

Summer 2018

Leaders & Learners

The official magazine of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators

Association canadienne des gestionnaires de commissions scolaires



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**Summer 2018
PUBLISHED FOR:**
**Canadian Association of
School System Administrators /
Association canadienne
des gestionnaires de
commissions scolaires**

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Oakville, Ontario L6H 5M1
Tel: 905-845-2345
Fax: 905-845-2044
www.cassa-acgcs.ca

PUBLISHED BY:
Matrix Group Publishing Inc.

Return all undeliverable
addresses to:
309 Youville Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2H 2S9
Toll-Free: (866) 999-1299
Toll-Free Fax: (866) 244-2544
www.matrixgroupinc.net
Canada Post Mail Publications
Agreement Number: 40609661

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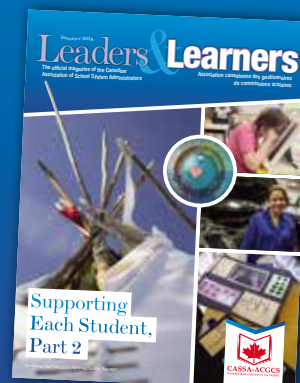
Advertising Design:
James Robinson

Layout & Design:
Cody Chomiak

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– World Development Report 2018



Anne O'Brien
CASSA/ACGCS President

A student's social, emotional, spiritual and physical well-being make up the fundamentals of learning preparedness and academic achievement.

As organizers finalize details in the final planning stages of the Summer 2018 CASSA Conference (July 4-6, 2018, in Ottawa, Ontario), we as participants can prepare ourselves for a welcome opportunity to learn and share prevalent topics in student well-being and achievement across the Canadian education system today.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared that quality Health & Physical Education programs, “lay the foundation for lifelong active living, enhance health and well-being, and help to prevent and/or reduce future health problems.” This statement is important to us as school system leaders as we focus on educating the whole student with well-being being a top priority for enabling success and achievement.

I would like to re-cap a personal highlight from our strategic planning session in February 2018, where Health and Physical Education expert, Ted Temertzoglou and I partnered to showcase how some school boards, together with their community partners, are working to support the physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being of all students.

Together, we demonstrated a series of exercises, the connection between physical activity, numeracy and literacy as a strategy

to help teachers deliver Daily Physical Activity (DPA):

- Connections between physical education and mental well-being, academic readiness and living skills;
- The positive effects of exercise and moderate to vigorous movement on the brain (specifically on depression, anxiety, academic readiness and neuroplasticity);
- The positive impact the revised Health & Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum can have on students if we used the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Quality Physical Education Policy Document as our framework; and
- UNESCO's recently-released informational video on the benefits of quality physical education (<https://youtu.be/XD3sCUOvnCs>).

These discussions and our overall focus on physical activity and emotional well-being connect succinctly to the theme of CASSA's 2018 Annual Conference, *Supporting Each Student*.

With this focus in mind, we are excited to welcome Dr. Michael Ungar as Keynote presenter at our conference. Dr. Ungar is among the best-known writers and researchers on the topic of resilience in the world, changing the way resilience is understood, shifting the focus from individual traits to the interactions between people and their families, schools, workplaces and communities. We will also hear from Dean Shareski, who has found his

passion in helping teachers explore the affordances of technology for learning. In an era where there is so much leading-edge technology available to students, we welcome this opportunity to embrace learning models that complement the digital narratives in our schools and classrooms. For a sneak preview of these and other presentations, and to register for the Summer 2018 CASSA Conference, visit www.conference.cassa-acgcs.ca.

In closing, I want to express my sincere gratitude to our Executive Director Ken Bain and the members of CASSA-ACGCS for the work you do each day as leaders within an education system that we all believe to be remarkably the best in the world. Serving in the role of President of this association has broadened my view of leadership through a national lens, and I am pleased that we have accomplished so much together with our educational and corporate partners, developing and improving our profession.

I look forward to welcoming new and returning faces at the 2018 Summer CASSA Conference as we work towards shaping school systems that promote our message of *Supporting Each Student*.

Note, the opening quote is from the *World Development Report, Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. It is available for download here: www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018.

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The theme for this year's issues of *Leaders & Learners*, as well as the theme for the conference, is *Supporting Each Student*. In looking up the definition of "support" in the Webster Dictionary, I found the following words and phrases: *advocate, assist, help, maintain, serve as a foundation, keep (something) going and champion*. The CASSA Board of Directors intentionally changed the association's purpose last year from addressing the success of "all students" to addressing the success of "each student." The change reflects the increasing focus on personalizing education to the individual needs of each student.

This issue of *Leaders & Learners* provides examples of practices across the country that support the needs of individual students, and stories of how supporting school leaders builds a foundation capable of supporting each student. These are the stories of school and system leaders who *advocate, assist, help, maintain, serve as a foundation, keep (someone) going and champion* each student.

From the creation of a backyard culture camp to foster students' learning

about their Indigenous culture in **Dene Zhatie (South Slave) Northwest Territories**; to work in **Nanaimo, British Columbia**, to reframe student codes of conduct to ensure each student feels a sense of belonging; to **Prince George, British Columbia**, with the student success stories of seven students, including a visually impaired student and a Syrian refugee; to **Wild Rose School Division, Alberta**, where a model is being developed to increase staff efficacy to address each student's mental health to a responsive, individualized approach; to the strategic alignment between effective professional development and student learning in **Saskatchewan Rivers School Division**; to **Lakeshore School Division in Manitoba**, where the School Self Review process supports the learning of each child; to a successful model of professional learning that supports student and staff learning at **Wellington Catholic District in Ontario**; to snapshots of success in **B.C., Alberta and Ontario**...the issue highlights what can be done as school and board staff support each student.



Ken Bain
CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

Lastly, I want to congratulate and highlight the exemplary contributions of the **British Columbia School Superintendents' Association** to ensuring that schools in B.C. are inclusive and welcoming. Its work in support of SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) Education helps to ensure that members of the LGBTQ+ community feel safe and included in B.C. schools. Please see the feature article starting on page 14.

My thanks to the educators across Canada who *advocate, assist, help, maintain, serve as a foundation, keep (someone) going and champion* the success of each student!

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Creating a Culture Camp



By Shirley Lamalice, Princess Alexandra School, and Sarah Pruys, South Slave Divisional Education Council



The sun slides through the spruce trees, resting upon the bright canvas tipis and trapper's tents below. Nearby, children wrap bannock dough around thick sticks to roast over a crackling fire. While it may sound like these students are in the middle of a forest, they are actually in the backyard of their school in the middle of their town.

If you drive north from Edmonton for about 11 hours, you'll end up in Hay River, Northwest Territories, home of this backyard culture camp. The town is home to three South Slave Divisional Education Council schools—Harry Camsell School (K to Grade 3), Princess Alexandra School (Grades 4 to 7), and Diamond Jenness Secondary School (Grades 8 to 12)—which have been sharing the camp since it was constructed in the backyard of Harry Camsell School during the summer of 2017.

Dene Zhaté (South Slave) teacher Shirley Lamalice, who came up with the idea to have a camp right behind the schools, explained that she didn't believe there was enough emphasis on the Dene language and a holistic approach. A holistic approach includes teachings about the land, culture and environment by Elders.

In the past, preparation to hold a cultural outing took a lot more time, effort and money for each of the three schools.



Educators had to rent space, book transportation (for both students and gear), arrange volunteers and ensure student permission forms were signed. Now they can just walk outside.

Creating opportunities for students to be out on the land is important; it allows them to reconnect with their culture (70 per cent of students in the community are of Dene or Métis descent) and learn life skills. It also teaches respect for the land, leads to improved wellness and facilitates Indigenous language learning.

So, we got to work and found a perfect place behind the three schools, which are all next door to each other. We worked closely with Principals Carolyn Carroll and Lynne Beck, along with

now retired Assistant Superintendent Brent Kaulback, who provided initial support and will continue to provide support and maintenance in the future to ensure the camp continues to grow as a place for learning.

When setting up a camp, the key steps include finding a proper location and then partnering with local community members who know how to set up and run a camp properly. Indigenizing education goes far beyond hanging up some posters in a school or giving land acknowledgements—it is about integrating Indigenous ways of life into the school system. It’s about involving the community in their children’s education whenever possible.

Once the camp was set up and fenced in, all three schools were free to share the space. The Dene Zhatié teachers have been trailblazers in using the outdoor classroom for their language lessons, but the area is available for all classes to use because the space is there for all of the students.

In the Dene culture all that people do is for their children’s future. By teaching youth to respect and care for the land, we are ensuring that generations to come will also have a relationship with their land and that the Dene ways will continue to be passed on. Even if students are not actively participating in a hands-on activity, the fact that they are immersed in culture and have a chance to observe is equally important.

And, as the Elders explain, Indigenous languages are centered on the land and so they are learned best on the land, fully integrated into other teachings, such as how to prepare and dry fish.

“It makes me happy to do this for our youth, they will learn and carry on what they learned,” explains Elder Margaret Eleeze. “In our Dene culture, what we do is always for our children, our youth, and as an Elder, I want to carry on the traditions the best I know how.”





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Elders Elaine and Robert Lamalice, who are also an integral part of the camp, say, “Not only do the students learn from us, we learn from them too. They bring us joy, smiles and laughter. If they are happy, it makes us happy, and by that we know we are doing the right thing in bringing the culture activities back.”

The Elders not only offer advice on how to best pass on the teachings, but are also immersed themselves teaching the students at the camp. Supported by a territory-wide program called Elders in Schools, the Hay River schools invite Elders into the outdoor classroom to help pass on skills and model language.

“I feel that the camp has enriched our language program and provided students with the opportunity to learn from their Elders in a traditional setting as opposed to the classroom environment,” says Principal Carolyn Carroll. “Both Elders and students are more comfortable and at ease in the traditional setting of the camp.”

The Elders, students and teachers have been using the camp year-round.

In the fall, students learn how to harvest and prepare fish and meat for the winter by hanging and smoking it over a fire. They learn which berries to pick, and which plants are traditional medicines and how they are prepared. Instructors and Elders also teach the students about the different animals—such as ducks, geese, fish and beavers—and how to make use of the whole animal so that nothing goes to waste.

Winter is time for moose stew, bannock and tea (made from rose bushes, Labrador tea leaves, and raspberry leaves) around the fire while listening to Elders’ traditional stories and stories from their youth. Of course, before that happens students have to maintain the camp by building a trail out to the tipi and the woodpile. You wouldn’t want the fire to go out when the temperature is -30°C!

When spring arrives with light and warmer weather, the new season is celebrated with traditional games and competitions, such as log sawing and snow snake. In snow snake, students throw a wooden spear underhand down a packed-down alley of snow. The student whose stick slides the furthest is the winner.

And, if you visit the camp during the summer, you’ll find students practicing carving, decorating driftwood, trying their hand at fish scale art, beading, making bannock and practicing shooting bows and arrows.

The Grade 6 class at Princess Alexandra School had only positive things to say about the camp. They echoed their teacher, saying, “It is cool to be around the fire and listen to the stories

that the elders tell,” “I like to learn how to make bannock and cook it over the fire,” and, “It’s calm and peaceful there.” The camp is doing just what we hoped that it would through incorporating the Dene culture in a holistic way.

There are also many other on-the-land activities that take place in the woods and waters outside of the camp boundaries, and so students will still leave school grounds occasionally to learn how to fish, trap and hunt, and pick berries and traditional medicines not found in the camp.

In the future, we would like to see the camp become even more functional, and so we are

always looking for ways to expand its offerings to benefit all students. One goal we have in mind is to offer overnight camps for students on the weekends.

But, for now, to have a camp on school grounds has already done so much to ensure that the students’ culture is accessible to them. ○

Shirley Lamalice is an Indigenous Language and Culture Specialist at Princess Alexandra School in Hay River, NT.

Sarah Pruis is the Public Affairs Coordinator for the South Slave Divisional Education Council.

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TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

BC's SOGI Story:

Supporting Each Student Through SOGI-Inclusive Schools

By Claire Guy, British Columbia School Superintendents Association

In 2016, the British Columbia Ministry of Education and its partner groups embarked on a courageous, coordinated and fast-paced journey that would create meaningful change to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ students in B.C. schools. At that time, the acronym, SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) was uncommon, but today, SOGI-inclusive education is a powerful initiative helping make our schools safer and welcoming for all students.

The SOGI journey is actually not new. Pockets of great work were happening for years but not province-wide. However, in 2015-16, the ARC Foundation (Awareness, Respect, Capacity) partnered with the Delta School District to fund .2 FTE staffing for a SOGI coordinator to create a coaching structure of support and resources for educators. The goal was to build capacity and awareness to make schools more inclusive.

Delta School District already had a committee of passionate educators keen to be involved, and the district lead coordinator, a local elementary principal, recruited volunteers at every school site—SOGI School Leads—who began building a professional network to share promising practices and create resources. The model proved highly successful and became the blueprint for the structure that has now grown throughout B.C.

Moving from the positive Delta experience, the ARC Foundation partnered with the Ministry of Education to allow for the intentional expansion to other districts. By the



end of June 2016, nine districts had committed to the first year SOGI Educator Network. To add further support, the ARC Foundation funded the Teacher Education For All (TEFA) initiative, providing teacher candidates in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia with training and tools to implement SOGI-inclusive education in their future classrooms.

In July 2016, a change to the *BC Human Rights Code* to include gender identity and expression as a prohibited ground of discrimination, became the catalyst for the BC Ministry of Education and school districts to take equal action. On September 8, 2016, districts were advised of a December 2016 deadline to align policies and Codes of Conduct with the change to the *Human Rights Code*. At this time, school districts were in various stages of readiness and



needed support, thus garnering momentum for the SOGI work.

The ARC Foundation held the first SOGI Summit on October 19, 2016, and this inspirational day brought together 140 educators from the nine pilot districts to share stories of success and learning. The day began with a historic joint welcome from the Ministry of Education and the BC Teachers' Federation,

delivering a strong unified message of support, highlighted by a moving speech by a celebrated transgender youth who, at the time, was only 13 years old.

That same day saw the launch of the SOGI 1 2 3 initiative and SOGIeducation.org website. It is important to note that SOGI 1 2 3 is an outstanding resource for educators, and not a stand-alone curriculum. It aligns with the recently re-designed B.C. curriculum and is virtually a “one-stop shop” for resources, including lesson plans, PowerPoint presentations, facilitator guides, videos, definitions and website links to resources and services. The site now also offers an accessible parent portal that has a parent brochure and informative videos. By March 2018, the site had already received over 70,000 unique visitors and the SOGI 1 2 3 Learning Modules have had 17,000 views since the spring of 2017.

The SOGI Educator Network pilot was a success and was opened to interested districts for 2017-18, with a new provincial SOGI Education Lead supporting their journey. An invitation was extended to other districts to join the original group, and the response was overwhelming. To date, 54 of 60 public school districts belong to the provincial network. This unanticipated exponential growth resulted in a regional model with seven cohorts consisting of SOGI District Leads, who, in turn, support their School Leads.

Partner groups, such as the BC Teachers’ Federation, the BC Principals’ and Vice-Principals’ Association, the BC School Superintendents Association, the BC Association of School Business Officials, the British Columbia School Trustees Associations, the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, the Federation of Independent School Associations, post-secondary institutions and others, have shown support and SOGI 1 2 3 presentations as part of their group events and conferences.

In spite of the unbelievable success of SOGI 1 2 3, the work has not been without controversy. There remains both misunderstanding and misinformation that SOGI 1 2 3 threatens family values and personal beliefs. Some parents mistakenly believe that the goal is to encourage students to become members of the LGBTQ+ community. There are pockets of negative influences trying to undermine the work, and these voices have been prominent in the media through sometimes vicious campaigns.

However, the collective unified stance of the educational partners has been amplified to counteract those opposed and is ironically strengthening the resolve to move forward. Joint letters of support from the Ministry and partner groups continue to reinforce the necessity of the work. The research clearly indicates that students who are members of the LGBTQ+ community are more at risk for addiction, depression and suicide, consequently, the argument to further SOGI-inclusive education is compelling and timely.

The SOGI story in B.C. has been one of courage, inspiration, action and

partnership. The work is expanding to other jurisdictions and moving with momentum that could not have been predicted. There have been many positive spin-offs:

- Schools are now sponsoring more GSA’s (Gay Straight Alliances) and QSA’s (Queer Straight Alliances), and parent support groups are also forming.
- School district staff who are part of the LGBTQ+ community are feeling more welcome in districts and are proud to be role models for their students.

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- First Peoples' perspectives are being recognized for valuing two-spirited people and bring pride to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students that is genuine and respectful of their culture.
- Teachers, support staff, administrators and parents are willingly assuming leadership roles in SOGI-inclusive initiatives.
- New schools are being constructed to include gender neutral washrooms, and older buildings are converting spaces so that washrooms and change rooms are safer places for students.

Ultimately, students are lending their voices, sharing personal stories of challenges and triumphs. We know this work is making a difference when we witness a crowded room of high school students jump to a standing ovation for a brave transgender youth sharing his story to help others. Our students are leading the authentic lives they deserve and are proud to see themselves represented and valued in our schools. ○

Claire Guy is Executive Director of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
SOGI 1 2 3

www.sogieducation.org

Resources and References: Parent Brochure

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a56d971d74cff2582e16846/t/5a96ff2471c10b2a2984ca8a/1519845157019/SOGI+123_Parent+Brochure.pdf

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Envisioning a Therapeutic Community Within the Public School Setting

Written with assistance from Bob Eslinger, Nanaimo Ladysmith School District, and Jacqueline Dunn, École North Oyster Elementary

Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools (NLPS) places a strong focus on being “educative, preventative and restorative” in teaching and responding to student behaviour. When a student transgresses, the desired adult response focuses on teaching them a better way forward. The goal is to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future and to restore students to their rightful place within the school community.

A more traditional disciplinary model focuses on discouraging student misbehaviour by threatening or punishing; it is recognized that this approach of doing “to” a student rather than “with” them (Costello, Watchel and Watchel 2009) may lead to short-term compliance but does little to equip a student with the tools needed to change their behaviour patterns over the long term.

École North Oyster is a dual-track French Immersion and English school of approximately 330 students, situated on the traditional territory of the Stz’uminus people; approximately 20 per cent of students are of Aboriginal ancestry. The diverse school community includes people of different races, cultures, abilities, religions, sexual orientations and socio-economic status.

When principal, Jacqueline Dunn, came to École North Oyster in 2016, she brought her passion for restorative practices and began conducting restorative circles in classrooms when issues arose in school and on the playground. While this created pockets of restorative practice, there lacked a comprehensive framework to make the school a fully restorative community. Nonetheless, it piqued sufficient interest among staff to instigate an inquiry into how best to put restorative processes into practice both at the school and classroom levels.

School staff began looking at the work of Dr. Ross Greene and his CPS model

(Collaborative and Proactive Solutions), which Principal Dunn believed was a natural fit with her school’s emerging restorative framework. An emphasis was placed on working “with” students rather than doing “to” them.

Dr. Greene’s model begins with an “empathy step” where one listens to the student’s perspective and empathizes with the challenges they are facing. Dr. Greene views student misbehaviour as being caused by “lagging skills” rather than any willfulness on the child’s part. To fully embrace the district’s educative, preventative and restorative response when dealing with student misbehaviour, Principal Dunn maintained firmly that all staff needed to uphold the belief that “kids do well when they can” (Greene 2008).

École North Oyster’s journey with Dr. Greene’s work began with a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for Educational Assistants (EAs) studying Dr. Greene’s book, *Lost at School*. This evolved into weekly breakfast meetings for all staff to

learn more about CPS and ways to embed it into their daily practice. These breakfast meetings were well-attended and staff embraced the principles and notions behind Dr. Greene's work, yet they still struggled to implement CPS in a consistent, school-wide fashion.

As the school attempted to implement the CPS model, staff encountered many of the typical challenges associated with change. Particularly, they struggled to implement the CPS model consistently and effectively in supporting the most vulnerable student populations at the school. Student behavioural incidents continued to occur with high frequency and while the response was restorative wherever possible, it was not always applied with consistency. It became apparent to Principal Dunn that, to create a truly restorative school community, the staff needed to develop an overarching framework that highlighted each classroom as a *community*. She felt it imperative that all students feel valued, included and supported by all staff in all environments.

The school arranged for a trainer from the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) to come and provide

a series of workshops for all staff on *Introduction to Restorative Practices* and *Using Circles Effectively*. To build capacity and spread this important work beyond the school, three other elementary schools were invited to join them for these workshops. After the first training session, which occurred in February 2018, staff were eager to continue their learning journey and to further explore the use of restorative practices.

At the same time, École North Oyster also developed a strong partnership with the Nanaimo John Howard Society (NJHS), which offers their exemplary restorative work to school communities around the district. So far, schools have relied on the NJHS to do the restorative work for them, which does not build capacity in schools. Because they value the NJHS's work with children and their families, staff have asked members of the John Howard Society to come and lead *circles* with their students, without having embedded this practice into their own classrooms.

Assistant Superintendent, Bob Eslinger, together with the Nanaimo John Howard Society's Executive Director,

John McCormick, have co-developed a vision for the creation of a Therapeutic Community (TC) within the public school setting. One such community, known as *Guthrie House* at the Nanaimo Correctional Centre, is already in operation and with high success under the John Howard Society. Eslinger and McCormick agree that the principles used at Guthrie House can be adapted to any educational setting within the public school system. The Therapeutic Community model may well offer the right mix of educative, preventative and restorative practices within a community framework, which NLPs desires for all its schools.

As the district works with the NJHS to envision the way forward, the work that École North Oyster has undertaken points to many promising outcomes of the use of restorative practices in a public school setting and the positive outcomes of "community as practice." ○

Bob Eslinger is an Assistant Superintendent in the Nanaimo Ladysmith School District, and Jacqueline Dunn is Principal of École North Oyster Elementary.

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Supporting Each Student, One Learner at a Time

By Marilyn Marquis-Forster, School District No. 57

Supporting each student calls educators to focus on success one student at a time. Often, when school districts document student achievement, averaged normative or criteria-referenced measures are employed to demonstrate improved student learning. While this type of analysis is frequently helpful and perhaps even necessary, it would seem wise to remember that behind the measured large group scores are individual learners, children and youth with unique strengths, challenges and aspirations.

School District No. 57 is proud to introduce seven individual learners, each with unique gifts and talents, all supported through commitment to personalized learning and success.



JESSICA SEDDON:
Grade 12 Automotive Service Technician Dual-Credit Student, Kelly Road Secondary School and College of New Caledonia, Prince George, B.C.

Jessica says, “I’m here every day learning more and more about something that I am passionate about.” This photo shows Jessica learning how to become an automotive service technician, something she knew she wanted to do since Grade 9.

Jessica was introduced to technical courses at Kelly Road. She describes herself as being quiet but also as being a good

communicator and a fast learner. “I am able to comprehend principles and concepts quickly. High school gave me a lot of the skills I needed to achieve and I was pushed out of my comfort zone, especially in English.”

Her best advice to SD57, “I would recommend a focus on Math and English. In this trade those are two of the most important skills.”

Future plans include, “earning my Red Seal, opening up my own shop and eventually starting a family.”



JUSTIN HAMPOLE:
Duchess Park Secondary School, SD57 Sports School Program, Age 16, Competitive Figure Skater, Five Years Qualifying for National Figure Skating Juniors, 2 Years Qualifying for National Seniors, Third Place in Canada Games, 2015, Prince George, B.C.

Justin says, “I am a student athlete, competitive figure skater, travel lots, take an interest in sciences, and I love the outdoors. The sports school is very helpful.”

Justin describes himself as being passionate, very motivated and hard working. He credits the school for having helped him stay organized, especially in the sciences. He says, “I love learning. I found classes that interest me. I look forward to going to

school every day to learn.” Justin comments that competing at a highly-competitive level can be challenging because classes are missed and he is away from friends, however, he considers it all worthwhile. He says, “It’s worth it because I experience things that others don’t.”

When asked about future plans Justin replies, “Definitely something in the medical field. My dad is a surgeon. I am thinking of that path.”



TESSA ERICKSON:
Grade 10 Student, D.P. Todd Secondary School, Member of the Nak’azdli What’en Band, \$50,000 Grant Recipient for the Development of an Indigenous Language App and Premier’s Award for Indigenous Youth Excellence in Sport, Prince George, B.C.

Tessa says, “My Band was putting out a notice for projects related to culture. (I thought) a language App would be pretty cool. (Also) the language camp was another idea to get kids involved. I felt that bringing (language) issues to the kids would help to strengthen the culture.”

Tessa reports that the best part of being at school for her is having the school community, saying, “I love having my friends and peers there offering support and a safe place. The teaching staff at D.P. Todd is amazing.”

Although Tessa excels academically and athletically, she describes herself as being “most predominately good with people. I can talk to people. I’m working on my public speaking so that I can get my voice heard by a bigger audience. Sometimes, I’ve been seen as too young to understand.”

Tessa discovered her love of languages through SD57 studies in French and Spanish, a passion she continues to pursue. When thinking of her future, she says, “I plan to go to university and have a career where I can help people. I will either become a doctor or a teacher.”

ESME SINGH LONG:
Grade 7 French Immersion Student,
École Lac des Bois Prince George,
B.C.

Esme says, “I look forward to things during the day, like gym, pottery club, band, afterschool activities. I like thinking about the good things coming as that keeps me positive. I like to learn.”

Esme tells us that Singh means “lion” in his East Indian language. He describes himself as hardworking, sensitive, curious, athletic, knowledgeable and enthusiastic.



Family is central for Esme. He talks of mountain biking as a family and having been taken to begin skiing at the age of two. Esme recommends that SD57 continue to encourage students to “find things they love or are excited about.”

On his future, Esme says, “I plan to be an engineer. My mom is one. It (engineering) has all the things I like and am good at, like science, math, construction, design and hands-on building. It’s challenging and you can work everywhere.”



SAMANTHA ARNSTON:
Grade 7 Student, Valemount
Elementary School, Visual Artist,
Fortis BC Poster Contest Winner,
Valemount, B.C.

Samantha’s EA says, “School has been essential in Sam’s success. When Sam first arrived (at school) she was non-verbal and had little communication, but with the support of her team she has made great progress.”


Sam loves being with her family; mom, dad, two sisters and two brothers. Like many diagnosed with CHARGE syndrome, Samantha experiences hearing and vision loss. She also possesses the determination


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and strong character often displayed by CHARGE children and youth.

Sam is a wonderful artist who draws fluently with pen. She has a style all her own. All drawings have great detail and are very colourful. Sam is able to visualize and draw from memory with exceptional sense of spatial awareness and perspective. She does not erase. For the past two years, Samantha has produced a commercially available calendar with specific drawings for each month.

The second image shows a drawing of a Chinese dragon, created by Samantha.

Samantha will transition to a second-year school next year with the support of

her family, school teams and district Vision, Hearing, Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy personnel.

Her EA says, "School has been a catalyst, opening a door to learning for Sam. When Sam shows an interest in any area, the school is able to expand her experience."



HASHEM KHALAF:
Grade 4 Student, Newcomer, Arabic Speaker, English Language Learner, Westwood Elementary, Prince George, B.C.

Hashem recalls, "When they called us to come to Canada my Dad said, 'No,

yes, no, yes!' and then we came to Canada and I got new friends."

Hashem explains in well-developed English that his family was living in Lebanon as Syrian refugees before immigrating to Prince George, B.C. 14 months ago. "Syria was not safe. I was happy and excited to come to Canada. It was my first plane ride." He talks about liking math at school, learning English and playing sports. "The teacher helped me when I didn't understand and at my school, all the school was my friend." Hashem also likes the big fruit bowl of apples and bananas that are located in the office area for anyone to access. Hashem proudly states his future goals are continuing school in Canada so that he can become a doctor. He wants to help people.

Hashem's advice for School District No. 57 is, "Keep helping the kids learn."

JAELYNN GILBERTSON:
Grade 3 After School Academic Proficiency (ASAP) Student, Reading Level Achievement from Fall 2017, Level I to March 2018, Level T, Quinson Elementary School, Prince George, B.C.

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Jaelynn says, "I really like reading. I like math. I also have fun with my brother doing cartwheels."

Jaelynn has been participating in the After School Academic Proficiency program. ASAP is an SD57 Aboriginal Education and Learning Innovations project where children study literacy and numeracy three times each week within an Aboriginal context. Jaelynn's progress speaks to the impact of this additional study. She says, "I plan to be a scientist, study leaves and things with microscopes. The best part of school is reading after lunch. I like chapter books. I just finished reading *Chocolate Fever*."

"Reading is fun," adds Jaelynn. "I am a book worm. Math is fun too." ○

Marilyn Marquis-Forster is Superintendent of School District No. 57, located in Prince George, British Columbia.



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If we are to consider, from a big picture perspective, what professions matter most in this world, it would stand to reason that those charged with building caring, compassionate, educated and empathic citizens, should be held in the highest regard. If that were true (and it is), those of you who hold our babes through their most formative years, often for more hours a day than their parents, means that, indeed, educators do some of the holiest work on the planet. Thus, as we are inundated by concerns about student mental health and school violence, we are increasingly challenged to figure out what is going on with the damn kids these days.

We search for explanations, assuming that the increased “screen time,” the threats of gluten, or even Grand Theft Auto 5 must

be to blame. None of those things matter nearly as much as this—disconnect. In a generation where we have the capacity to connect instantaneously to almost anyone on this planet, we have sadly never been more disconnected.

We lack face-to-face, in person connection with everyone in our lives—those we raise, live with, love, care for, teach. We are pressured to do “more with less” and rely on our significant advances in technology to ease this burden. What cannot be replaced, however, is our biological need for face-to-face connection. In this generation, we spend far less face-to-face time with our children than our grandparents did (just think about the difference in the square footage of their house and yours). Only when you have felt things like empathy, kindness and being apologized to, can you give it away to someone else.

If those of us holding our babes on a daily basis are not ok, our kids don’t stand

a chance. Those of us holding our babies, parents, caregivers, educators need to be the priority.

Our understanding is becoming clearer as there is significant evidence to suggest that academic learning abilities become inaccessible to students who are emotionally unavailable. We are now beginning to understand that even if we have the most brilliant pedagogical lesson plans, fun white boards, or strict classrooms, kids cannot learn unless they are emotionally regulated.

Over the past two years, in Alberta, we have begun to talk (a lot) with educators about the need to “collect” a kid before you have the capacity to direct or teach them. If, for example, a kid has no stability in their life outside your classroom, is unsure if they can trust anyone, and is sure that no one believes in them, they will not be able to focus on even the most brilliant teaching plan.

As we work with educators in this country to understand the mental health needs of students, what has become most apparent to us is that there has been little

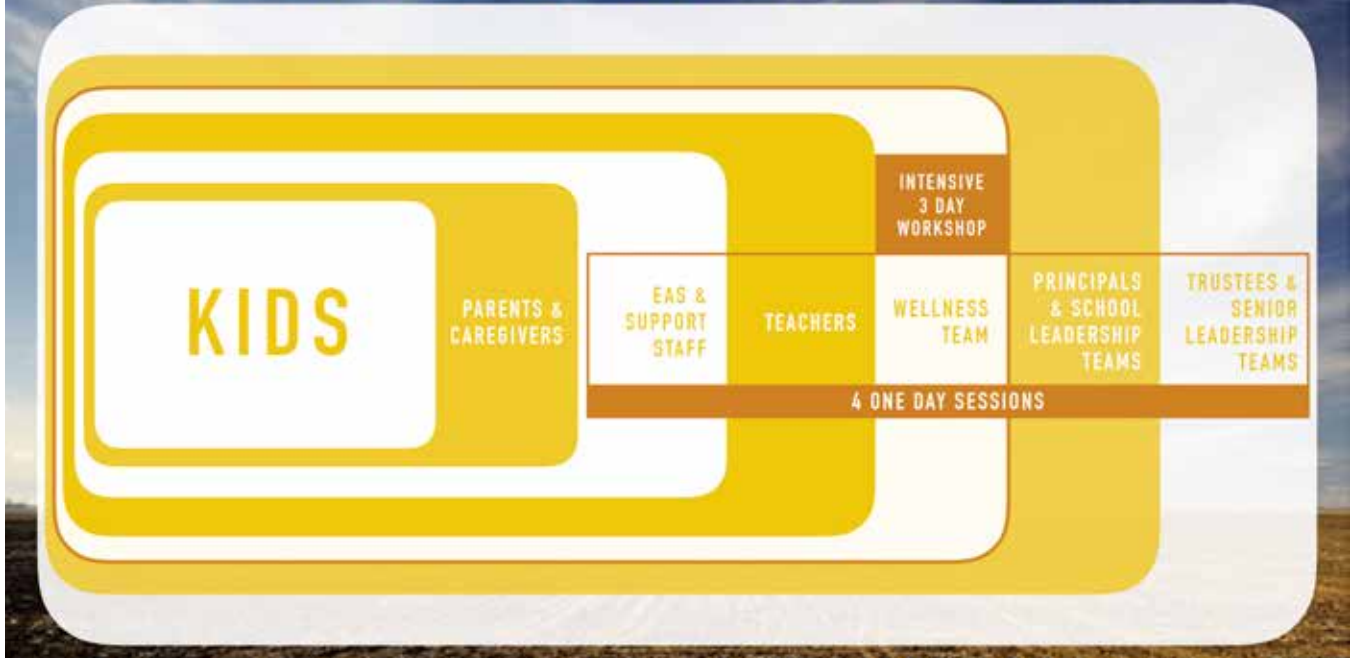


Guiding Staff Back to Why they Started:

A Wellness Model for System Leaders

The Connection Works Project:

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understanding of (or support for) those who do this critical work—our educators. Indeed, wouldn't it stand to reason that the same principles apply? If teachers feel unsupported, misunderstood, unappreciated and empty, they will have little capacity to help those they teach and care for every day.

How do we focus more on the people who hold our students? One step at a time. We are so honoured to be working alongside educators in Alberta, and now across this country, and are working to create a divisional wellness network where we focus less on the children and more on the staff who hold them, rolling this out in a very distinct sequence of events.

First, we have learned that starting at the top, with system leaders, is imperative. Many have developed brilliant models to support their staff and students; however, in our province, there is little consistency across divisions. Next, we have highlighted the importance of involving all staff (bus drivers, custodians, administrative supports, educational assistants, teachers) in developing a common language when it comes to four things: relationships,

trauma, grief and “compassion fatigue.” We believe that relationship knows no hierarchy and we can use “all hands-on deck” when working with our toughest babes.

Creating sustainability is the critical next step and our focus has been on the “wellness team” in each division. Again, there is no consistency in the make-up of these teams (some have psychologists or social workers, some have teacher counselors, while others contract these services to government agencies). Structures vary widely across divisions and very few of these teams have a focus on staff wellness. We have developed a three-day training for wellness teams to provide a common language with a focus on assessment and creating “villages of support” within each school for the toughest kids, with less of a focus on individual therapy.

Finally, our goal is to connect those divisions who share a common language together in a network, so that you can all be available to each other, particularly in times of crisis. We struggle to support our own when we're distressed, and when you can trust the support you “call in” to help through crisis, we become a united system

that can support hard things when they come. And they will. To each of us.

Right now, all we need you to think about is this—why do you do what you do? We want you to remember why you got into this business of holding most everyone's most precious commodity—our children. And then, we want you to remember that this is a job. A very important one, and one that some days you will rock at. And other days you will wish you became a barista. Totally and unemphatically ok.

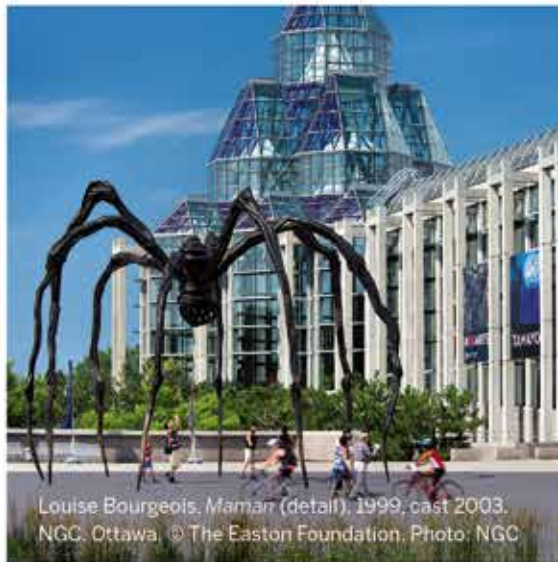
We'd love to hear your thoughts. You can find us at darlene.ferris@wrsd.ca or at www.drjodycarrington.com. Stay tuned to some of our continued discussions within this province and this country. Your work is vitally important, educators. It's an honour for us to have you read these words. Give the best you got today to my kid (and everyone else's) and it will be enough. We are so lucky to have you. ○

Darlene Ferris, M.Ed., is the Director of Wellness for the Wild Rose School Division, and Dr. Jody Carrington, is a Registered Clinical Psychologist in Olds, Alberta.

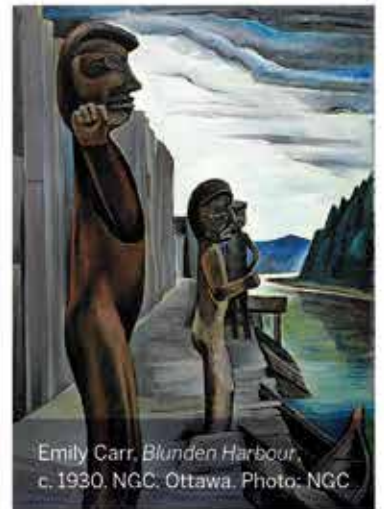


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Differentiated Professional Development: Supporting Each Student



By Randy Emmerson, Natasha Isaac, Stacey Monette, Kathleen Schwartzenberger, and Corrine Schwehr, Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division

How can professional development for teachers and administrators support every student? Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division has embarked on a journey towards a responsive, individualized approach for meeting the professional needs of educators—keeping in mind strategic alignment of professional learning with student learning.

Ultimately, we are working towards ongoing differentiation of learning for adults, while responding to our Division's Commitment to Student Achievement. We are striving to understand the individual and collective needs of teachers, working towards excellence for every learner.

Our division-based instructional leadership team is a group of professionals consisting of Curriculum and Interdisciplinary Consultants, Curriculum and Behaviour Coaches, Speech & Language Pathologists, Psychologists, and Occupational Therapists, all of which are

led by two Superintendents. Newly named, the "Inclusive Learning Team," we started 2017-2018 with this new structure. Portfolio responsibilities have evolved based on a number of components, including student needs and achievement, team members' expertise, response to educators' professional needs, staffing and budget.

The changes in our instructional leadership team created the opportunity for us to take a fresh look at our processes for providing professional development. Our team of four Curriculum Consultants, along with the Curriculum Superintendent, focus on the importance of listening to teacher voice while planning and executing a variety of professional development opportunities. The ongoing collection of feedback includes tools such as teacher surveys (google forms), discussions with educators and reviewing feedback from a committee within our local teachers' association. We understand that reflecting on teacher feedback is essential to inform the plans for professional development in order to meet the holistic needs of our students.

Teachers have been given the choice to participate in a variety of workshop styles, including mini-conference, a professional learning community, and grade grouped, with full-day and half-day options. Topics are varied and include subject specific (content) and non-curricular (whole child) issues. Drawing from the expertise of the entire Inclusive Learning Team, in addition to those who focus on curriculum, has been extremely beneficial. This variety has allowed teachers to tailor their personal professional development to the growth of their students, themselves and their schools.

In modelling the importance of a welcoming classroom environment for students and families—and the critical role of positive relationships—we are conscious of little things that make teachers gathering together an impactful experience. Recently, a teacher commented, "I absolutely love these days and always come away feeling excited and inspired." Considering room set up, wellness breaks, greetings and overall atmosphere, we are hoping teachers feel valued, understood and inspired as they spend their time with us.

We are conscious of the student contact time being sacrificed for teachers to attend, and we are determined to make the most of our time together. In the same way we want students to feel safe, welcome and motivated to learn in our schools, emphasis on these feelings within professional development opportunities has been strongly considered.

Workshops this year have been predominantly invitational. Teachers determine if they feel the topic is pertinent to their work. We have discovered the choice of language with regards to professional development plays a key role. Previously the words “initiative,” “workshop,” and “in-service” would have been used—intentionally, unintentionally and sometimes interchangeably.

We found ourselves gravitating to the word workshop and this seems to have been appreciated. Workshop is defined in Google dictionary as, “a meeting at which a group of people engage in intensive discussion and activity on a particular subject or project.” Encouraging teachers to share best practices, engagement ideas and daily operations has allowed for intensive discussion on a wide range of challenges facing teachers of all grades and experience levels.

Some workshops have included teachers with expertise as presenters. These teachers are building capacity in their own schools while

sharing ideas and practices with teachers from across the division. Feedback from schools indicates that teachers, administrators and other staff members feel a sense of pride being asked to present to their peers.

Our teacher presenters went on to encourage their colleagues to share their expertise at future workshops, with one saying: “It’s a great opportunity to share with others what you have learned over the years. Teachers want to hear from other teachers. Stepping out of the box is worth it!” The teachers who attend these workshops are fully engaged and provide extremely positive feedback indicating they are very happy with our decision to ask our own teacher experts to present.

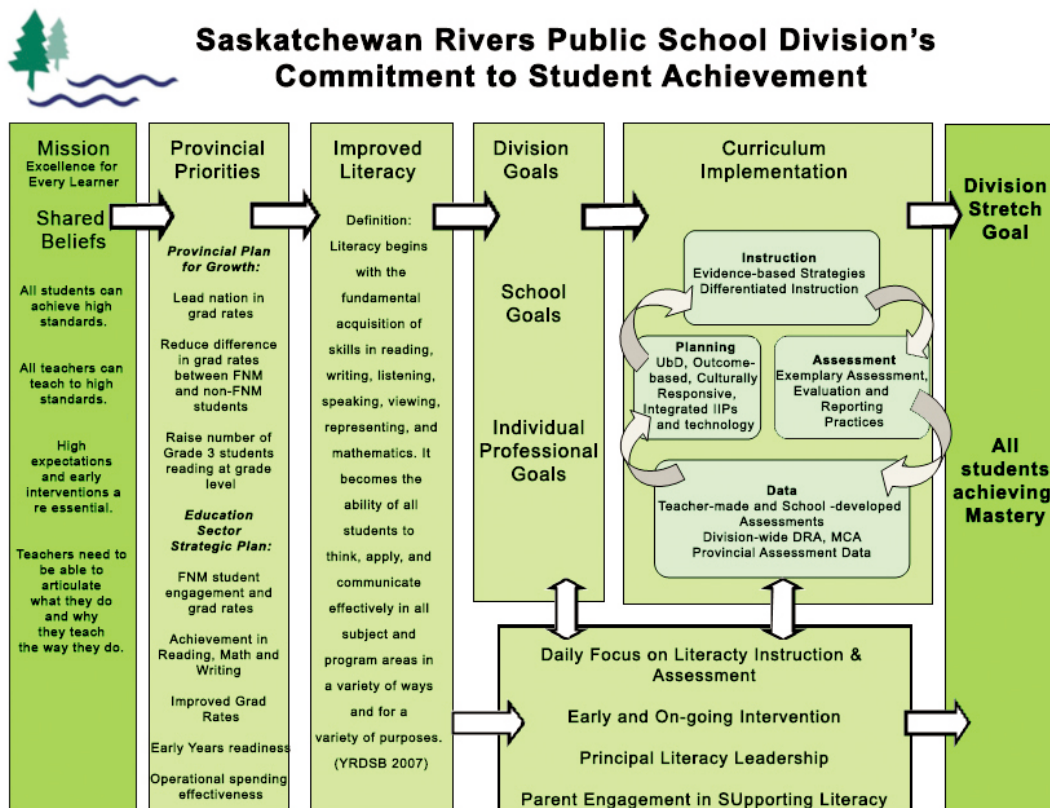
We recognize the importance of responding to Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action within education. With the support of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Learning Consultant, teachers are provided with various opportunities and experiences supporting Indigenous integration in all subject areas from K to 12. Workshops are created to allow teachers to engage in hands-on learning, and meaningful conversations and discussions, around topics such as treaties, residential school histories, and Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies. Our teachers go back to their classrooms with new

knowledge and experiences to share with their students and staff.

Feedback is collected before and after workshops, which helps to inform future gatherings. We analyze strengths and improvement areas. Usually teachers do not hesitate to share with us the places we can improve our future workshops (even if it’s just making sure we have REAL cream for the coffee). Since collected feedback informs the planning of future workshops, teacher voice is acknowledged with a meaningful response. Our workshops continue to evolve to meet the needs of our teachers.

We would describe our changes in professional development for teachers as innovative. Innovation can be seen as making changes in something established, especially by introducing new methods or ideas, which is what we believe has happened here. It may have been innovation that emerged out of necessity, but innovation nonetheless and innovation that has been very well received. We believe this approach allows teachers to choose their professional development based on the desire to support each student in order to achieve excellence for every learner. ○

Randy Emmerson is the Superintendent of Schools in Saskatchewan Rivers Public School Division (SRPSD) and through this writing process, has considered himself privileged to work with and learn from Natasha, Stacey, Kathleen and Corrine. Natasha Isaac is the First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Learning Consultant. Her role is to support teachers when integrating FNMI content in to their classrooms. Stacey Monette is the Middle Years / Technology Consultant for SRPSD. She has been employed as a classroom teacher, early years and technology coach for 20 years. Kathleen Schwartzenger is passionate about early learning. In her consultant role she supports teachers in PreK to Grade 3. Corrine Schwehr is a Consultant with 20 years of experience in education. Her current leadership areas are data analysis (K to Grade 12) and secondary (Grades 9 to 12) curriculum.



Improving Student Learning Through School Self Review

By Janet Martell, Superintendent/CEO, Leanne Peters, Assistant Superintendent

Lakeshore School Division, located in Manitoba, engaged in a School Self Review process to support learning for every child. The Assistant Superintendent and an external critical friend did five visits to each school during the year on an eight-week cycle. School teams were supported to review data, examine classroom practice and try new things to support students. This article will explain why the division did this, and what leaders learned in their quest to support student learning.



Situated between the two large lakes in Manitoba, Lakeshore School Division spans 7,000 square kilometres and serves 10 schools in eight communities. With a divisional student population of 1,150 students, schools and classes are small.

The Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium (mRLC) is an educational co-operative that supports rural school divisions to address challenges in supporting quality learning experiences for all. They provide a program of services that support teachers with promising practices in literacy and numeracy, among other services.

In 2016-2017, Leanne Peters, Assistant Superintendent, and Eileen Sutherland, Co-Director of the mRLC, embarked on a journey of school self review with all the divisional schools. Prior to this year, Sutherland had worked with two pilot schools in the Division to try out the concept of School Self Review with an External Critical Friend.

What is it?

School Self Review is an action research approach to supporting schools in their efforts

to improve in learning and teaching. Schools determined who would be involved in the review process and those teams met with Peters and Sutherland five times over the course of the school year. Each visit followed a similar format that was grounded in the school's action research question.

As a team, we reviewed student achievement data and determined the priority learners in each school. We asked critical questions where students were not making the gains that were expected by certain points in the school year. There was opportunity to review professional development activities as well as school team meetings to see how schools were engaging in conversations about student data as it related to student progress and achievement.

mRLC began with an initial research question, "What is required to build the capacity of schools, both teachers and leaders, to effectively implement a quality, manageable school self-review process that improves student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics,"

(mRLC Research and Development, 2015, p. 1)? The second action research question was developed by the school and was a component of the school plan pertaining to improving student outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

Purpose

Schools have been completing school improvement plans for decades with slow progress to improvement in learning and teaching or significant gains in student progress and achievement. Lakeshore School Division was no different in that regard. However, Lakeshore reached a turning point with most of the principals having several years of experience and a strong desire to better meet the learning needs of students, coupled with finding ways to support the teachers of those students.

The school plan, while limited to three or four goals, was still unwieldy. The School Self Review Process provided a targeted, focused opportunity to look at one goal in manageable, measurable pieces and rally staff in the school to really make a difference.

Process

Each school determined its own focus for the action research. Once the focus was determined, schools collected baseline data to determine where the students were at in relation to the inquiry focus. The initial visit to each school was about clarifying the school's question, ensuring that there was a mechanism in place for gathering data and describing the expectations for next steps and future meetings together. Subsequent visits to each school involved a review of data and discussion linking the evidence of student achievement to teacher practice.

Discussion

It became clear early in the process that a quality inquiry question, grounded in research and promising practice, was paramount to a successful action research process. Schools that began with questions that were not worthy of delving into deeply or lacked the focus to shift teacher practice did little to improve student achievement. Schools with rich inquiry questions had much better student achievement results because they had spent their time working

on things that made sense both in the context of the school and where their teachers were at in their learning journey.

Two challenges emerged early in the process—primarily it was principals and vice principals involved in the critical friend visits and conversations; these were not necessarily making a difference at the classroom level. The second challenge, linked to the first challenge, was having teachers develop class profiles that would enable them to organize students according to the data that had been collected and plan effective next steps for each child.

To support each child, teachers require specific knowledge of current levels of performance as well as targeted next steps to see improvement. With teachers not directly involved in the process, this was a challenging step that took time to overcome. Conversations with principals also focused on teachers' practice and how that related to students' progress. Because the Critical Friend had a divisional perspective, there was opportunity to share stories of effective practice in different schools and to encourage classroom visits between schools.

Conclusion

School leaders felt supported throughout the School Self Review process and there was a high level of trust between the Critical Friend and the school leaders. Several school leaders, especially those who had been involved in the pilot year, took advantage of the trusting relationship and emailed questions and ideas in between visits.

Since that school year, the process has evolved to include more teachers in the conversation and more focused classroom data on priority learners. Critical Friend visits have continued, and students are making progress toward achieving specific learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy. ○

Janet Martell is the Superintendent/CEO of Lakeshore School Division. Leanne Peters is the Assistant Superintendent of Lakeshore School Division.

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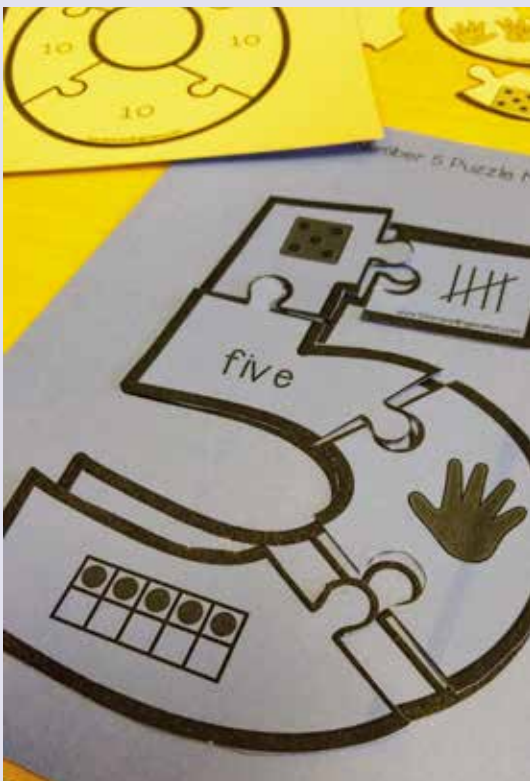
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Responsive Models of Professional Learning: A Success Story



By Cathy Chaput, Deb Watters, Dawn Uliana, Stefanie Palmer, Natasha Finoro; Scott Pritchard, and Mike Glazier, Wellington Catholic District School Board

Comments such as those highlighted have been a common refrain of Wellington Catholic District School Board principals and primary teachers throughout the past school year. In our second year of the Primary Renewed Math Strategy (RMS), we have found significant success in a professional learning model that combines short cycles of professional learning designed to improve educators' curriculum content knowledge, with responsive, personalized check-in meetings that provide support to educators as they implement changes in practice.

“I know where my students are at and where to go next.”

“This has been some of the best professional development I have ever had!”



Knowing our learners, knowing our curriculum

“I thought I knew my students but now I see them through the lens of the continuum.” The Wellington Catholic Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement has an overarching theory of action formed on the following idea: *If we know our learners and we know our curriculum, then we can make intentional instructional decisions to engage and challenge our students.* This statement has been central in the planning of all professional development for our board.

In the context of our Primary RMS Plan, we set out to deepen educator content knowledge and create common understandings of early numeracy development by identifying milestones in counting and quantity relationships observed on a developmental continuum. We also wanted to encourage the use of effective math tools and representations so educators were equipped to respond to learning needs of students.

Dr. Alex Lawson’s book, *What to Look For: Understanding and Developing Student Thinking in Early Numeracy*, and her research, was the basis for much of the primary educator learning across our district this year.

Creating a responsive professional development model

When planning our professional learning model we reflected on a number of key questions:

- How do we promote fidelity to system goals for math instruction and develop common approaches, understandings and language in all schools?
- How do we maximize the curriculum expertise of our program team to support teachers and leverage the influence of principals?

- How do we create a system of support for educators to encourage risk taking and implementation of new teaching strategies?
- How do we support principals in effectively monitoring the application of professional learning back in schools?
- How will we know this is making a difference for individual students in our classrooms?

Networks for professional learning

To create district-wide consistency we used a series of small learning networks consisting of primary educators and principals. Network sessions, operating in short cycles (i.e., every four to five weeks over four months each), were designed to be very practical, engaging and focused on the student experience of math.

At the culmination of each network day, principals met with their respective school teams to discuss what they learned, what they were committing to in the weeks between sessions, and who could support them (e.g., instructional coaches, colleagues) in applying new strategies. Teachers also identified which students would be the focus of their inquiry.

Monitoring effectiveness and just-in-time support

We knew network sessions would not be enough to sustain system change. A measure of pressure and support would be required. As a result, we created a monitoring and support system wherein the principal and a member of our program team (i.e., curriculum coordinator or instructional coach) would host check-in meetings with individual teachers in between network sessions. Meetings lasted 30 to 45 minutes each and permitted personalized discussions with staff about focus students and their own professional learning.

Teachers shared pedagogical documentation, spoke about gains made and areas of struggle, and discussed what they were going to try next. Principals and program staff offered support to teachers in implementing their plans. In the weeks following, administrators noted that the emphasis of their walk-throughs shifted from just “look fors” to include “listen fors” and discussions had opened lines of dialogue about math instruction and student progress.

Over time, conversations shifted from “what students can’t do” to “what students can do.” Teachers also noticed students using a wider variety of representation and more efficient counting strategies.

To promote consistency across the board, administrators used common and shared tracking tools and meeting protocols. The use of the same question prompts, session to session, also served as a tool to monitor professional growth. For example, by asking the same question, “How has your practice changed,” educators’ articulation of counting principles and strategies used, instructional strategies employed, and next steps to assist students became much more precise. Check-in sessions were great opportunities for differentiated, responsive learning supports.

Key learnings?

As we reflected on the success of the model, a few common ideas surfaced. We learned:

- Teachers want and need very practical, content-focused professional learning;
- Having a whole-system approach to professional learning can be effective in providing consistency of practice and in reducing variability in school, and between schools. However, to be successful, you still need to attend to the individual needs of staff;
- Short learning cycles create momentum, keep everyone focused and ensure the learning is current. Teachers have concentrated time to try new strategies, reflect on practice and reengage in the learning; and
- The practice of hosting focused check-in meetings is a powerful tool for teacher and principal learning. It promotes discussion about professional practice, provides just-in-time supports and helps principals in monitoring implementation of strategies.

Implications for future planning

This model has proven very successful in our district. Our success hinged on developing a well-defined system plan with a consistent focus rooted in evidence-based, instructional practices, and by supporting educators with what they needed, when they needed it.

There is great promise in a model that recognizes and responds to the needs of the system as well as the individual educator. Plans are already underway to extend this learning model for 2018-19. ○

This article was submitted by members of the Wellington CDSB Program Team, including Curriculum Coordinators Cathy Chaput and Deb Watters; Instructional Coaches, Dawn Uliana, Stefanie Palmer and Natasha Finoro; Student Achievement Officer, Scott Prichard; and Superintendent of Education, Mike Glazier.

No More Teaching and Learning in Isolation:

Collaborative Learning Services



If we want powerful and purposeful learning for our children *then* we must create and sustain powerful and purposeful learning for our adult learners.

By Rhonda Ovelson, Central Okanagan Public Schools

The Central Okanagan School District has been building a culture of collaboration over the last decade. Nine District level teams (Aboriginal Education, Student Support Services, Learning Technology, Instructional Leadership, Early Learning, French Languages, Health Promoting Schools, International Education, Career Programs) have been collaborating with teachers in all 43 schools, providing them with a menu of services to support the “just in time” learning needs of both student and adult learners. So, why change?

For two compelling reasons. First, the

recent implementation of a re-designed, provincial curriculum has caused us to reflect on the current delivery of service and professional learning support for our adult learners. The British Columbia Curriculum is a competency driven curriculum, providing educators with the *flexibility* to personalize learning for students. Job-embedded, collaborative, professional learning to support the implementation of the redesigned curriculum is critical if we are to realize the opportunities that this curricular change affords us.

Second, educators are embracing the growing complexity of today’s classrooms and are acknowledging that the greater the diversity, the greater the opportunity to deepen learning. The desire to create

inclusive learning experiences for students has caused educators in our District to reflect on the current delivery of direct service and support for our students.

In response, we have re-focused and re-structured our learning services model. Working in collaborative teams we are now focused on co-designing purposeful and powerful tier one instruction to empower each and every learner. No longer do District teams plan or teach in isolation of one another. It is the collaborative expertise of our District teams, alongside school teams of enrolling and non-enrolling staff, that is required if we are to design innovative learning environments that support powerful and purposeful tier one learning experiences for all in today’s classrooms.

Furthermore, it is the same collaborative expertise that is required to provide targeted,

scaffolded and contextualized tier two and tier three instruction for those requiring additional practice and support.

As we shift our paradigm and work in *Collaborative Learning Services* teams, focusing first on inclusive tier one instruction,

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so too has our attention turned to defining what inclusive, powerful and purposeful tier one instruction looks and sounds like in our District. We have used the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Learning Principles, which are derived from a synthesis of research conducted across 35 different countries over the last decade, to help us co-construct a common understanding of what we are striving for as we design innovative learning environments for ourselves and our students. These seven principles create the basis for cycles of co-planning, co-teaching and co-learning of our teams, framing the learning conversations that encourage us to continually construct our practice in ways that best meet the diverse needs, passions and interests of our learners.

How do we ensure that our learning experiences and learning environments encompass the seven principles of learning? By continuing to cultivate a collaborative culture where inquiry nurtures the professional curiosity of our adult learners. To this end, we have developed a conceptual model where support is wrapped around students by a team of educators at the school and District level.

Through an iterative process of collaborative inquiry we are learning how to grow the adaptive expertise required to continually and responsively construct meaningful learning experiences that are competency driven, and which are inspired by the natural curiosities of our students. Through this type of job-embedded collaborative professionalism, we ensure Helen Timperley's key characteristics of professional learning are met.

Thus, the theory of action driving our work states that: *if we want powerful and purposeful learning for our children then we must create and sustain powerful and purposeful learning for our adult learners.* As we continue to reflect upon and reimagine how to align our beliefs with our professional practice, at all levels of our system, we get that much closer to transforming classrooms of today into learning communities for tomorrow. ○

Rhonda Ovelson is an Assistant Superintendent serving Central Okanagan Public Schools. She works alongside a professional team that has an unbridled passion for transforming teaching and learning.



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School Leadership Practices that Foster Critical Thinking for All Students

A qualitative study in southern Alberta revealed while teachers indicated the importance of fostering critical thinking, they defined the concept in different ways. In order to best foster critical thinking for every student, school leaders can play a role in building a shared understanding of the concept and how it applies to teaching and learning.



By Dr. Richard Tapajna, University of Calgary, and Dr. Jim Brandon Werklund School of Education, former CASS President

Despite the array of policy and theoretical imperatives calling for deeper student learning and more engaging pedagogy in this twenty first century (21C), teachers and school leaders struggle with how to take concrete steps in this direction. One such 21C policy, Alberta's *Ministerial Order on Student Learning* (Alberta Education, 2013), requires students to discover, develop and apply competencies across subject and discipline areas for learning, work and life to enable them to think critically and to construct knowledge.

As stated in related provincial policies, critical thinking, "involves using reasoning and criteria to conceptualize, evaluate or synthesize ideas," (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 2). How can school leaders support the development of teacher beliefs and practices to foster critical thinking by all students?

Although almost all educators believe that developing critical thinking skills is an

important goal for 21C education, many teachers and principals do not think this is achievable by all students (Tapajna, 2017; Zohar & Dori, 2003). Teachers in Zohar and Dori's (2003) study indicated they did not believe all students were capable of processing higher order tasks. In their views, such activities were designed more for their students achieving at or above grade level expectations.

Although all of the teachers surveyed in Tapajna's (2017) Alberta case study indicated they felt that teaching critical thinking was important, a large percentage revealed beliefs about the reduced ability of specific students based on socio-economic status, age and diverse learning challenges (such as English language learners status or learning disabilities).

This widespread educator belief that some students are less capable of critical thinking, "may have serious educational impacts because it undermines the goal of helping lower achieving students in closing gaps, thereby denying equal educational opportunities," (Zohar & Dori, p.146). In contrast, the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (2014)

emphasized the need and expectation that 21C competencies be, "developed by every student, in every grade and across every subject/discipline area," (p. 1). A clearer understanding of the concept of critical thinking for all students may improve access to equal learning opportunities.

Evidence from documents, questionnaires, classroom observations, teacher and principal interviews collected in three urban elementary schools in Southern Alberta provided insights about school leadership practices that effectively support teaching that fosters critical thinking by all students (Tapajna, 2017). The urban school district's Education Plan underlined the importance of, "a common understanding of the meaning of student success and language for innovation, creativity and critical thinking," (School District, 2016, p. 24) as one of the strategies to, "build instructional capacity to create classrooms characterized by learning opportunities that require critical thinking, creativity and innovation, and align with the Programs of Study," (p. 24). This strategy can be effective at addressing the inconsistencies in teacher understandings and definitions of critical thinking (Tapajna, 2017).

Continued on page 41



Leveraging Learning in Principals' Meetings to Support Every Student

By Rose Burton Spohn and Colleen Hannah, Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board

Educational researcher Stephen Katz (2013) is well known for identifying the link between students', educators' and administrators' learning. In Ontario's Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board (HSCDSB), we acknowledge that administrators' learning needs are proxies for teachers' learning needs, and teachers' learning needs are proxies for students' learning needs.

Consequently, our principals' meetings have been restructured to include a one-and-a-half-hour component devoted to learning in each priority instructional area: numeracy, literacy and faith. Separate sub-committees, chaired by school administrators and supported by senior administrators, curriculum coordinators and teachers, plan and

lead the learning. When principals return to their schools, they share their learning about numeracy, literacy and faith with staff members, who then apply their learning in classrooms. Leaders monitor this transfer of learning when conducting learning walks and school visits.

Numeracy

Improving achievement in numeracy is one of Ontario's and HSCDSB's top priorities. Understanding many people's discomfort with complex mathematics, the board developed a plan to improve problem solving, classroom discourse and content knowledge. At each principals' meeting, staff who are part of a larger regional network of learning, engage principals in actually doing math. The Numeracy Subcommittee teaches administrators key philosophies, models and strategies that

promote accuracy, efficiency and flexibility with numbers; these include mental math, number talks, and Lawson's continuum of instructional strategies.

Later, school administrators return to their schools to teach educators the same concepts. This collaborative, supportive structure, combined with schools' commitment to 60 minutes of math per day, has allowed everyone to strengthen confidence and fluency with numbers and to develop positivity towards mathematics. HSCDSB is encouraged by these gains, knowing positive attitudes towards math often precede greater achievement in it.

Literacy

Whereas HSCDSB's focus in numeracy is on building capacity and new knowledge, in literacy, the board's focus is on unearthing, reviewing and solidifying existing

knowledge. Thanks to much work done previously in our board, many HSCDSB employees are familiar with evidence-based literacy strategies.

However, over time and with staffing changes, strategies such as read alouds, shared reading, guided reading and independent reading have been forgotten. Consequently, during principals' meetings, administrators intentionally re-learn these strategies. After-school webinars, archived content stored online and videos of local teachers implementing literacy strategies bolster the board's literacy plan.

Often, these resources are accessed on PA days, when principals discuss problems of practice with their staffs. School-based teams consider how using these strategies or other literacy interventions (e.g., Reading Recovery, Empower Reading) might alleviate concerns. We are pleased with the re-learning and re-implementation of reading strategies and anticipate focusing on improving students' writing skills next year.

Faith

In our Catholic board, knowledge and articulation of faith concepts is as important as achievement in numeracy and literacy. Acknowledging the post-modern context and the uniqueness of individuals' educations, experiences and faith journeys, the board has committed to building a common understanding of Church teachings. We aim to have employees and students grow in relationship with God by practising their faith, reflecting on it and wrestling with difficult issues.

Consequently, all principals' meetings include interactive faith development sessions, often led by priests or sisters, on such topics as the liturgical calendar, LGBTQ2S relationships, poverty awareness, forms of prayer, educational sacred spaces and Indigenous histories/perspectives (e.g., residential schools). As with literacy and numeracy, principals later share their learning in faith with employees, students and families. In this way, HSCDSB strengthens student success and the bonds between school, home and church.

In recognizing that administrators' learning needs are proxies for teachers' learning needs, and teachers' learning needs are proxies for students' learning needs, and in restructuring principals' meetings to plan for everyone's learning, HSCDSB has improved its support of all students. We look forward to continuing this pattern in future years. ○

Dr. Rose Burton Spohn is the Director of Education for the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board, located in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

Currently a Catholic elementary school principal, Colleen Hannah will, in 2018-19, become the Principal of St. Mary's College, the board's largest secondary school.

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While teachers indicated the importance of fostering critical thinking, they defined the concept in different ways. One leadership practice that can foster critical thinking for every student, is building a shared understanding of critical thinking and how it applies to teaching and learning.

Teachers believe fostering critical thinking is important, and with a common understanding of what that means and how it looks, this case study research suggests one important leadership step toward deeper learning and more engaged pedagogy is to begin with a shared focus on the expectation that all our students be critical thinkers. As teacher and principal participants in the study made clear, there are notable benefits when school leaders strive to set clear goals and expectations, are engaged in instructional programming and promote and participate in a positive school learning climate to support teacher beliefs and practices that foster critical thinking (Tapajna, 2017). ○

Richard Tapajna has held school leadership positions in Alberta and internationally. His research focuses on supporting teachers to foster critical thinking. He can be reached at richard.tapajna@ucalgary.ca.

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For a complete list of references for this article, please contact Editor-in-Chief, Shannon Savory, at ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net.



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