engage with multiple sections over a series of meetings.

Facilitated or Community of Practice Use

The guide can also be used to support facilitated sessions or Community of Practice gatherings, providing a consistent structure for dialogue across school authorities while allowing for local context and variation.

Suggested Approach

While the guide is not intended to be used in a strictly linear way, leaders may find it helpful to:

- Begin with a focused section aligned to current system priorities
- Capture key insights and emerging patterns
- Identify one area for deeper attention
- Determine a small number of actionable next steps

The emphasis is not on completing the guide in its entirety, but on using it as a tool to support ongoing reflection, coherence, and intentional leadership action.

Building Mental Health Capacity Across the System

System education leaders play a critical role in establishing the conditions that build student mental health capacity across all schools. This includes shaping shared understanding, aligning practices, and ensuring supports are proactive, responsive, and sustainable.

Reflect on Current Practice

- How is your school authority currently working to build student mental health capacity?
- What successes have emerged in this work?
- What challenges or barriers continue to surface?
- In what ways are students experiencing the impact of these efforts?

Leadership Considerations

- What should system education leaders be considering to ensure that mental health capacity is being built consistently across the continuum of supports?
- Which leadership practices are most critical to sustaining this work over time?
- Where is there strong alignment across schools, and where does variability persist?

Use the next page to synthesize your thinking and identify potential next steps.

Capture your thinking:



Building Mental Health Capacity Across the System

Key Insights

Emerging Patterns

Questions to Explore

From Reflection to Action

Based on your reflections, identify one focused area for action.

One area to strengthen:

One initial step forward:

Early Identification and Intervention

Early identification and timely intervention are essential to supporting student mental health and well-being. Effective systems ensure that processes are coordinated, responsive, and accessible across all schools.

Reflect on Current Practice

- What structures and processes are currently in place to support early identification of student mental health needs?
- What intervention strategies are being used across your system?
- What is working well, and where are challenges persisting?

Leadership Considerations

- What leadership practices are necessary to ensure consistent and effective identification and intervention across schools?
- How well are current approaches aligned across the continuum of supports?
- How is impact being monitored, and how is that evidence informing decisions?

Use the next page to synthesize your thinking and identify potential next steps.

Capture your thinking:



Early Identification and Intervention

Key Insights

Emerging Patterns

Questions to Explore

From Reflection to Action

Based on your reflections, identify one focused area for action.

One area to strengthen:

One initial step forward:

Partnerships and Pathways

Strong partnerships and clearly defined pathways are essential to ensuring students and families can access the mental health supports they need. This work requires coordination across systems and shared responsibility among partners.

Reflect on Current Practice

- What partnerships are currently in place to support student mental health and well-being?
- What has been most effective in navigating pathways to services?
- What challenges or barriers are being experienced?

Leadership Considerations

- What leadership practices support the development and sustainability of effective partnerships?
- Where are partnerships strong, and where are there gaps or inconsistencies?
- How clearly are roles and responsibilities understood across partners?

Use the next page to synthesize your thinking and identify potential next steps.

Capture your thinking:



Partnerships and Pathways

Key Insights

Emerging Patterns

Questions to Explore

From Reflection to Action

Based on your reflections, identify one focused area for action.

One area to strengthen:

One initial step forward:

From Frameworks to Practice: Coherence, Policy, and Innovation

System leaders are responsible for ensuring that evidence-informed frameworks and policies are meaningfully translated into practice. This requires coherence across the system, responsiveness to context, and a willingness to adapt and innovate.

Reflect on Current Practice

- How effectively are mental health frameworks translating into day-to-day practice across your system?
- What innovative practices are having a positive impact on student mental health and well-being?
- Where do current policies or expectations fall short in meeting diverse student needs?

Leadership Considerations

- What conditions are necessary to strengthen alignment between frameworks, policy, and practice?
- How can systems balance consistency with flexibility and local responsiveness?
- How is evidence being used to inform decisions about scaling, adjusting, or discontinuing supports?

Use the next page to synthesize your thinking and identify potential next steps.

Capture your thinking:



From Frameworks to Practice: Coherence, Policy, and Innovation

Key Insights

Emerging Patterns

Questions to Explore

From Reflection to Action

Based on your reflections, identify one focused area for action.

One area to strengthen:

One initial step forward:

Access, Gaps, and Supporting Complex Needs

Ensuring equitable access to mental health supports, particularly for students with complex needs, remains a significant challenge. System leaders must continually assess how well current approaches align with values of inclusion, equity, and sustainability.

Reflect on Current Practice

- Where are the most significant gaps in access to mental health supports in your context?
- What factors contribute to these gaps (e.g., system design, partnerships, capacity, geography)?
- What is currently happening when students require intensive (Tier 3) support?
- Whose needs are being met well, and whose remain difficult to address?

Leadership Considerations

- What patterns or tensions are emerging across need, capacity, and available resources?
- What does this suggest about alignment with system values (equity, inclusion, sustainability)?
- What is one system-level adjustment that could improve access and support for students with the most complex needs?

Use the next page to synthesize your thinking and identify potential next steps.

Capture your thinking:



Access, Gaps, and Supporting Complex Needs

Key Insights

Emerging Patterns

Questions to Explore

From Reflection to Action

Based on your reflections, identify one focused area for action.

One area to strengthen:

One initial step forward:

From Reflection to Strategic Action

Across these reflections, a complex and evolving picture of student mental health and well-being begins to emerge. While each school authority's context is unique, common patterns often surface, highlighting areas of strength, persistent tensions, and opportunities for deeper alignment.

This final section is intended to support system leaders in synthesizing their thinking and identifying purposeful next steps. The goal is not to resolve complexity, but to respond to it with greater clarity, coherence, and intention.

Looking Across the System

- What patterns are emerging across the different areas of reflection?
- Where is there strong alignment across your system?
- Where are inconsistencies or gaps most evident?

From Reflection to Strategic Action

Understanding Tensions and Opportunities

- Where do tensions between need, capacity, and available resources show up most clearly?
- What trade-offs are currently being made, either explicitly or implicitly?
- Where might there be opportunities to strengthen coherence, responsiveness, or impact?

Clarifying Strategic Focus

- Based on these reflections, what feels most important to focus on at this time?
- What is one area of the continuum that would benefit from deeper attention or refinement?
- What conditions will be necessary to support meaningful progress in this area?

Commitment to Action

One strategic priority we will focus on:

Why this matters in our context:

One initial action or shift we will explore:

How we will know this is making a difference:

Commitment to Action

What ideas or insights from this reflection that you want to carry forward into your leadership practice?

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