Wellbeing Is Leadership Work: Building Coherent Systems of Support

CASS Fall Conference
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CASS College of Alberta School Superintendents

Continuing Education Program

Session Outcomes

- **Examine** the role of system education leaders in creating conditions that support student mattering, well-being, belonging, and optimum learning.
- **Reflect** on the coherence of their own system's approach to student mental health and well-being, including capacity building, early identification and intervention, partnerships and pathways, alignment between policy and practice, and supports for students with complex needs.
- **Identify** a leadership priority or action that could strengthen alignment, responsiveness, or sustainability within their local continuum of supports.

We cannot expect leaders to create the conditions for student well-being without examining the conditions we create for leaders themselves.

Learning Arc



1 Provoke

Well-being & mental health are leadership work.

If I walked into your school authority and
looked only at your structures, decisions,
resource allocations and leadership practices,
without reading your strategic plan,
what would I conclude you believe about student well-being and mental health?

2 Ground

Having supports is not the same as having a coherent system of supports.

Coherence is a system education leadership responsibility.

System Education Leadership for Inclusion

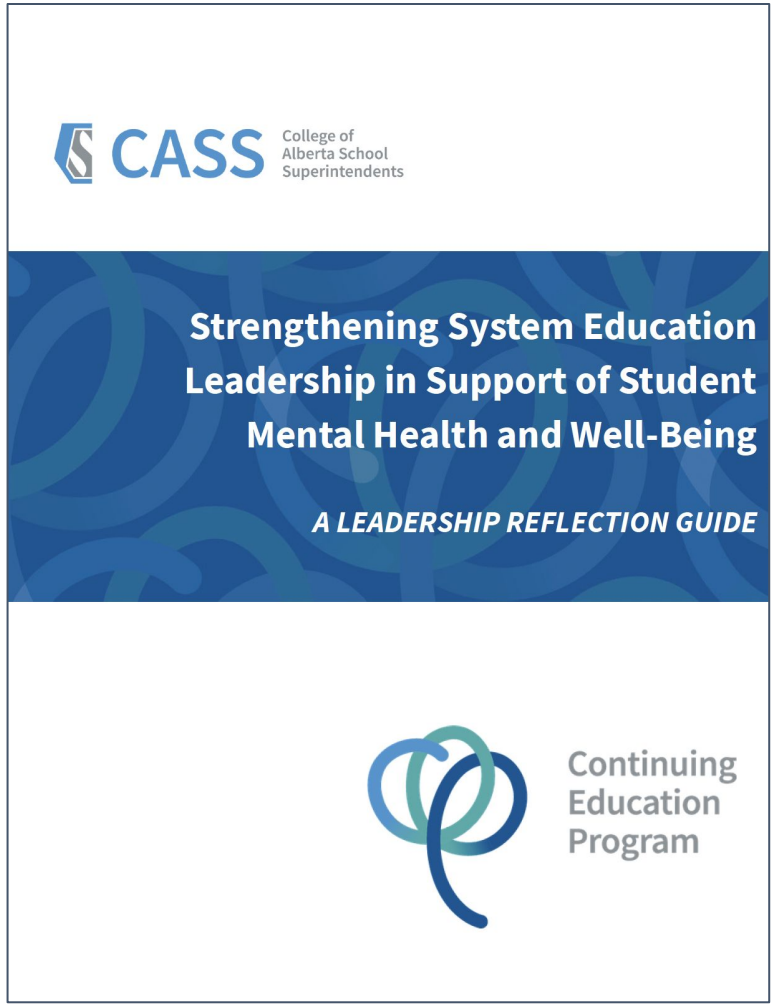
Inclusive education, student mental health and well-being, and optimum learning are interconnected system leadership responsibilities.



Strengthening coherence across the continuum of supports

A Tool for System Education Leadership Reflection

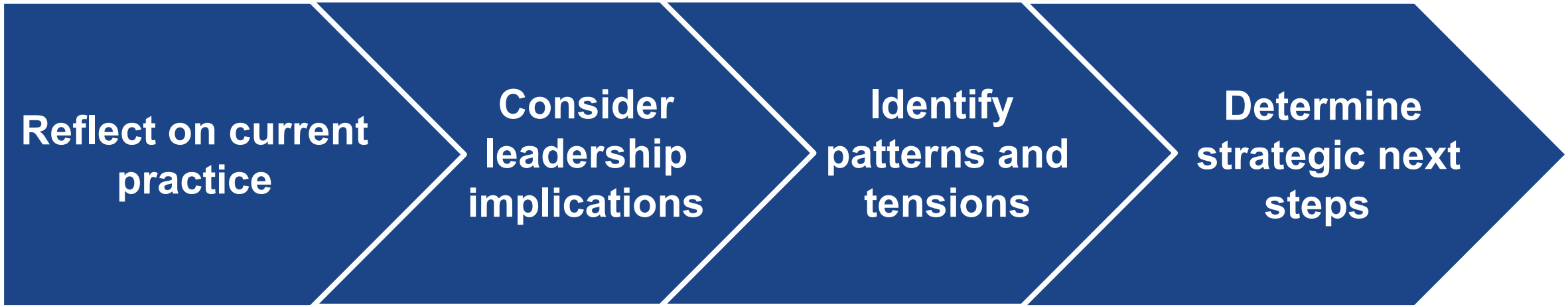
- **Reflect** on current approaches to student mental health and well-being
- **Examine** alignment across the continuum of supports
- **Surface** successes, tensions, and persistent gaps
- **Identify** opportunities for strategic action and system improvement



Five Areas for Reflection

- Building mental health capacity across the system
- Early identification and intervention
- Partnerships and pathways
- From frameworks to practice: Coherence, policy, and innovation
- Access, gaps, and supporting complex needs

From Reflection to Strategic Action



3 Humanize

The Lived Reality of Leader Wellbeing

"We cannot expect leaders to create the conditions for student well-being without examining the conditions we create for leaders themselves."

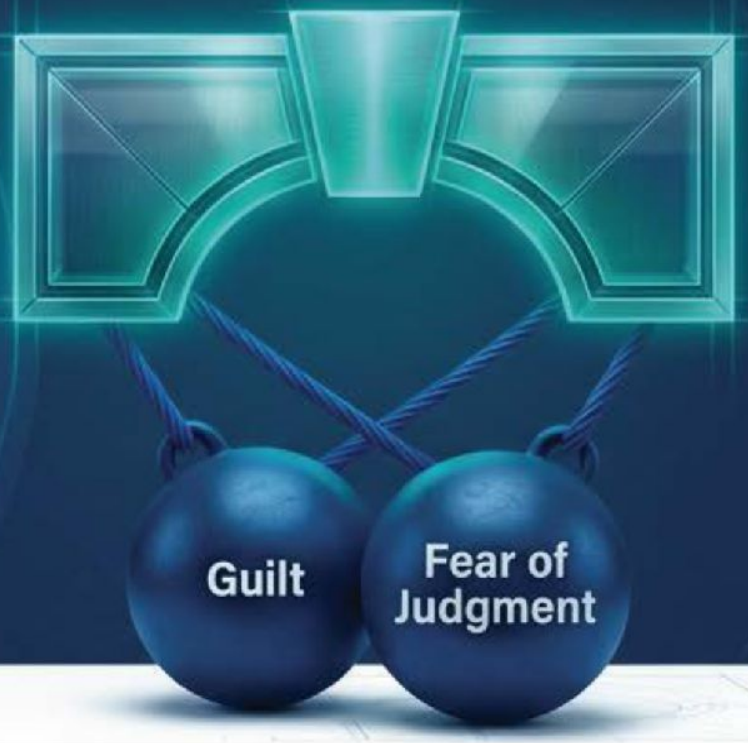
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Wellbeing is not a lack of knowledge; it is a lack of permission.

The Wellbeing To-Do List
(Cognitive Understanding)



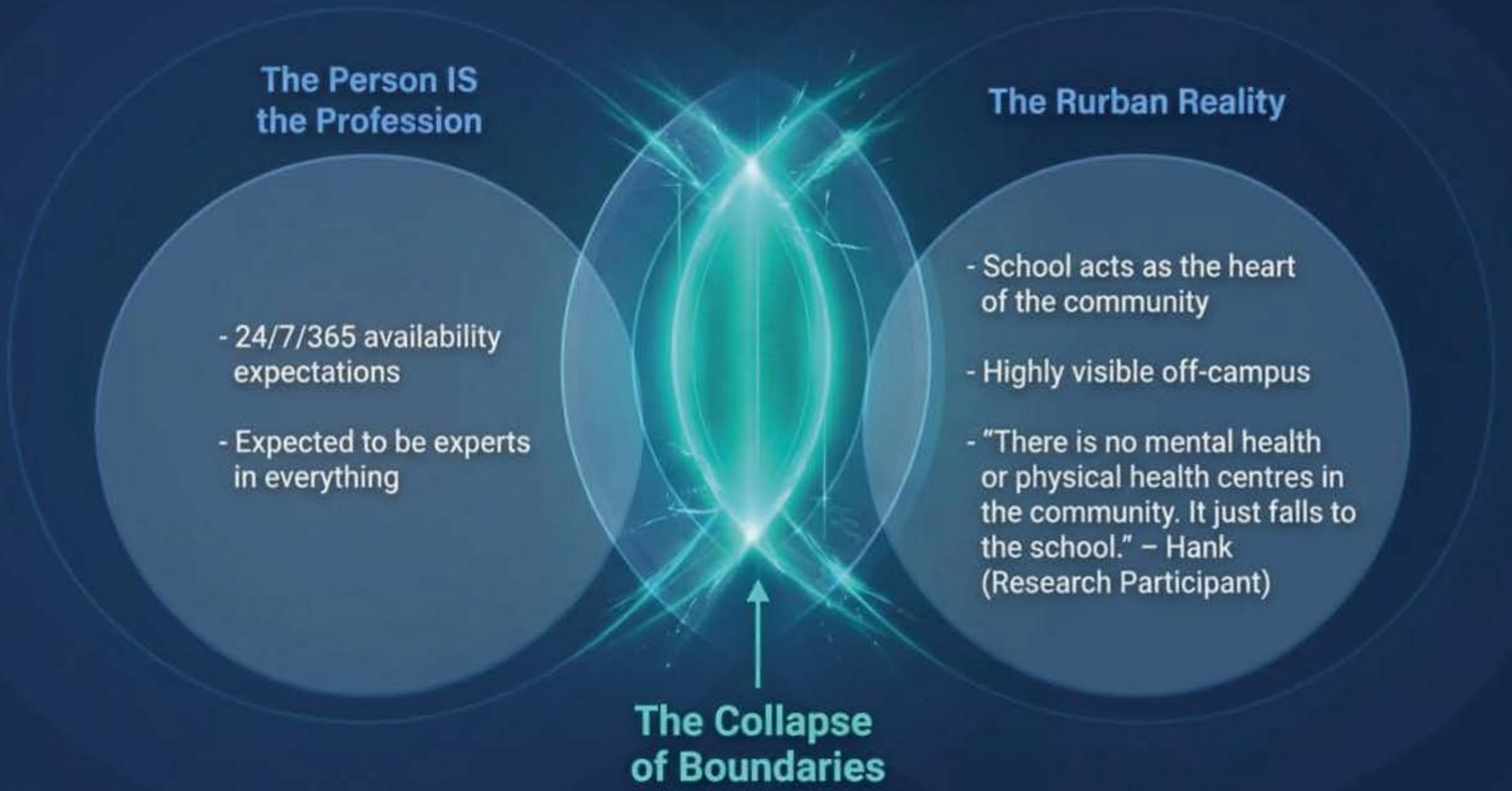
The Cornerstone:
Internal Permission



School leaders possess a cognitive understanding of health metrics. Yet, until they are granted the internal and external permission to reject the guilt of taking time away from students and staff, true wellbeing remains structurally impossible.

Gemini Notebook

The Architecture of Overwhelm



Gemini Notebook

A New Lens for System Leadership

Moving from individual checklists to systemic conditions.

Permissions (Internal & External)

Do our system policies offer explicit external permission that fosters a leader's internal permission to disconnect?

Boundaries (Professional & Personal)

Does our divisional culture actively respect the line between the person and the profession?



Tensions (Social Norms & Expectations)

Are our resource allocations alleviating or adding to the complex societal expectations placed on rurban school leaders?

Gemini Notebook

The Pathway to Systemic Change

Moving from individual insight to sustainable organizational impact

01

Awareness

Recognizing the structural barriers and systemic conditions that impact wellbeing across the organization.

02

Acknowledgement

Validating the lived realities of leaders and granting explicit permission to prioritize systemic health.

03

Action

Redesigning policies, resource allocations, and cultural expectations to foster sustainable leadership.

How does your system's design support—or obstruct—a leader's permission to be well?

4 Examine

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4 Examine

Exploring the Five Areas: A Jigsaw

Each table will explore all five areas of the Leadership Reflection Guide.

1. Building Mental Health Capacity Across the System
2. Early Identification and Intervention
3. Partnerships and Pathways
4. From Frameworks to Practice: Coherence, Policy, and Innovation
5. Access, Gaps, and Supporting Complex Needs

At your table:

- Divide the five areas among table members.
- Each person will explore their assigned area and share key insights with the group.
- Together, you will consider connections, patterns, and tensions across all five areas.

Individual Reflection: Become the Expert

Explore your assigned section of the Leadership Reflection Guide.

- Review the questions under Reflect on Current Practice and Leadership Considerations.
- Consider how these questions relate to your own system context.
- Identify one or two key insights, observations, or questions to share with your table.

As you reflect, consider:

- Where do you see coherence?
- Where do you notice variability, gaps, or tensions?

Jigsaw: Share and Connect

Share

- Take turns sharing key insights from each of the five areas.

Explore

- What connections, patterns, gaps, or tensions are emerging across the five areas?

Consider

- What do these observations suggest about the conditions we create through system leadership?

Connect to the Research

- How might the conditions experienced by school leaders enable or constrain coherent, sustainable systems of support for students?

5 Sense-Making

What Are We Noticing?

- What patterns are emerging across our systems?
- Where are we noticing tensions or inconsistencies?
- What opportunities for stronger system coherence are becoming visible?

6 Act

From Reflection to Action

Leadership Reflection Guide | Page 16

- 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:

Identify one meaningful leadership priority, not a list of new initiatives.

What Will Our Leadership Make Possible?

At the beginning of our session, we asked…

If I walked into your school authority and looked only at your structures, decisions, resource allocations and leadership practices, without reading your strategic plan, what would I conclude you believe about student well-being and mental health?

What might the answer to that question be a year from now?

Thank you

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