

Summer 2010

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**Carol Gray**

CASA/ACAS President  
Director of Secondary Schools  
Lester B. Pearson School Board

**A**s educators, we have all experienced those wonderful moments when we knew that we had captured our students, when we knew we “had gotten through,” as they were totally engaged in a learning task. Later, in our quiet reflection, I am sure you revelled (as I would) in that purely magical moment of teaching and learning. In today’s much-changing education world, there can be no doubt that our primary task is one of engaging our learners, of providing for them challenging, stimulating and relevant connections that are always present in their schools.

Across the country, in rural, suburban and urban settings, our schools make available an extraordinary array of different programs and approaches in efforts to attract and support all learners. These include a wide range of designs, from magnet schools and magnet programs to reduced enrolment classes catering to special needs and interests. An examination of those most successful does show much commonality. Each illustrates clearly

a safe and nurturing learning environment, one that is caring and supportive and, at the same time, expects high achievement from students and staff members. To provide this is our challenge as educational leaders. It may be thought of as self-evident that, by providing in every classroom a teacher committed to the values of the school, we will achieve our goal of engagement.

However, it is our responsibility to ensure that each and every teacher is proficient in the mechanics of teaching. He or she must be a master of the small but vital techniques so essential to engaging the learner in both the short-term and long-term. These are skills that were, at one time, thought

**It is our responsibility to ensure that each and every teacher is proficient in the mechanics of teaching. He or she must be a master of the small but vital techniques so essential to engaging the learner in both the short-term and long-term.**

to be an inherent quality but are now seen as practices to be identified and honed. The teacher must be part of the learning community that is the school, a partner willing to share and to learn. We must provide a working environment that is professional and supportive and that is focused clearly and irrevocably on the learner and his/her success. Meaningful professional development activity must be made available to all and we must use those most skilled as mentors and leaders.

Very little of this is new. I add only that teachers who are given the trust, respect, support, and flexibility to design and implement novel strategies and approaches almost invariably meet our shared goal of engaging all learners.

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**A**s educators, it is our objective to involve all learners in their education so that they enjoy learning and develop a desire to continue the process throughout their lives.

For some, learning is a natural thing and they are quick to join and respond. For others, learning is a chore and they would rather be elsewhere than confined in classrooms reading and doing exercises they consider boring and confusing.

Student engagement is not something that can be taken for granted. We all learn in different ways and we all have different interests. As teachers and system administrators, it is our responsibility to ensure that programs are diverse and instructional methods reach out to our different clients.

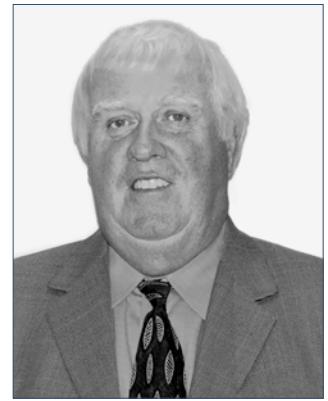
Some consider marketing or selling of 'learning' inappropriate. But the reality is that young people espouse the learning that takes place in areas other than the classroom. A great example of the engagement of Canadians is the commitment to the Olympics in Vancouver. Ask any student about the performance of Canadian athletes and you will get a response that is knowledgeable about statistics and skills and comparisons with other countries. Ask about the speeds on the downhill or the number of twists in the air by snowboard performers and you will find a complete set of facts. Ask about the ranking and skills of each member of the Canadian hockey team and most will tell you very quickly.

Many students will be able to tell all about the scoring for ice dancing and how the drivers steer the bobsled. A great number will know the details of the spectacular opening and closing ceremonies.

Students are engaged with computers, cell phones and handheld devices that require learning. They know intuitively that these methods of communication are important to them and they all want to use these items more effectively. The whole area of electronic gaming is another dimension that engages students from a very young age.

The Olympics in Canada were a major event, widely publicized and presented dramatically. The communication devices let us reach out to others and gather information from a multitude of sources. There is competitive excitement in mastering an electronic game.

There are lessons in these examples for learning practice. As educators, we must look closely and adapt the reasons for their appeal to instruction and learning.



**Frank Kelly**  
Executive Director, CASA

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# Huron Perth Catholic District Gets Connected

The Huron Perth Catholic District School Board is using web-based technology to engage and enhance home, school and peer relationships.

By Sean McDade and Annemarie Petrasek

**T**echnology for communication and the production of information is more widely available than ever before to students in today's classrooms. Outside of school, students access and use Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr to exchange information and socialize.

Many parents and care-givers worry that their children are spending too much time online, while feeling disconnected from the virtual reality of this kind of social networking. Incidents of cyber-bullying are cited in blaming the web for the breakdown of relationships between parents and children and between peers.

Inside the classroom, teachers find it more and more challenging to feel confident and secure about using web based tools to facilitate learning. At the same time, students are telling us that in order to be engaged in learning at school, they want "active and dynamic learning where they have opportunities, where they have choice."<sup>1</sup>

They understand that the most important skill they need to acquire in school is how to apply learning in new situations and

they want to have a voice in how that takes place in their classrooms. They are eager to be engaged. Students challenge our thinking by reminding us that education is not something *for* students but that education needs to belong *to* students.<sup>2</sup>

In the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board, a group of teachers came together in the summer of 2009 to learn about an online learning environment called the Moodle. This web-based software program creates an electronic extension of the classroom, which is accessible to students and parents 24 hours a day. Students can post assignments, create a blog or wiki, review projects/assignments, expectations and access various classroom materials like PowerPoints and study guides at their leisure. More importantly, students can connect with their peers and teacher in a password-protected environment that allows them to stretch the classroom into their living room. For parents, it creates an engaging portal into the day-to-day happenings of the classroom, where they can not only see what their child is doing almost up to the minute, but can be active participants by contributing ideas to the parent wiki or by responding to student/teacher postings.

The features of the Moodle allow for the possibility for students to participate in new ways to construct and share learning

that goes on in the classroom like never before. One of the teachers and co-author of this article, Sean McDade, decided that the Moodle would be the perfect way to strengthen the home/school link while helping students use the technology that they love. Moreover, the Moodle would engage students in their own learning by enabling them to become publishers of information rather than just passive consumers of it. Immersing them in the use of web based tools such as Animoto, Glogster, Wordle, Google Docs and presentation software such as Notebook by SMART Technology®, was the first step in this process. Over the course of six months the students gained experience with the tools by completing a variety of projects connected with the learning goals and curriculum expectations for their grade. Students had the opportunity to create a healthy eating commercial while considering a target audience.

With this activity, students were tackling objectives both within the media/language strands and the health curriculum. However, since the students were using Web 2.0 software and posting their finished projects on the Moodle, the learning experience seemed to deepen for the students. Engagement, work ethic and peer interaction took on





*Students and teachers in Huron Perth Catholic District Schools use web-based technology to enhance learning.*

another shape as students created projects that were closer to a Madison Avenue marketing commercials than the traditional hallway posters.

As one student put it, "I felt like my commercial was good enough to be on TV."

By using the web and the Moodle, the classroom was transformed into an exchange of ideas that stretched far beyond "work that is just turned in to be graded."

Early in the year, parents were invited to a meeting with the principal, teacher and the information technology co-ordinator from central office to show them the features of the Moodle, how to access it from home and to answer questions they had about the security and safety of using this web tool in the classroom. Parents were encouraged to think of the Moodle as "an open-ended" invitation to the classroom. For example, a student recently tried to make an argument in class that ringette is a faster game than hockey. After the teacher challenged her argument, she went home and continued the conversation with her parents. Her father wrote on the Moodle and explained that in his opinion, which was based on

playing hockey and coaching ringette, that indeed ringette is a faster game, which of course led to further debate in class.

Mid-way through the year, the authors wanted to find out about how the use of technology in this classroom was contributing to and encouraging the home, school and peer connections in the classroom. The authors collected

feedback from parents and students using a survey and questionnaire. Parents reported that the Moodle is a huge asset in helping them feel connected to the classroom.

"It has kept me informed as my child never tells me much about what he does at school... He has been more enthusiastic about school and challenged to do more creative work," noted one parent.

"Yes, deadlines are now "emailed" or submitted through the Moodle and I get to review her work on the computer. It is pretty impressive so far," said another parent.

Most of the parents who responded to the questionnaire were familiar with the names of the web tools that their children were using and many reported that they saw an increase in their son or daughter's engagement with school and school projects.

"My child enjoys learning new software, uses it at home, and is excited to show us her work. It makes learning fun!" said a parent.

Students were given a short online survey to find out what they thought about using the Moodle and the web based tools. Most of them reported they "strongly agreed" that completing

projects with another person or in a group is easier using web based tools. The students also overwhelmingly supported the statement that, "It is good that my parents can see what I am doing at school on the Moodle."

Many students use the web based software to create things besides projects for school. They use them for their own personal creations which some may post on social networking sites such as Facebook.

After only a short time using this technology it seems that there are considerable benefits for students and their parents. Increased engagement in learning, reduced stress about completing projects while working in a group or with others, greater parental engagement with the learning their children are doing and improved communication between home and school in a meaningful and regular way have all contributed to improved student learning for this class.

Students easily embrace technologies such as the Moodle and it is our task as educators to see the possibilities that new technologies provide so that students can reach their full potential. ○

*Sean McDade is an elementary school teacher at St. Columban Catholic School. He is married and has one daughter and resides in Seaforth, Ontario.*

*Annemarie Petrusek is the Coordinator of Curriculum at the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board in Dublin, Ontario.*

## References

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2. *ibid.*

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# Inner City Success for the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board

Because of funding by the Government of Ontario, The Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board was able to provide an engaging summer experience to support academic achievement for students who needed it the most.

By Linda Staudt, Darlene Kennedy, Stephanie Houlahan and Katherine Guenette

**P**overty, poor attendance, inability to complete assignments, credit deficit, lack of literacy and difficulty forming positive social relationships are all risk factors that impact student achievement.

During the summer of 2009, three distinct groups of students facing some of these risks were enrolled in a unique summer credit program. The Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, through an Ontario Ministry of Education Urban and Priority Grant, was able to offer summer programming to students at one of its inner city high schools. Funding from this provincial initiative enabled the school to run enhanced summer academic programming and leadership experiences for three key groups of students.

- 26 students entering grade nine in the Fall who required additional support to ensure a successful transition from elementary to secondary school. These students were enrolled in a Personal and Active Fitness course that served as a key transition activity while at the same time earning them a high school credit;
- 20 ELL students who had arrived in Canada with limited language skills. These new Canadians were enrolled in an ELL Personal and Active Fitness course that provided them additional opportunities to acquire language proficiency and allowed them to become familiar with their school and local community; and
- 31 students who after two or three years in secondary school were, for the most part, in a credit deficit situation. In addition to earning a full credit, the course provided these students opportunities to enhance their interpersonal skills while giving them mentoring opportunities.

In his study, *Early School Leavers: Understanding the Lived Reality of Student Disengagement from Secondary School*, Dr. Bruce

Ferguson provided educators with key strategies and recommendations for engaging at risk youth. His qualitative study set out to understand the processes of school disengagement from the specific point of view of young people in Ontario, who themselves were considered at risk or were early-leavers. His recommendations to educators centered around three key principles: *be more understanding, be more flexible and be more proactive*. In an effort to implement specific strategies identified by Ferguson, the summer program teachers focused on addressing the following key concepts:

- Caring mentoring/tutoring;
- Continued out-of-school enhancement (after school and summer scholastic, recreation and social programs);
- High levels of collaboration and communication;
- Creation of a supportive learning environment; and
- Recognizing and involving the strengths, abilities, and energy of youth

The new grade nine students were identified by their elementary school teachers as requiring additional support with their transition into

high school. Enrolled in a grade nine Personal and Active Fitness Course, they focused on the importance of physical fitness, interacting positively, working independently and collaboratively along with promoting lifelong participation in physical activity. An integral component of the course was participation in a variety of recreational and fitness experiences in the Windsor-Essex County area. In this course, the students canoed at Point Pelee National Park, played beach volleyball, golfed, bowled, ice skated, and swam. For the vast majority of students, these activities, sports and places were new to them.

Through the encouragement of their teacher and two University of Windsor Faculty of Education students hired as mentors, the students challenged themselves to engage in new activities in a safe environment. At the same time, they familiarized themselves with their new high school, began building positive relationships with peers and with the school student success teachers. These students began high school with one credit earned and a sense of belonging to their school. First semester data indicates that the grade nine students who participated in summer school had a pass rate of 97 per cent compared





to a 93 per cent school pass rate for the remaining grade nine cohorts. In addition, only two students from this group were suspended; these suspensions were one day in length and were for attendance issues.

The second course was offered to students new to Canada and students who had limited language and literacy skills. These students also earned the Physical and Active Fitness credit, participating in many of the above-mentioned activities, but with an emphasis placed on enhancing language proficiency and a sense of inclusion in the school and broader community. Students felt pride in their accomplishments and gained greater confidence in their interpersonal interactions and in their ability to advocate for themselves.

The third course, Leadership and Peer Support, targeted disengaged students enrolled in their second, third or fourth year of high school. Students in this course met curriculum expectations as they improved communication, teamwork and interpersonal skills. The students were expected to put their learning into practice by mentoring others in the summer program. At events, students were the planners and leaders; in the cafeteria, they were the “lunch buddies” ensuring that no one sat alone; and on field trips, they were the encouragers and role models. They “stepped up” as leaders, displaying pride in their roles and in their achievements. While these students generally had a history of poor attendance, their attendance in the summer program was near perfect, with no one missing more than two days in total over the 110 course hours.

Summer school has come and gone, leaving behind a great deal more than memories. Data shows an increase in credit accumulation and a smooth transition into a new year of school. Teachers from the summer school program noticed some of the intangibles that data cannot capture: the camaraderie, the increased confidence and sense of pride that students carry, relationships formed that welcome intervention and allow for challenge (“We saw the great job that you did in the summer, and we know that you can do well in this school year.”), and the hope—yes, most of all the hope. ○

*Linda Staudt is the Superintendent of Education on the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. She has served as superintendent with responsibility for Student Success for the past six years.*

*Darlene Kennedy is a principal at Catholic Central High School. She has served as principal here for the past seven years and as administrator*

*with the Board for the past 20 years. Kennedy was named as one of “Canada’s Outstanding Principals” in 2008.*

*Stephanie Houlahan is a Student Success Teacher at Catholic Central High School. She has served as Student Success Teacher at Catholic Central for the past five years. Houlahan has directly overseen the implementation of a variety of programs and interventions to serve students identified as potentially at risk.*

*Katherine Guenette is a Student Success Teacher at Catholic Central High School. She has served as Student Success Teacher at Catholic Central for the past year. Guenette*

*has implemented a proactive behaviour intervention program to support students.*

The following excerpts taken directly from the student scrapbooks best summarize the leadership experience for these students:

“Learning to work as a team helped us become better leaders.”

•••••

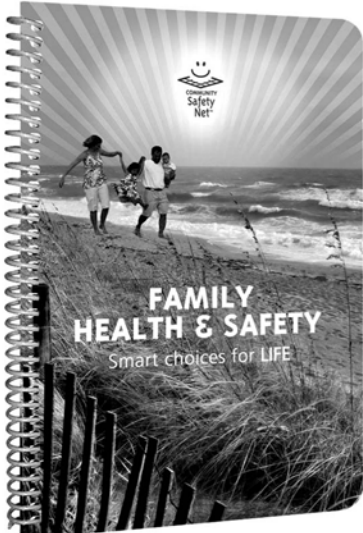
“Patience and communication are two important parts of group success.”

•••••

“Our field trips helped us to build the foundation of friendships.”

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# Aboriginal Pride Programs Promote Academic Success

Calgary Catholic Schools are implementing programs that address the needs of Aboriginal students.

By Lorianne Tenove

**T**ouch their spirits softly with the feather of encouragement, whispering. You can, you will, you must, your people need you..." (Gilliland, 1999)

The Calgary Catholic School District has four Aboriginal Pride Programs, funded by the United Way of Calgary, that have supported student success in school since 2006.

Programs designed to address the academic, cultural, and spiritual needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students, complemented by the Aboriginal Pride Program provide students with educational opportunities that will result in high school completion and successful post-secondary transition.

Built on the central concept that success in school starts with relationship between teachers, students, parents and the entire school community, the goals of the Aboriginal Pride Program are to:

- Develop a network of academic support for Aboriginal students, parents/guardians/families, and school staff;
- Involve Aboriginal students and their families in school events;
- Engage Aboriginal students in cultural, recreational and social activities;
- Enhance the creativity and artistic abilities of Aboriginal students;
- Develop and sustain stability in the lives of Aboriginal students in and out of school by working with parents/guardians/families and community resources;
- Create environments which encourage Aboriginal students to work alongside all peers for social and emotional support;
- Increase class attendance among Aboriginal students; and
- Provide support and resources for school staff.

St. Benedict, a K-6 school located very close to the Tsuu T'ina Nation in Calgary, started their Aboriginal Pride Program in the Fall of

2006 with the shared staff goal of ensuring families from Tsuu T'ina would feel welcome and see themselves as fully included members of the school community. Related to this overarching focus were the intentions to increase attendance rates, to support student success in school and to promote an environment where the entire community, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and families, could learn together about Aboriginal culture and knowledge.

These goals became an articulated part of the school plan and teacher growth plans. Strategies to support these outcomes included infusion of Aboriginal culture and history in the curriculum, professional development for staff and extracurricular activities such as field trips and presentations. The results of the work over a three-year period were evident and

extraordinary. School staff was excited to note that:

- FNMI parents started coming to the school to attend parent- teacher interviews;
- FNMI parents volunteered on field trips, in the classroom and attended school council meetings;
- Attendance rates increased because parents understood the importance of education and their children wanted to be in school;
- Parents realized they had a voice, and were able to communicate concerns to the teachers and school administrators;
- The entire community began to learn about Aboriginal culture and knowledge, creating an environment of understanding, compassion and empathy;
- Children were no longer segregated on the playground or in the lunchroom. They





were invited to each other's birthday parties and play dates;

- Announcements in the morning were said in English and in Tsuu T'ina;
- Students were more engaged in learning as instruction was effectively differentiated and meaningful for the students. The Aboriginal Pride co-ordinator would go into each class over the course of a week to teach a lesson on Aboriginal culture and knowledge to all of the students;
- Teachers changed assessment practices to focus consistently on demonstrating what students were learning, rather than what they were not;
- More students wrote the provincial achievement exams than any year previously; and
- Non-Aboriginal students participated in traditional feasts and powwows with their peers.

At Father Lacombe, a high school where an Aboriginal Pride Program has also enhanced student success, students are motivated to come to school as a result of their connection to the Aboriginal Pride co-ordinator who helps them with timetabling, assignments, career planning and cultural activities. When interviewed, many students stated that the Aboriginal Pride Program made a significant difference in their attendance and desire to complete their high school diploma. They consistently expressed that their experience was one of receiving support. The opportunity to have a significant relationship with someone who believed in their potential, despite challenges in their lives, made a difference.

To complement the Aboriginal Pride Program strategy, Calgary Catholic implemented an initiative to build profiles for all FNMI students from grade nine to 12. The intention was to provide district-wide data to allow the FNMI team to analyze the data for trends and issues that might prevent students from attending school. The identification of specific barriers to student success allowed the implementation of proactive strategies responsive to student need. Often, just the provision of a bus pass or a work experience program that allowed some flexibility, paid a small salary and provided credits towards the high school diploma were able to solve the problem.

Sharing of the learner profiles with administration and teacher advisors kept them informed about individual students and allowed them to identify how they could help students with school and family issues.

The Aboriginal Pride co-ordinator assists the FNMI teacher with the delivery of the

Aboriginal Studies 10 course and Aboriginal dance classes so students are able to gain extra credit while building appreciation for their culture and history. In March, students from the two Aboriginal Pride Programs in the high schools planned an Aboriginal Wellness Day when their peers had the opportunity to learn about hoop dancing, traditional dances, drumming and Aboriginal culture. Over 1,000 students from both high schools and the surrounding junior high schools attended.

Since schools in Alberta are required to include FNMI outcomes in their school plans, the following strategies have been identified by

schools with FNMI students to support the FNMI team and Aboriginal Pride co-ordinators:

- Focus on literacy in early years;
- Differentiate instruction according to levels and interest;
- Introduce more opportunities for visual and oral learning styles;
- Incorporate inquiry based learning strategies;
- Implement strategies to assist teachers and support staff to develop relationship with students, parents and Elders and to encourage them to see FNMI parents and community members as assets to



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the community so that their expertise is acknowledged and respected;

- Use culturally relevant materials when possible. Classrooms that have culturally relevant materials, are informal in nature, encourage cooperative learning/group work, support open-ended questioning, inductive/analytic reasoning and student participation, produce positive results for their FNMI students;
- Include Elders in the school community;
- Access the District FNMI team for support for students and families;
- Implement strong Aboriginal Pride Programs. FNMI and non-FNMI students who are provided with opportunities to appreciate the richness of FNMI culture and participate in FNMI cultural programming excel;
- Demonstrate to students and parents what students are learning, not what they are not learning;
- Offer FNMI culture and language programs;
- Hire FNMI teaching and support staff; and
- Plan for student transitions and ongoing services to individuals within the school setting.

It is our hope and our vision that with support from the Aboriginal Pride Programs in the Calgary Catholic School District, students will continue to achieve higher graduation rates, have consistent attendance rates and experience a sense of pride in their culture and a willingness to share their culture with non-aboriginal peers and families.

And so, with the dedication and hard work of students, parents, elders, and staff we continue to, "Touch their spirits softly with the feather of encouragement, whispering. You can, you will, you must, your people need you..." (Gilliland, 1999). ○

*Lorianne Tenove is a supervisor for Instructional Support and FNMI (First Nation, Métis and Inuit) education for the Calgary Catholic School District. Tenove believes that there is a great change occurring in Canada amongst Aboriginal cultures and that education with the outcome of successful graduation must be a priority for all school Districts.*

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# Passion from the Head, Heart & Hands

Schools are making learning meaningful through the act of service.

By Abraham R. Tuazon, M.Ed and J. Paul Stewart, Ed.D.

**T**eachers often struggle with making learning more relevant for their students. Imparting knowledge in a real world context, where students can apply what they are taught in class can be a constant struggle. One method of making learning more relevant is through the act of service. It has been advocated that community service that reinforces learning prepares students to become active, productive citizens when they leave school and enter

society (Howard, 1998). We believe that it should be a part of every teacher's repertoire.

The task of making learning meaningful leads many educators to try to include some sort of experience such as a field trip, guest speaker or add-on service project as a supplementary activity to reinforce the learning for the students. Although these activities have their merits, they do not always achieve the type of serving we hope our students will engage in when they leave our classrooms. The question of how teachers prepare students to be ready to serve their communities when they graduate is best accomplished

by giving them real experiences throughout their school years.

We believe that service learning has three critical components: the head, the heart and the hands. The head is where the students learn the facts and the body of knowledge needed about a topic. The heart is thinking critically about the knowledge and personalizing the knowledge. When knowledge is applied and starts changing the way we live and allows us to reach out to our world in an act of service, then the hand is utilized. This meaningful use of curriculum is the genius of the service-learning teaching approach.

In elementary and secondary schools, there is a growing trend in using service-learning to teach students that their actions can have a meaningful impact on their community (Kaye, 2004). In essence, student participation can help to shape the future of the communities they will live in. Service-learning forms its usefulness from the needs of students to use what they are learning. It can offer a life changing experience that benefits other people. The process of service-learning helps students to be productive citizens in their communities as agents of positive change in the present rather than only in the future tense.

An example that students in an elementary school used was doing a gardening project related to a science and religion topic. The students learned more than the principles of respect for the environment and people in their community. Raised gardening boxes were built around the school and were cared for by the students and seniors who lived in a complex nearby. This project links the concepts to a real world setting which has an immediate impact on the environment that the students are presently living in. In culmination, the students and seniors spent a morning with the story, *Stone Soup*, and made stone soup for lunch using the produce from the garden.





The school and community partnership is, arguably, the most significant advantage of using service-learning. It raises the greater societal issues that are pervasive in most communities. These would include homelessness, hunger, injustice, poverty, illiteracy and exploitation of resources, people and goods. An example, which addresses the issues of homelessness and injustice, occurred in a school in Red Deer, Alberta, in a service learning activity called, "Save Africa Now". Grade seven students raised awareness for the needs of a small village in Africa by hosting a luncheon that provided food, entertainment and artwork which the students produced. Donations, which totalled \$16,000, were sent to the African village providing the villagers with one house.

The opportunity exists to address these problems directly, indirectly or through advocacy by the collegial activities that the students, teachers and community arrange (Fertman, 1994). In doing so, service-learning leads to more favourable perceptions of the school and its students by the community in general. This perception encourages further exchanges between school and the community to alleviate other issues in society.

Examples of service projects that benefit the community but are not related to the curriculum have a place, such as students shaving their heads for cancer or collecting donations for the survivors of the earthquake in Haiti. But there will usually be a greater effect if the project is related to the curriculum. One class of gifted students learned how to sew and then made quilts which they donated to a homeless shelter located near the school. This is an example of how projects can be creatively linked to the curriculum. Another example of relating learning to the curriculum is grade six French students created menus, acted as

waiters and hosted a French Café where they served their schoolmates and parents in French. This reinforced what the students were learning in French Language Arts and reinforced verbal skills. All of the proceeds went to the SPCA, a charity chosen by the class. The final example is a high school construction class built a house on donated land under the supervision of the teacher (a certified carpenter). The plan is for the 10th house to be donated to Habitat for Humanity.

The service does not begin when students enter into the community. In order to have a successful program, a tremendous amount of envisioning, planning and organizing needs to go into the proposed project. Students need to be integrally involved with choosing the service they will provide. The service must be challenging and relevant to the curriculum and should address a practical issue or need in the school or community.

Reflection after the activity helps students place their experience into the context of their everyday lives. The action of serving is only part of the learning that happens when the students engage in their community work. It is the reflecting or recording of their thoughts before, during and after the service that cements the value of the service and gives it a meaningful link to the curriculum.

Celebration is another essential element of service-learning. Students sharing with the class, school or community about the results of their service projects is a form of celebrating. Having a culminating activity, recognizing achievements and contributions of individuals and highlighting what the service learning project has accomplished, lets students know that their contributions are valued by the community.

When the service-learning project has reached its conclusion then all stakeholders, students, teachers and community members need to evaluate the effectiveness of the project. The educational value of the service-learning project is a critical aspect to be assessed. It is incumbent on the teacher to ensure that the curriculum objectives and the service-learning goals be directly related. This will link both the classroom concepts with the outcomes of the service to the community.

Service-learning affects the students, parents, teachers, administrators, the school and the community. These benefits are displayed in the changes in the attitudes of the students toward their academic work and the relevance it has to their ability to engage with their community in a meaningful manner. The impact on students can be they become more engaged in the issues that reach their head first, grip their heart and lead them into action with their hands. The ultimate goal is to have students who give back to their community through a lifelong dedication to engaging in voluntary service. ○

*Abraham Tuazon is currently teaching Grade four and is the Service-Learning Lead Teacher at Gateway Christian School in Red Deer.*

*Paul Stewart is currently the Associate Superintendent with Red Deer Catholic Schools and works in the students services area.*

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# A Path to Student Success

Engaged Staff | Engaged Students | Improved Learning and Achievement.

By Steve Bayus

Greater St. Albert Catholic Regional Division (GSACRD) is breaking new ground in Alberta with a promising pilot project that is providing educators with tools to measure staff and student engagement to improve student success. For the purpose of this article, student success is defined as learning, achievement and high school completion. One of only a few school jurisdictions in Canada using the *Gallup*

*Organization's Q12 – Climate and Culture Survey*, GSACRD is building on Gallup's 2006 research findings that staff engagement is linked to student engagement; and that students' learning and achievement is influenced by their level of engagement. The Q12 Survey is in part the result of Gallup's research included in Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman's book, *First Break All The Rules – What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. Gallup's Dr. Gary Gordon (see references), has brought engagement to the education sector.

The term "engagement" is popular

everywhere. Civic engagement, community engagement, cultures of engagement, electoral engagement, engagement mapping, public engagement and of course, youth engagement, are all terms we use to assign a process of establishing and maintaining relationships with our clients, customers, publics or stakeholders. In education, it is with our staff, our students, our parents and our communities. Just as there are many ways of expressing "engagement" so are there many ways of defining and understanding the term.

GSACRD has adopted a definition of engagement espoused by the research and literature of the Gallup Organization that provides a focus on a deep sense of belonging. We define and understand engagement to be a "psychological and emotional attachment" of staff or students to the work/mission, school, class, teachers or subject matter to which they are connected. We know that engaged people have a predictable opportunity to be successful in their work or education. However, engagement cannot be viewed in isolation of the many other research findings and strategies educators consider.

As educators we recognize that there are many factors that contribute to student success. The rationale for working with the concept of "engagement" is to provide leaders and teachers with predictable factors that affect the measurable outcomes of the division's education plan. GSACRD has chosen to follow a path to staff and student engagement because of factors that complement the division's mission, vision and values; and its faith culture. This Gallup Path™, selects the best talent for the roles of teacher and principal, develops the strengths of staff and facilitates characteristics of engagement in the work and learning environment. The data generated from the GSACRD Q12 project is providing measured, meaningful information that is used to develop new strategies for success in school improvement plans. The result is expected to be improved measurable student outcomes such as high school completion rates, improved instructional strategies and greater value to the community.





## Staff engagement

The division's purpose for measuring staff engagement is to have both a sense of the engagement of division staff in their work and to work with staff to improve staff engagement, which is assumed to positively impact student engagement. We believe that if the division can positively impact the school or site environment within which we all work (culture and climate), then staff and students can build psychological and emotional attachments that, in the end, will make the division a great place to work and learn.

GSACRD has been measuring staff engagement since 2008. Staff participation rates have been in the 95 per cent plus range, making the Q12 results highly valid. These results are providing leaders and staff with a temperature reading of how we are doing as an organization. A high-yield benefit of the Q12 Survey and the post survey process is the unpacking of results with all division staff and the action planning that occurs "to make this an even better place to be and work." Since culture is about "us" and how "we" do things around here, leaders facilitate staff action plans. The division believes that "we" get better when "we" take action to do so.

Q12 Survey results indicate that the GSACRD level of staff engagement has been significantly higher than the general comparisons with the Canadian and U.S. workforces and that staff engagement has improved over the three years of implemented school and site action plans. It is significant that employees are aware that there are 12 researched and predictable elements of building staff engagement and that these elements can impact their workplace and their sense of mission. The division assumes that the learning and understanding of the notion of staff engagement has prepared staff to understand the significance

of student engagement. We will now have three years of results which will be useful as trend data to benchmark against measurable employee factors such as absentee rates and safety, and their correlation to school and division achievement results.

## Moving to measure student engagement

In October of 2009, GSACRD launched Phase Two of its engagement work by administering the "Gallup Student Poll." This poll links grades, achievement scores, retention, and employment, hope, engagement, and well-being representing actionable targets and indicators of success. It is expected that this initiative will provide school leaders and classroom teachers with predictable and measurable factors to inform them about student engagement and its influence on student learning and achievement. The Gallup Student Poll specifically measures factors that Gallup research indicates can predictably affect student success:

- **Engagement:** the student involvement and enthusiasm for school;
- **Hope:** the ideas and energy we have for the future; and
- **Well-being:** how students think about and experience their lives.

Gallup has also determined the correlated research value of each of these factors. Their research indicates that *Hope* is more predictive of academic success than traditional measures. *Engagement* items distinguish between high and low performing schools. *Well-being* items estimate flourishing and predict academic achievement.

In Fall 2010, the division plans to re-survey student engagement to gain a more qualitative understanding of the results beyond a numeric score. Plans are in place to conduct follow-up focused conversations with students to dig deeper into their

perspectives of personal engagement with division schools and their learning in these schools and classrooms.

The initial Q12 results have provided encouraging and useful data and information. Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools places great weight on the cultural factors that lead to high staff engagement so that staff are giving their best to students and are engaging them fully in learning and achievement. The Q12 measurement tool is an exciting beginning to understanding the relationship between staff engagement and student achievement. The voice of students and staff must be heard if we are going to meaningfully affect the levels of engagement in schools. The acid test for this engagement initiative will be the trend data that indicates whether or not maximizing engagement of people in the school division will assist all of us in the faithful mission to help students reach their potential. ○

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*Steve Bayus is the deputy superintendent of Human Resources and Leadership Services for Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools, a Catholic school Division adjacent to Edmonton, Alberta with 17 schools serving about 6,400 students. Bayus started with this school division in 1981 working as a teacher, school administrator and senior administrator.*

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# Building a Calendar of Research and Inspiration

Dana Laliberte from the Holy Family C.R.D. #37 discovers what students really like and don't like about school and puts a tool in the hands of teachers.

By Dana Laliberte and Jim Parsons

**D**ana Laliberte, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction for Holy Family C.R.D. #37 in Peace River, had an ingenious idea about how one might represent research results to teachers—a way that not only brings research data together, but offers opportunities for teachers to be reminded how to apply what they have learned.

Laliberte, in her role as Supervisor of Instruction/AISI (Alberta Initiative for School Improvement) for Holy Family Catholic School Division, had a burning question: “What are students saying about their classrooms and learning?” And, more specifically, “What do students say they like?” and “What do students say they don't like?” For her, the best way to find out

was to go to the source. So, over a four-year period, she interviewed and videoed students in focus groups to find out what they thought.

Laliberte was shocked both by how willing students were to talk about their school experiences and what students really liked about their schools. Her student focus groups used three simple interview prompts: 1) Tell me about school; 2) Tell me what you like; and 3) Tell me what you don't like. All the focus groups were taped. Laliberte has put together some of the focus group footage and used it for the kick-off for Cycle IV AISI.

Laliberte found that her data could be “crunched” into what she called “big ideas”—29 of them in total. She felt she needed a way to represent these 29 big ideas that would both capture what students said and offer teachers suggestions about how to apply this unique research data.

So Laliberte took these “big ideas” and created a calendar teachers could use on their desks. The calendars contained suggestions for applying these research-informed insights. In other words, they helped teachers answer: “What am I going to do with what students tell us?”

Here's how she captured the 29 “big ideas” into a 10-month teacher's school calendar:

**SEPTEMBER:** Let's get to know each other. (Know your students)

**OCTOBER:** Make my learning interesting and engaging. (Differentiated Instruction)

**NOVEMBER:** Involve Students in Learning - Reflection (Assessment for Learning)

**DECEMBER:** Let me have a say in my learning. (Goal Setting/Portfolios/Student-led Interviews)

**JANUARY:** Allow me a variety of ways to show my learning. (More DI/Flexible Grouping)

**FEBRUARY:** Teach to my needs. (Instructional Level)

**MARCH:** Be fair. (Assessment for Learning)

**APRIL:** Challenge me. (Tiered Instruction – “Zone of Proximal Development”)

**MAY:** Make me laugh. Make learning fun. (Engagement and real life connections)

**JUNE:** Celebrate how well I have done. (Evidence of successful learning)

Each month in the Teacher's Calendar has a Big Idea on the front, with reflection questions on the back. To give a sense of what the calendars looked like, here are May and June.

On the front of the calendar was the month May with the words: “*Make me laugh. Make learning fun.*” (*Engagement and real life connections.*)







Grade seven math student, Joey, receiving feedback. Glenmary School, Peace River.

On the back of the calendar page, teachers could see the following reflection question: *Do I present as a passionate caring teacher who comes to school every day wanting to make a difference?*

On the front of the calendar was the month June with the words: *“Celebrate how well we have done.” (Evidence of successful learning.)*

On the back of the calendar page, teachers could see the following reflection question: *Do I encourage students to celebrate their successes and facilitate ways for them to demonstrate proof/evidence of their learning to a variety of audiences?*

Although the construction of a calendar as the product of the synthesis of research data is both creative and ingenious, from an AISI research perspective, perhaps the generation of data from asking students key educational questions and rigorously recording and synthesizing their answers holds the greatest importance. The students had lots to say and much of it was really positive. For example, here is some of the organized data that generated May’s calendar page. Here is what students said about “making learning fun” and “engaging real-life connections.”

Students noted:

“There is nothing worse than a moody teacher. I shouldn’t have to guess which personality showed up today. You need to let me know that you are excited to be my teacher and tell me every day that you are glad to be here teaching me this most fascinating subject. Make me want it. Make it interesting. Entice me. Tell me stories. Be enthused about what you are teaching so I want to be as enthused about it as you are. Make me laugh every day. Offer me variety. Give me choice. Let me work with my friends sometimes. Play games

with us. We can learn through games and they’re fun.”

These student ideas were followed by Laliberte’s synthesis of specific ideas students had told her during the focus groups.

- The best teachers make students laugh every day and students want to have them for a teacher;
- Not every activity is exciting and engaging but the majority of the time, the student is excited about the topic of study and/or the teacher’s personality;
- These teachers work hard at creating a very good relationship with their students; and
- Learn to be a storyteller. Kids love to hear funny, gory, present-day stories about yourself and the world around them.

Here’s what students had to say about June’s topic, “Celebrating how well we have done” and about the “evidence of successful learning.”

In the student words...

“Nobody likes a parent or teacher that nags. However, I know you probably had to do a little bit of that to get me here today. We all like parties. We all like stickers, even those of us in grade 12. Let me know how proud you are of me. Let my parents know how proud you are of me. Be sure to know me well enough to know what would be the best way to celebrate my progress. Be genuine. Don’t make it up. I will know if I truly didn’t deserve the recognition. Let me share the good stuff I am producing to others. Celebrate some every day.”

And Laliberte’s synthesis...

- Hold daily mini celebrations of learning;
- Brag about your students every day;

- Have others come see the great work they are doing. Audiences are key to Assessment for Learning;
- Ask students if you can keep their work as exemplars;
- Send home notes of praise to five parents every week;
- Make one phone call/day with good news;
- Hold big celebrations on a regular basis; Food is always good; and
- Inviting the Principal is a good thing too.

Laliberte’s research provided wonderful insights for Holy Family teachers. Her unique representation of her research findings suggests that, perhaps in this one case, teachers really can “put research on their calendar.”

As Laliberte notes, she really came to know kids and to believe they have many positive suggestions for teachers. She has learned both how students felt and how honest and helpful they can be. Her teachers, on the other hand, were touched when they heard what students had said about their classes. Holy Family teachers are doing great things in their classrooms. We know because “we listened to what the kids said.” ○

*Jim Parsons has been a professor in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta for 34 years. His areas are social studies education and research.*

*Dana Laliberte is in her 29th year in education. She has taught many grades and subjects and worked in Central Office twice, the first time as Supervisor of Special Services and now as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction.*

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# Engaging Minds: See-Do-Get



Pembina Hills Regional Division asks some tough questions on “testing the test.”

By Richard Harvey, B.Sc. B.Ed. M. Ed.

**W**hat do we understand about our paradigm? How comfortable are you with change? What results do you want to achieve?

*District Leadership That Works* by Marzano and Waters is an interesting book that discusses many things including setting and monitoring non-negotiable goals, collaborative goal setting, high-reliability districts and the perils and promises of second order change.

*Grading What Matters*, an article by Tony Winger in a recent ASCD Educational Leadership magazine, discusses just that, “what matters”.

No matter how SMART the assessment goal, how your school division grades your students will reveal what you value. We communicate to our students and parents what we value when we send home our progress reports and report cards that are stuck in a 20<sup>th</sup> century context and that is; if the students comply with what I want, they can get good grades; effort is rewarded not learning.

As we assess our students, we certainly have to be aware that when we “test”, the test design and use is critical. Do we ask for

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**“As we assess our students, we certainly have to be aware that when we “test”, the test design and use is critical.”**

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a test item analysis? Do we test for validity and reliability or are we depending on the “gut feeling” we all get through the inherent experience of teaching. Do we debate the value of the test and what it actually may test? More than short-term memory we hope. Short-term memory is important when making a life decision but is not a valid grading instrument. But isn’t studying for a test a good way to develop responsibility? It can be, but attending classes regularly, completing regular assignments, rewriting that assignment, peer assessment and feedback to improve understanding should also be considered.

So it might be time to rethink our paradigm and ask the question, “Do we value higher order thinking? What are we expecting from our graduates?” We would hope to encounter young people who are knowledgeable about their own learning styles, who understand how to

work through problems and gain the skills necessary to be successful in society. A broader question for us as school leaders might be, “Do we see ourselves as site-based managers or as learning leaders in our schools? Do we really understand our roles in those environments? What are the non-negotiable goals that your division or Board has set for student achievement? Do teachers understand the significance of these non-negotiable goals for student achievement and success?”

For the experienced teacher to change grading practices is a challenge; more-so if you happen to be teaching high school content and real second order change is needed. By second order change I mean looking at things outside your current comfort level and gaining new knowledge and developing new skills. We understand that the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher identifies the learning outcomes first; designs the assessment second and the



instructional strategies are the last consideration, especially if we are using formative assessment as the key to improving student achievement as all the current research indicates. Is that your understanding of how to improve student achievement? It is your "See-Do-Get?"

Marzano and Waters discuss the 4 "P"s to managing personal change and I believe they have asked the critical questions for teachers to adapt to new grading practices and formative assessment or generally dealing with change. The purpose, picture, plan and part of the transitional change are the connections that need to be made to their personal loss. As the authors note, "people need to know why the organizational change(s) associated with their personal loss is necessary." What will the new picture or vision look like? What plans are associated with the change and what part do they play in this change? Change can be like that, a personal loss. *Scaredy Squirrel*, a wonderful primary book by Melanie Watt, concludes, "Finally Scaredy Squirrel realizes that nothing horrible is happening in the unknown today."

See-Do-Get: How you see things determines what you do and the results you get. It is a tried but true Covey model. What is your See-Do-Get with regards to formative assessment, grading and reporting? While some will see, do and get it rather quickly, others may need time to deal with their personal loss. We know formative assessment works for students in general and in particular for kids at risk. Teachers on the front lines need the resources and professional development to move into true formative assessment and it is a new "see" for them; for the leaders outside the classroom, it is a non-negotiable goal and one that must be measured. ○

Currently Richard Harvey is the Superintendent of Pembina Hills School Regional Division, Alberta; community schools and the Alberta Distance Learning Centre. Richard has 34 years service in education as a teacher, teaching VP, principal, deputy and superintendent and is a trained facilitator and mediator. Harvey is a strong advocate of distributive leadership and formative assessment; the focus for his school division is high school completion. Harvey is retiring this coming December and is planning to return to his home in Newfoundland.



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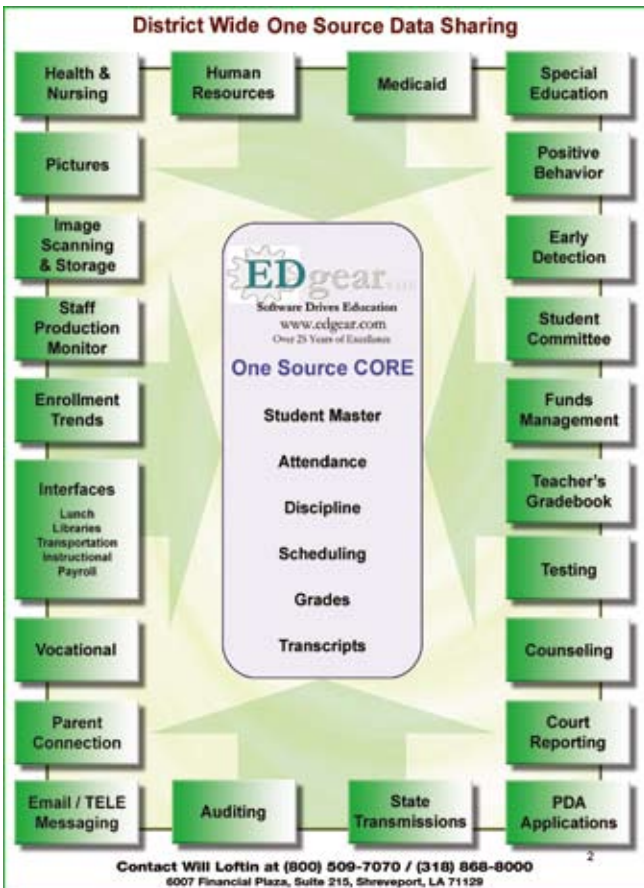




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# Engaging Students through Relevance

The Lester B. Pearson School Board is providing students with a link between education and their future life goals.

By Nancy Battet and Lise Charlebois



Volunteers from McGill University "Engineers without Borders" support a unit of inquiry on water at Sherwood Forest Elementary, where students do a hands-on activity entitled "Water around the World".



Grade nine students from Beaconsfield High School interested in pursuing a career as a Chef visit the School of Culinary Arts at Pearson Adult Career Center for a job shadow opportunity.

The Lester B. Pearson School Board's, Pearson Interactive Community Partnership Program (PICP), has a mandate to link educational, business and community partners to teachers and students in order to give meaning to the curriculum taught in the classroom. The program fosters community initiatives at the primary, secondary, adult and vocational sectors. PICP oversees the GOAL (Guidance Oriented Approach to Learning) dossier, which is an integral part of the Québec Education Program. GOAL supports the philosophy that *relevance to learning* is essential for our students.

The Guidance Oriented Approach to Learning states that young people's educational success is directly related to their motivation in their studies and motivation is sustained, among other things by linking curriculum with career and life plans. Not only do students need to understand why the subjects they are studying are important, but why the skills they are developing are essential for their futures. In order to help students be motivated towards career plans, PICP provides ways for them to discover, develop and exploit the talents and

aptitudes that shape their identity. PICP offers many opportunities for students and teachers to link with community and business partners and is instrumental in organizing career awareness opportunities for students. Some of these programs include: guest speakers to the classroom, off-site visits to business or community organizations, job shadow opportunities, career days (both elementary and high school), teacher training workshops and mentorship programs. Partners of the LBPSB include over 200 companies and organizations from the business community, various community organizations, as well as educational institutions such as vocational programs, cegeps and universities.

Stephanie Ceravolo, a grade seven Discovery Science teacher at Beaconsfield High School, says, "I just naturally think in terms of having community partners visit my classroom when I am teaching my students. When I was teaching my unit on water, I had McGill Engineers without Borders come to my classroom to do hands-on activities with the students to teach them about water shortage around the world. It just allows students to understand the concepts in a realistic way."

The guidance-oriented approach to career exploration is to have community partners become an educational resource.

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As the schools begin to explore academic and work options with their students, they are able to turn to PICP to find relevant and engaging partnerships. In addition, the school is then able to help them grasp the relationship that exists between their learning in school and the society they live in, particularly the world of work.

“I feel in school like I am not always challenged enough; however I do get more than enough school work. I just need to know where everything I’ve worked so hard for will take me in life. I would like to take advantage of the job shadowing program and partake in visiting industries to learn more about robotics, engineering, architecture and medicine,” says Nick Nadeau, an IBO Student at Beurling Academy, LBPSB.

It is also extremely important that students, teachers and parents understand the value of vocational programs as a valued career path. We, at the Lester B. Pearson School Board, are also dedicated to linking our youth sector with our vocational sectors, beginning at the elementary grade six level. PICP’s mission is to introduce our various vocational programs to our youth sector students and to help them open their eyes

to the possibilities of future careers through such programs.

Myriam Boffice, a grade six teacher at Greendale elementary says, “Linking community partners to the curriculum is such a wonderful experience for the students. It makes learning so relevant. Our grade six Career Day really demonstrated to the students how important an education is and helped to answer the famous question that students ask which is “Why do I need my Math?””

PICP is constantly looking for new partnerships to enhance our students’ learning experience. Judging by the interests of our community

partners and the response in our schools and centers the initiative is making a difference. ○

*Lise Charlebois is Assistant Director of educational services at Lester B. Pearson School Board. Her experience in education includes being an elementary school teacher, literacy consultant and school principal.*

*Nancy Battet, Partner Community and Partnership Liaison Agent, is a marketing and communications professional with the LBPSB whose role is to link business, education and community organizations to teachers and the curriculum taught in classrooms.*



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# Every Student, Every Day, A Success

Battle River School Division asks, “What can students expect from us?”

By Dr. Larry Payne, Rick Jarrett and Diane Hutchinson

In the Province of Alberta, expectations for students are spelled out in the School Act and are exactly the same no matter where a child attends classes. The role of a school has always been to make those expectations explicit and measure how well students meet them.

In recent years, Battle River School Division has turned that equation around and begun to ask, “what can students expect from us?” This student-centred approach has required the school division to rework everything from its vision and belief statements to its policies, instructional and professional development practices.

Aligning the philosophy, the training and the practice is critical. Today, with a vision of *Every Student, Every Day, A Success*, and seven beliefs which include statements such as, “when a student is in the greatest need we will provide the greatest support” and “optimal learning occurs when it is engaging, meaningful and active”, the Battle River School Division works hard to ensure students are always the focus.

The 2009 Canadian Education

Association report, *What Did You Learn in School Today*, has given Battle River School Division one more means of analyzing how well it is measuring up.

“There are four points in that report that caught our eye,” explains Assistant Superintendent Rick Jarrett. “Our success, or lack of it, can be tied back to whether or not we’re meeting those four points.”

The four points include:

- High Expectations;
- Effective use of learning time;
- Appropriate instructional challenge; and
- Teacher/student relationships.

The school division sets **high expectations** for everyone, including itself. Students, parents and staff are consulted through the annual satisfaction survey, as well as through an annual series of input sessions organized by the board of trustees. In addition, the superintendent meets regularly with groups of students, as well as inviting input through a web link.

Battle River School Division also focuses on **effective use of learning time**. One of the most recent examples is a pilot project in which a group of students in Grade 11 and 12 have been given laptops, so they can incorporate computer technology into every

aspect of their day.

In order to provide students with **appropriate instructional challenge**, teachers are expected to use their skills to differentiate instruction and ensure all students are able to achieve success.

**Teacher/student relationships** are key to student engagement. Battle River believes, “everyone will be treated with dignity and respect in a safe and caring environment” and, further, has a goal that every student will have a staff advocate. There is a working group of school vice principals designated to creating a framework that will ensure students feel welcome and cared for and possess strong connections to their school. It is the strength of these connections which ultimately supports student engagement.

The big question, of course, is how well these initiatives are working. Battle River School Division revamped its annual satisfaction survey for the 2010 year and now has baseline data to reflect its priorities. Here are a few examples:

- 91 per cent of students in grades seven to 12 agreed with the statement, “students are taking responsibility for their own learning.”;



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- 84 per cent of parents say their students are challenged to do their best;
- 98 per cent of teachers say they differentiate instruction in the classroom to meet the learning needs of students; and
- 85 per cent of those in grades four to six say students in their school can identify a staff member who cares for them.

“The base is solid,” according to the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Larry Payne. “But we’re focused on continuous improvement and we are using the data to identify those areas where we can do even better in the future.” ○

*Dr. Larry Payne is in his third year as Superintendent of Schools for Battle River School Division and has a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Alberta.*

*Rick Jarrett, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Instruction, has a Masters in Educational Studies from the University of Alberta. He has been a member of the superintendency for three years.*

*Diane Hutchinson has a background in corporate communications and journalism, and has been working in the education field for four years.*

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# Increasing Student Engagement through Digital Literacy

Edmonton Catholic Schools are using Literacy Strategies for the 21st Century to connect their students with the online educational world.

By Daniel Espejo and Susana Tomé

As educational consultants with Edmonton Catholic Schools, we are witnessing exciting success in student engagement from an AISI (Alberta Initiative for School Improvement) project entitled, *Literacy Strategies for the 21st Century*. The project focus is to build capacity, awareness and dialogue among secondary students and teachers regarding literacy in the digital age. The success in just the first six months of this three-year project is exemplified in a case study at St. Rose Catholic Junior High School. Through the use of various Web 2.0 sites, teachers and students have been able to communicate their inquiries, ideas and understandings.

Web 2.0 refers to a shift in the creation of information on the internet. Over the past decade, more and more online content has been “user created” by users via interactive websites. *Literacy Strategies for the 21st Century* embraces this social media revolution by helping students and teachers consume, interpret and display knowledge through various forms of media.

Classroom teachers and the administration at St. Rose have been pleased with their involvement in the project. Grade nine math teacher, Josh McJannet, used wikis as a medium for

comprehension during a unit focused on number sense. Students built and analyzed various graphs and had to interpret the information collaboratively online.

Social studies teachers Melissa De Stefanis-King and Mark Plouffe both incorporated online forums to discuss pressing contemporary social issues. One of Melissa’s students said that she preferred online discussions because, “If we use the discussion boards we can type in our work and check over it and maybe then have a better answer than when we just speak it out.”

Melissa said that hosting an online discussion was a powerful tool in that, “It gives every student an opportunity to discuss as well as it gave me the opportunity to assess all of the students as opposed to only assessing those students that speak up in class.”

She also mentioned that, “...once I gave (students) this tool the student responses were more in depth.”

In the grade eight language arts class, Karen Thompson’s students again used online forums to discuss character development and other features of fiction. Students had the opportunity to comment on one another’s posts and ask peers questions to deepen their understanding.

We have been further impressed with the efforts of Julie Crick, a grade nine science teacher at St. Rose. As with the other teachers at St. Rose, she has designed learning experiences

for her students that focus on 21st Century literacy. In Julie’s classes, students have also created digital posters on edu.glogster.com. This has helped students recall, interpret, think critically, represent their understanding and synthesize information to create new media. Students have addressed controversial issues while being sensitive to multiple perspectives.

Julie Crick credits a huge part of the success in her classroom to the progressive professional development model designed by the consultants for the project. Traditional pull out in servicing has been used sparingly; in its place, *Literacy Strategies for the 21st Century*, has employed a residency model. We schedule each of our schools for a four day residency where we work with lead teachers. Consultants are in the classrooms alongside teachers implementing new strategies and new methods. As a lead teacher, Julie stated that, “...now that (Daniel and Susana) are gone we have the skills to teach the rest of our staff to do it. It’s really starting to trickle down to everybody.” Julie also mentioned that, “We’ve really been pushing ourselves to implement these new technologies and the impact it’s had on the kids is pretty big.”

*Literacy Strategies for the 21st Century* has become a broad initiative focusing on 21st century skills in general. Through the efforts of Julie and her colleagues, the students at St. Rose have been developing important 21st century skills. Collaboration and critical thinking are key parts of each lesson. Student engagement is critical. The skills gained are transportable. Students are aware of their new learning and it has become viral.

Every teacher at St. Rose is now looking at new ways to engage students and have invited us to continue to visit their classrooms and work with them and their students. ○

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*Daniel Espejo is a multimedia consultant and Susana Tomé is a content literacy consultant. Before taking on the role of educational consultants for the AISI project both Espejo and Tomé were classroom teachers within Edmonton Catholic Schools. Espejo worked for four years as a high school math and science teacher and Tomé taught grades two, four and six for seven years.*





# Learning Community Allows Division to Follow Vision

Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools is setting goals to ensure student success.

By Hans Woehleke

**E**stablishing Catholic Learning Communities within its schools is one way Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools (CRCS) is ensuring it is meeting the goals it has set for students and staff. As part of its Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS) program CRCS has developed Catholic Learning Communities in each of its schools with the vision of setting goals, developing methods to achieve those goals and perhaps most importantly, developing strategies to measure and analyze results to ensure those goals are met.

Gary Chiste, associate superintendent for CRCS, says the Catholic Learning Communities initiative is division-wide and has been embraced by the teaching staff and administration.

“We are building Smart Goals which are measurable and attainable,” says Chiste. “People are really able to sink their teeth into this.”

The Catholic Learning Communities are made up of everyone in each school who can impact student learning including administration, teachers, teacher’s assistants and even maintenance personnel when needed. The message is clear—everyone plays an integral role in the students’ education, therefore everyone must share in the responsibility of ensuring students achieve their goals.

“We want to share the leadership with these learning communities,” says Chiste. “We want everybody to start taking greater ownership. There is great sharing going on.”

The focus of the learning communities is to set goals that will not only identify what students are expected to learn, but they also allow teachers to analyze whether or not students are learning the material and establishes strategies on what can be done if students are

not meeting their goals. To ensure the Catholic Learning Community program was successful, the school division needed to set aside time for teachers to analyze progress on a regular basis to ensure the Smart Goals were not being neglected. To do so, CRCS made a bold move by announcing early dismissal for students on Friday afternoons to clear room on the timetable for the Catholic Learning Community project. Although students are home shortly after noon on Fridays, teachers and administration are using Friday afternoons to meet with their learning communities and discuss the progress of their Smart Goals.

Dorothy White, principal at Holy Spirit Academy in High River, says the time on Friday afternoons is an opportunity to embrace the whole learning community—it is not just for the teachers, but the students will be the biggest benefactors.

“During this time spent together teachers can discuss questions like, “What do we want the children to learn? How do we know they are learning? What do we do if the kids haven’t learned it?” says White. “We answer those questions and the teachers are dedicated and focused on the learning of our kids.”

White says the teaching staff has embraced the new initiative because they can see the immediate impact on student learning and it gives them an opportunity to affect change in student learning long-term.

“That is what gets teachers excited—seeing children learn,” says White. “This is not a one-year fly-by-night project. This is a three-year commitment because we know if you want to affect change, to entrench it in an organization, it takes time.”

In the past it was difficult to follow initiatives established by administration or staff through to the end because of lack of time, resources or support. With the learning communities, staff has a set time each week to review the progress of their specific initiatives



and it also provides teachers with an opportunity to discuss issues with their colleagues. Catholic Learning Communities can impact change throughout the division by focusing on specific targets so they can track growth, develop strategies and timelines and constantly bring them forward to the group. For example, one Smart Goal set by a learning community was to increase reading scores for all students by two per cent by the end of the school year. The learning community will set benchmarks and meet every week to gauge the progress to make sure they are meeting those benchmarks and they are on target to meet their Smart Goal. If not, what needs to be changed to ensure they meet their goal of improved reading scores?

“Every week that goal is in their face,” says Chiste. “The word accountability is not a bad word in our division and it is refreshing to see everyone taking on the responsibility because they are a part of it, they can embrace it because they can make changes.” ○

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*Hans Woehleke started with Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools as the founding principal of the jurisdiction’s first high school, Holy Trinity Academy, in 1992. In 1998 he became Associate Superintendent of the Teaching and Learning department and since 2008, has served in the capacity of Associate Superintendent of Administration, Operations and Human Resources.*

### Former Director of Education to receive honorary degree

Bill Hogarth retired from his position as Director of Education at the York District School Board on December 31, 2009 after 16 years of service. Hogarth has spent the last 40 years in education and is receiving an honorary degree from York University for his accomplishments.

“It really is the ultimate honour. First of all, to be recognized both internally and externally. Second, to be recognized by a renowned university, it’s quite an honour,” says Hogarth, adding that upon receiving the phone call from the president, he got a chill up his spine. “It’s an amazing feeling when you get recognized for your achievements.”

Hogarth says there were many highlights in his career including the quality of instruction in the York region which led to high student performance. He also pointed out the high level of instructional intelligence of their teachers. He is also very excited about the focus on literacy—91 per cent of students are reading at the end of grade one.

Hogarth is still taking on many projects to further education ideals. He will be receiving his honorary degree on June 27, 2010.

### Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board teacher receives Premier’s Teacher of the Year Award

Recipients for the Premier of Ontario’s Teaching Awards for Excellence, aimed at recognizing outstanding teachers, principals and education support staff across Ontario, were announced in April, 2010. The Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board is proud to congratulate Diane Nehmetallah, Food Service and Hospitality Technology Teacher at Assumption College Catholic High School upon being awarded the highest honour—the Premier’s Teacher of the Year Award.

Nehmetallah is one of five teachers from across the province to receive this prestigious award, which recognizes educators and staff who excel at unlocking the potential of Ontario’s young people and gives these remarkable professionals the recognition they deserve. There was never a doubt at Assumption College that Nehmetallah is a teacher who transforms students’ lives and makes a profound and positive impact on students’ intellectual, social and emotional development. The Premier’s Awards for Teaching Excellence have ten different categories which honour the positive impact teachers and staff have on students, and are a great way to recognize those individuals who make a difference in education.



*Carol Van Slyke, Peace Regional Outreach Coordinator, assisting a student*

### Outreach Coordinator semi-finalist for Alberta Excellence in Teaching Award

Peace River School Division is pleased to celebrate Carol Van Slyke, Peace Regional Outreach Campus Coordinator for her accomplishment as Semi-Finalist in the Alberta Excellence in Teaching Awards.

“We are very pleased that Carol is being recognized provincially for her outstanding contributions to student learning and success,” says Nan Bartlett, PRSD Board Chair. “The difference that Carol makes in her role at the Peace Regional Outreach Campus is immeasurable. She leads an outstanding team of individuals that work hard to bring services and supports to youth in the area. She is passionate, dedicated and very deserving of this recognition.” Van Slyke teaches mathematics, English, social, physical education and all career technology studies to students in grades 10 to 12 at the Outreach Campus, performs administrative duties and has taken a lead role in forming an in-house daycare at the Outreach Campus.

“This is one of the most gratifying places I have worked in my career” says Van Slyke. “I work with an outstanding team of individuals and we give back to the community. It is rewarding to know that we are helping youth and providing the services and supports for them to succeed.”

### OPSBA welcomes appointment of Leona Dombrowsky as Minister of Education

The Ontario Public School Boards’ Association (OPSBA) congratulates Leona Dombrowsky on her appointment as Minister of Education and looks forward to working with her on further developing the many positive education initiatives undertaken by the Liberal government.

“We are pleased that by naming Leona Dombrowsky to this portfolio, Premier Dalton McGuinty continues to honour his promise to

keep public education at the centre of his government’s mandate,” says Colleen Schenk, president of the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association.

OPSBA is prepared to work in cooperation with Minister Dombrowsky and this government to continue to build a school system that can give Ontario’s children an education that is the envy of the world. Together, they will continue to focus on developing a strong publicly funded education system, open to all and governed by democratically elected local school boards.



### Director Ambrose White receives volunteer award from province

The 36th Annual Provincial Volunteer Awards Ceremony and Luncheon was held Monday, April 12th at the Westin Hotel, Halifax. More than 70 volunteers were honoured for the tremendous contributions they have made to their communities and to the province. Approximately 70 volunteer representative awards will be presented along with four specialty awards.

Representing the Cape Breton Regional Municipality was Ambrose White, one of its 2010 representative

volunteers. Ambrose, Director of Operational Services, for the Cape Breton Victoria Regional School Board, spearheaded the establishment of the Greenfield Elementary School’s “After School Initiative Program”. He also served as president of the New Waterford Tennis Club for more than 20 years, coached soccer, baseball, basketball and hockey and has served in executive positions for many of these sports.

Dr. Davis, Superintendent of Schools, states, “Ambrose is a valuable well-respected member of our staff, and an extraordinary member of our community.”





### Interprovincial visit to facilitate leadership development

In December 2009, 10 members of the Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association (OCSOA) were hosted by the Calgary Catholic School District's Superintendents for 3 days. The opportunity for the exchange of ideas and promising practices was facilitated through Ontario's Mentorship and Coaching Program, which has supported the transition into educational leadership roles for principals, vice-principals, supervisory officers and directors of education over the last four years. The visit was organized by Larry Langan, OCSOA's Mentoring and Coaching Coordinator for Directors of Education, and Lucy Miller, Calgary Catholic's Chief Superintendent.

The Ontario visitors were pleased to share information about efforts to improve student achievement in literacy, numeracy and student retention. Other topics included the work of the Institute for Education Leadership with a particular focus on the Ontario Leadership Strategy and Succession Planning and Talent Development. ([www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca))

As a follow-up to the visit, Lucy Miller was invited as keynote speaker to bring the message of "Sharing the Role of Shepherd" to the OCSOA AGM in April 2010.

### Directors of Education lead community campaigns for United Way in 2009

Kudos to three Ontario Directors of Education for their leadership as Chairs of local 2009 United Way Campaigns! Jamie McCracken, Director of Education for the Ottawa Catholic School Board, has been involved with Ottawa's United Way since 2006. Under his leadership as Campaign Chair this year, the Ottawa United Way goal of \$31.7 million was surpassed with a final total of \$32.6 million. Jamie was OCSOA's CASA EXL recipient in 2007.

Michael Schmitt, Director of Education for the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board, chaired the Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington United Way campaign. After an 11 week campaign the community's goal of \$2.82 million was exceeded with a final attainment of over \$3million.

John Mackle, Director of Education for the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board, and his wife Susan were co-chairs of their community's United Way campaign. Cognizant of the area's struggling economy and the increasing needs locally, the campaign target was raised to \$2.5 million. With a motto of "Right Here, Right Now" and with hundreds of volunteers organizing BBQs, breakfasts, auctions, soup fests, bake sales and chilli lunches, the "Every Day Hero" program saw the goal surpassed with the collection of \$2,515,014.00.

John is OCSOA's CASA EXL recipient for 2010.

### Ottawa Catholic School Board - Director of Education to retire

At the Board meeting on January 12, 2010, Director of Education James McCracken announced his retirement effective August 31, 2010. McCracken has been director of education for 7 years and an educator for 34 years.

"Jamie has been a transformational leader for this Board," says Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, Gordon Butler. "Early in his tenure, he tasked each and every employee of the Board with the responsibility of student success and faith development. He created an environment open to change, one where all staff participate in the leadership journey. This group commitment to the goals of Catholic education has made the Board a recognized leader in education in Ontario. Jamie will be missed, but thanks to his vision and leadership, he leaves behind a flexible and innovative Board that will continue to ensure excellence for all students."

"It has been a privilege and honour to have served this board for most of my career in education. The Ottawa Catholic School Boards is a model of teamwork and collaboration rarely seen in organizational life," expresses McCracken.

### GPPSD giving its students the Edge

The Grande Prairie Public School District (GPPSD) wants to give its students the Edge.

A new partnership between the GPPSD and Edge School—a high performance, independent sports school in Calgary—will bring passion-based education to students in Grande Prairie.

While efforts were being made to pursue this initiative independently and on a smaller scale, GPPSD senior administrators soon saw the benefits of partnering with an existing, well-developed program. Edge School for student-athletes has been operating since 1999 with the focus on unlocking the athletic and academic potential of all students. That recipe for success will come to the GPPSD in September 2010 as an alternate program called Edge School Skill Academy North.

"We were looking for different ways to engage students. What a better way to engage students in school then to allow them to pursue a passion they care deeply about?" says GPPSD Supt. Chris Gonnet.

The concept of a High Performance Sports Program in Grande Prairie using the Edge Program framework and philosophy was first brought to the District's attention by Brett Stephenson, a member of the Board of Directors of the Grande Prairie Storm Athletic Association. According to Edge School's philosophy, this program is about using world class sport development programming as a vehicle for unlocking the academic and leadership potential in young people.

The program is set to be introduced in September 2010 with location yet to be determined.

### Government makes education priority in tough fiscal times

“The government made education a priority in a tough budget—it could have been worse,” says Alberta School Boards Association President Heather Welwood of the hold-the-line budget for Alberta schools announced in February, 2010. Grants to school boards were frozen at 2009-2010 levels for the coming year—a far cry from the \$300 million cuts warned of last fall.

Welwood cautions that while the numbers aren't as bad as expected, school boards still face significant budget challenges—especially on the teacher salary front—that will require far more than routine belt-tightening. “No grant increases plus rising operating costs mean school boards will have less money to meet the expectations of students, parents and their communities.”

“The 5.99 per cent wage increase awarded by the arbitrator (in February) and an expected three per cent wage increase in September represents millions of dollars—which school boards don't have,” says Welwood. “At this point, we are counting on the government to make good on its promise to fully fund the five-year deal it made with teachers regarding salaries.”

“The minister has asked school boards to be patient. We will do what we can to support and work with him—but we are really counting on the government to come through.”

### New principal for Duclos School

Northern Lights School Division No. 69 (NLSD) Superintendent Roger Nippard is pleased to announce the appointment of Richard Cameron to the position of Principal for Duclos School in Bonnyville effective September, 2010.

Cameron received a Bachelor of Education from the University of Alberta in 1984. In 2001, he graduated from the NLSD Leadership Academy. In 2005, he completed his Master of Arts—Leadership and Training from Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC, and a year later graduated from the National Staff Development Leadership Academy. Cameron has been an educator with the Northern Lights School Division for 25 years. He was an elementary teacher for 13 years—eight of which were spent at Duclos School. In 1998, he moved to Cold Lake Elementary School where he spent four years as Assistant Principal, then Principal. He was Principal at Iron River School for seven years. Cameron is currently NLSD's Director of System Improvement.

He comments, “I am excited to be joining the Duclos School community and look forward to being part of the future of this wonderful school. It will be great to work with the committed and caring staff and to continue building on the successes of the school...”

The Northern Lights School Division has 27 schools, serves a student population of close to 6000 students, and covers a geographic area of 14,800 square kilometres. Its mission statement is, “working together to help every student learn and excel.”



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### Garry Campbell receives Helen Des Roches Starfish Award

Garry Campbell, the Peel District School Board's Climate for Learning and Working leader, is the 2010 recipient of the Helen Des Roches Starfish Award. He was honoured at an award ceremony on March 5, during National Social Work week, at the HJA Brown Education Centre in Mississauga.

"Garry is a deserving recipient and the first member of the psychology department to be honoured," says Jim Van Buskirk, Chief Social Worker, Peel board. "The award recognizes both Garry's remarkable success in creating appropriate programs to help students succeed and also his unprecedented work in the area of school climate."

Campbell's three-decade career with the Peel board has been distinguished by his interest in children and youth with behavioural difficulties and his work in the area of school climate. He generously supports his colleagues in their work efforts, has strengths as a presenter and teacher, and inspires people who work with him.

The Helen Des Roches Starfish Award is presented annually to an individual who has made a significant difference in the lives of students facing obstacles to their education.



*Florent Bilodeau (right) with Yves St-Maurice, Chair ACELF and Nicole Hennessey, recipient*

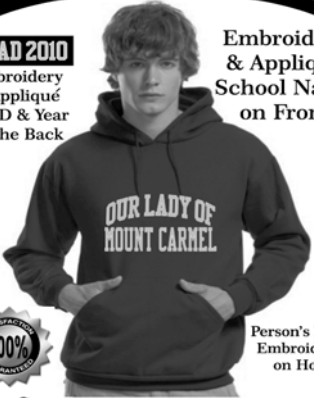
### Honorary member of the Canadian Association of French Language Education

Florent Bilodeau, Superintendent of the Greater Southern Separate Catholic Francophone Education Region No. 4 (CSCFSA) of Alberta was recognized as an honorary member of the Canadian Association of French-language education (ACELF) at the ACELF conference in the fall of 2009. The award recognizes Bilodeau's exemplary contribution to the development of francophone education in


Saskatchewan and Alberta and in promoting the rights of the Francophone population at a local, provincial and national level.

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### Peel Board names Tony Pontes as new director of education

The Peel District School Board has selected Tony Pontes as the new Director of Education. Pontes, currently Superintendent of Staff Development and School Support Services and a 31-year employee with the Board, assumed the new role on March 1, 2010. He succeeds retiring director Jim Grieve who, in November, became the Assistant Deputy Minister with the Ministry of Education.

"We were impressed by the quality of all the applicants we considered," says Janet McDougald, Chair of the Board. "Each candidate spoke about the positive reputation of this board and the outstanding quality of our staff. Though the candidates had many strengths, Tony Pontes was our clear choice. Not only does he bring an understanding of our organization, and critical continuity and stability, he also has a network of positive relationships throughout our board."

Pontes says, "I have always felt honoured to be a learner and a leader in the system that has supported me throughout my life. I know the system and the region well. I have been a Peel resident since 1963, growing up in Streetsville and I now live in Brampton. I am excited knowing I will be working collaboratively with staff, parents and community partners in my new position, in order to enhance student success."

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### Dropout prevention a priority

With the release from the *ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport* (MELS) of the dropout rates for the 2007-2008 school year in April 2010, the Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) has launched an extensive comparative analysis against its own internal data. The information released by the MELS shows an increase in the number of students leaving school without a diploma or qualification, for a dropout rate of 43.7 per cent for 2007-2008. When comparing this against the ETSB's own internal data, which takes into account the 49 students who left the province during that school year, the dropout rate falls to 34.6 per cent.

"The dropout rate, as calculated by the Ministry, takes into account students that are registered in an educational institution in the province, therefore any student that leaves Quebec and goes to study in another province or country is considered a dropout. This migration of students leaving the province is more prevalent in the English sector and negatively impacts our dropout rate every year," explains Chantal C. Beaulieu, Director General.

The school board is continuing its internal comparative analysis to uncover any other discrepancies and anomalies to be able to give an accurate portrait of the dropout situation in its territory. "We strongly believe that the concerted actions and efforts that have been put in place since September 2007 will have a positive impact on our dropout rate. For example, the 2007-2008 school year was the first year in which we implemented a recognized qualification program for the students of the Eastern Townships Learning Centre and the 16-plus program at Massey-Vanier High School. The success of these students and programs will only be reflected in the 2008-2009 data. Our efforts will not be dissuaded as we strongly believe that having even one student drop out of school, is one too many," states Beaulieu.



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### Administrators appointed in LRSD schools

**Peter Weeks** has been appointed Principal of J.T. Foster School in Nanton beginning August, 2010. Weeks brings with him 15 years experience as a teacher and administrator in rural Alberta schools. He has taught in both elementary and high schools, has served as AISI coordinator and, most recently, was Principal of Botha School. In 2008, Weeks was recognized as a finalist in the Alberta Excellence in Teaching Awards for creating a highly innovative and engaging 21st century learning environment to help meet the needs of a small, rural school facing declining enrolments. He attributes that success to strong community support, engaged students and a motivated staff. Weeks joins Bart Heine as the administrative team at J.T. Foster School.

**Sandy Treit** has been appointed Principal of Matthew Halton High School in Pincher Creek. Treit joins Livingstone Range School Division from Peace River South, British Columbia where she has served as a teacher and, for the past five years, principal of Tumbler Ridge Secondary School. Treit has been involved in many district initiatives including the implementation of a new teacher mentorship program, the Support for Growth district professional development committee and administrator growth committee. Treit joins Kirby Dietze as the M.H.H.S. administrative team.

**Ronalee Orr** has been appointed Principal of Granum School. Orr has worked with Livingstone Range School Division for 18 years as teacher and administrator at W.A. Day School and G.R. Davis School in Fort Macleod and, over the past five years has been principal of Canyon School in Pincher Creek. Orr has a strong background in early childhood development and literacy. She is a consummate learner who values professional development and uses current research on teaching and learning to make programming decisions for students. Orr's strong commitment to students and learning will serve Granum students very well.

**Myrna Dembicki** has been appointed Assistant Principal of Horace Allen School beginning in August 2010. Dembicki joins LRSD from Palliser School Division and brings with her 20 years of experience as an educator in Swaziland, Africa, Lethbridge and rural Alberta. Her areas of specialization are early childhood and special education. She has a strong literacy background and has worked as a learning support teacher, an Assessment for Learning coach, Lead teacher for 6 +1 Traits and AISI consultant. In addition she was a 2008 Provincial Excellence in Teaching Award finalist. Dembicki joins Elaine Garner as the Horace Allen administrative team.



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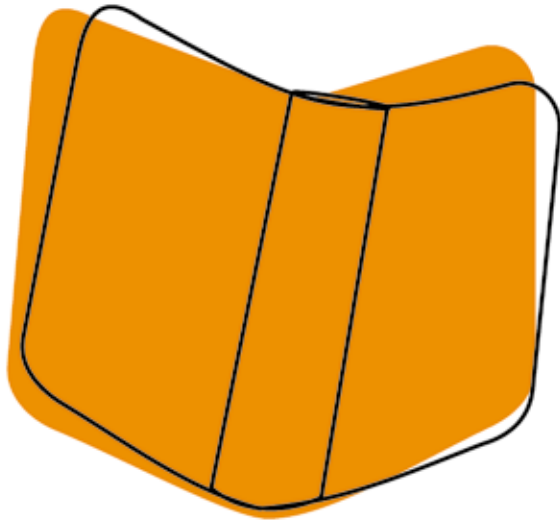
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