

Winter 2022-2023

Leaders & Learners

The official magazine of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators

Association canadienne des gestionnaires de commissions scolaires

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Contents

MESSAGES

- 7 A Message from the CASSA/ACGCS President
- 9 A Message from the CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

- 11 Invoking System Change Through a District Wide Analysis of K-3 Literacy
- 13 Navigating School Change in Times of Ambiguity
- 18 The spirit of Leadership: Reimagining System Leadership in British Columbia

- 20 A Partnership Between School Districts and Communities
- 22 The Importance of On Ramps for New Teachers
- 24 Recommendations for Leading During Challenging Times
- 26 Reimagining Mental Health During a Global Pandemic

LEADERSHIP LEARNING

- 28 You are the Strategy... But It's Not About You
- 30 INDEX TO ADVERTISERS

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President & CEO:

Jack Andress

Operations Manager:

Shoshana Weinberg
sweinberg@matrixgroupinc.net

Senior Publisher:

Jessica Potter
jpotter@matrixgroupinc.net

Editor-in-Chief:

Shannon Savory
ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net

Senior Editor:

Alexandra Kozub
akozub@matrixgroupinc.net

Editor/Social Media Manager:

Jenna Collignon

Finance/Administration:

Lloyd Weinberg, Nathan Redekop
accounting@matrixgroupinc.net

Director of Circulation & Distribution:

Lloyd Weinberg
distribution@matrixgroupinc.net

Sales Manager – Winnipeg:

Neil Gottfred

Sales Manager – Hamilton:

Jeff Cash

Sales Team Leader:

Colleen Bell

Matrix Group Publishing Inc.

Account Executives:

Rob Gibson, Jim Hamilton, Frank Kenyeres, Sandra Kirby, Cheryl Klassen, Charlie Langsford, Andrew Lee, Brian MacIntyre, Jaime Schroeder, Tanina Di Piazza

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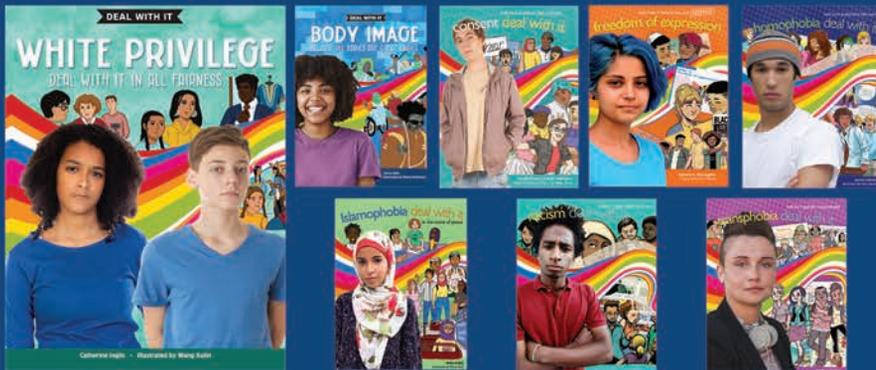
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CATHERINE INGLIS is an elementary teacher who has taught for more than 20 years. She lives in Toronto, Ontario.



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ear Colleagues;

I hope your year to date has gone well. I hope that any provincial or local negotiations end smoothly. Labour negotiations add pressure to the relationships we try to build with all our partner groups and much of the mandate is outside our local control. It is just another example of the complexity system leaders manage as we try to keep our team's focus on improving the life chances of our learners.

I expect the post-pandemic reflections or even inquiries of the actions taken by various levels of government, ministries, and districts to keep some form of education delivery going on, whether in-person, online, or a constant shift between both, will be part of future discussions. Whatever decisions that were made at the time with the best available information. Reflection can be good to support learning and even better decisions as we face new "pandemics or complex issues," but don't let it distract you from your core work: preparing students to thrive as citizens in a complex economically and socially connected world.

The efforts your teams make to ensure students can meet the foundational competencies that they will need as they transition through the Kindergarten to graduation, or transition to trades or post-secondary, are critical. The interventions you put in place to support foster learners as they accelerate their learning post pandemic are important. How you foster the learning that your educators will need as they focus on the instructional core can be supported by networks and teams of educators. How will you ensure that what we have learned in terms of providing personalized learning will help students have voice and agency to pursue their passions and interests? How will you ensure that learners experience the deep learning that ignites curiosity and raises the depth and breadth of competencies that students apply while trying to solve real world problems that will improve all our lives?

I recognize if we are to answer the questions I posed previously in a positive way, we need to re-connect the students, staff, and parents that learn in our schools and live within our communities. We have to re-establish safe, respectful schools focused on learning. District and school leaders need to check their mindsets, beliefs, and leadership practices to ensure that they nurture caring communities in our schools. In his book, *Community – The Structure of Belonging*, Peter Block offers the following thoughts on shifting the context for community:

"The context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity, and gifts rather than one of problem solving, fear and retribution. A new context acknowledges that we have all the capacity, expertise, and resources that an alternative future requires. Communities are human systems given form by conversations that build relatedness."

This is all very complex work. The advantage you have is the networks within your professional associations, the thought leaders in education that work closely with Districts, and participation in networks like the Canadian Association of School System Administrators means you don't have to solve them alone. You have leaders across Canada who are facing very similar complex issues as we rebuild confidence in public education as we move through the endemic stages of learning to live with COVID-19. I am pleased to hear how wonderful it is to be engaged in in-person learning and at the same time learning about improved online learning programs that are synchronous, flexible, and timely. Keep up the great work and be sure to connect with your colleagues!

Kevin Kaardal
CASSA/ACGCS President



Kevin Kaardal
CASSA/ACGCS President

I am pleased to hear how wonderful it is to be engaged in in-person learning again and at the same time learning about improved online learning programs that are synchronous, flexible, and timely.



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Canadian School Mental Health Leadership Network

In 2020, the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) was invited, along with Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA), to team up with Dr. Kathy Short from the School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO), to create a national network of school system administrators and governors. Each association, in turn, reached out to key leaders to form a steering committee. I invited Dr. Cindy Finn, Director General at Lester B. Pearson School Board in Montreal. Nancy Pynch-Worthylake, the CSBA Executive Director, invited Nathan IP, a trustee from Edmonton Public Schools. The concept was to create a safe space for leaders to have conversations and to further their understanding in support the mental health and well-being of their students. Funding for the network was generously provided by The McConnell Family Foundation. The network was supported by thought leaders who have years of experience in research and practice in the field of child and adolescent mental health.

Our thought leaders were Dr. Jean Clinton, McMaster University, Ontario; Dr. Deineria Exner- Cortez, University of Calgary, Alberta; Dr Kathy Giorgiades, Offord Centre for Child Studies, Ontario; Dr. John LeBlanc, IWK Health Centre, Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia;

Dr. Michael Unger, Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia; and Dr. Brenda Restoule, First Peoples Wellness Circle, Ontario.

Prior to the first formal meeting of the network, we asked the members to forward topics and themes they would like addressed. We used their feedback to create a series of network meetings that continued from 2021/2022. The format of each network meeting starts with a presentation by a thought leader on the topic of that meeting. That is followed by an open question and answer opportunity for network members to engage with the thought leader. We then break into smaller groups with a cross-section of administrators and governors that represent various geographic regions in Canada. The breakout groups are facilitated by a steering committee member and breakout notes are taken that



Ken Bain
CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

are shared internally with the network participants.

We have recently asked network members for topics and themes that they would like addressed in 2023 and we look forward to continuing the dialogue to support student mental health and well-being throughout Canada in its publicly funded school boards.

Ken Bain
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Invoking System Change Through a District Wide Analysis of K-3 Literacy

By Naomi Ross and Deanna Holitzki, School District 8 (Kootenay Lake)

Despite our concentrated efforts over time, our district data in School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake) showed that a significant number of our learners Kindergarten to Grade 3 (K-3) were lagging in their literacy skill development and continued to fall even further behind in reading and writing by the end of Grade 3. We began a deep dive into mapping out what was at the root of the problem and then creating a new path forward. Our exploration resulted in the creation of a new “Literacy Coherence Model” for students across our district.

Our commitment to being solution-focused at the K-3 level provided an opportunity for district portfolios to collaborate. Using a “Spiral of Inquiry” model,¹ we explored all data points, district programs, inclusion support practices, and resource allocation in the primary grades. It became apparent that many of our traditional models and practices were outdated and ineffective resulting in more of a waiting to fail approach for our learners, rather than a proactive model for “catching readers before they fall.”² This gave us the evidence we needed to invoke a district-wide change.

The journey toward change began with a collaborative “Think Tank.” When asked “What’s working, what’s not working, and what’s next,” principals, teachers, education

assistants, and district staff gave us valuable insights about our K-3 literacy program. For example, we learned that equity in literacy resourcing across schools was lacking. Some schools were relying on outdated and culturally inappropriate resources. This led to a district-wide inventory of literacy resources and resulted in a reallocation of literacy funding to schools.

We also examined how schools were working with vulnerable learners in the primary grades. Our pull-out model lacked an evidence-based approach and was systematically segregating students.³ In addition, our literacy support program for ongoing emergent learners relied on education assistants to provide targeted literacy instruction to learners, thus putting our



“Inclusive education is about providing opportunities with supports for all students to have access to, and contribute to, an education rich in content and experience with their peers.”⁵

most vulnerable learners in the hands of our well-intentioned, but least credentialed staff. Furthermore, by removing these learners from the classroom, they were not only receiving limited access to quality literacy instruction from their classroom teacher but were also feeling the stigma and long-term effects associated with exclusion and deficit-model thinking.^{4, 5}

“Inclusive education is about providing opportunities with supports for all students to have access to, and contribute to, an education rich in content and experience with their peers.”⁵ Guided by the belief that our inclusion support teachers (ISTs) and our speech language pathologists (SLPs) are integral in supporting literacy instruction in the classroom both universally and specifically, we shifted the district’s inclusion model to one of integrated co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing in primary classrooms during literacy time. Furthermore, following Allington’s (2012) model of catching readers early, we allocated IST and SLP support in elementary schools to providing two thirds of time dedicated to primary classrooms.

In keeping with our goal for coherence across our district, we also realized the need for a universal district literacy assessment. We enlisted the expertise of Early Literacy Consultant Dr. Donna Kozak, who co-authored the School District 23 (Central Okanagan) Early Literacy Essential Skills Profile. This formative assessment tool focuses on the early predictive essential literacy skills that both inform teaching and help inform allocation of resources to support the needs of all learners in the classroom. In addition, this universal assessment tool is foundational to enacting a school-wide collaborative approach of using class profiles to locate and track learner’s literacy development over time.⁶ To support the implementation of this district assessment tool, we engaged Dr. Donna Kozak to support an ongoing series of professional learning opportunities for primary teachers.

“Ongoing professional learning communities are the bedrock of the work that creates a whole school of effective teachers.”⁷ Our targeted literacy focus also includes a “Community of Practice”⁸ for our primary teachers, SLPs, ISTs, and elementary PVP. These workshops, all delivered virtually, were mainly after-school sessions lasting approximately 30 minutes. These informal community of practice sessions created the space for teaching staff from across the district to dialogue with one another, sharing their ideas, inspirations, and challenges. One of our Kindergarten teachers, endorsing the new model, states that “Consistent assessment among our classroom teachers has given us a better opportunity to collaborate with each other and to problem solve how to attack the gaps we are noticing within the class profiles. My grade level colleague and I have aligned our resources and some of the literacy tools we use, which is great.”

Finally, we built in opportunities for collaboration within school primary teams. Using a structure called Literacy Community of Practice for Primary (LCOPP) twice a year, school primary teams consisting of K-3 teachers, the IST, and the principal collaborate in order to analyze their school’s primary literacy data and determine next steps in how to best meet the needs of all primary learners. In conjunction with this initiative, district senior staff meet with each elementary school principal, with a focus on their school’s primary literacy data. This gives the principal and the district senior team the opportunity to analyze trends to re-allocate support to schools where needed.

We are now in our third year of implementing our Literacy Coherence Model in primary.

Evidence of success is readily apparent. A teacher shared, “I like how we can see how everyone is doing on a one-page colour-coded class profile. It takes the guesswork out of what I need to focus on to support my students.”

From a principal’s perspective, “This Early Literacy Profile we have implemented in our primary grades is the best example of coherence that I have seen in our district. Equity is being addressed through differentiation and allows us to scoop groups of students to address learning needs as they arise.”

Alignment of staff and district resources, including ongoing “just in time” professional development in a community of practice model, and a collaborative inclusive approach to working with all our learners in the classroom, has resulted in a system-wide shift in philosophy, pedagogy, and practice. We are energized, inspired, and optimistic that we are now on track to achieve our goal of ensuring that every student will complete Grade 3 with the skills and confidence of being proficient in literacy. ○

Naomi Ross is a District Principal of Inclusion, Early Learning and Child Care in School District 8. Deanna Holitzki is a Director of Instruction in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the district.

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Navigating School Change in Times of Ambiguity



By Anna Villalta, CASSA Board of Directors

Keeping your boat on course can be difficult in a world that is in a state of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). We have gone through a period of enormous disruption where connections have been broken, interactions have been interrupted, and people's values and commitment to education have been tested. Leading a school that is undergoing change in times like these is not only a time to change gears and refocus your vision as a leader, but a time when

you maneuver and readjust your leadership to that of a compassionate, inclusive, adaptive, and purpose-driven instructional leader. These 10 channel markers define leading practices that can help steer the course to make sustainable change possible.

Channel Marker 1: **Create a healthy school climate**

Nourish a culture that positively influences others with well-articulated beliefs, a sense of well-being, cohesion, and a shared vision. Model open-mindedness and value staff as individuals collaborating on solutions together.¹ Leaders who don't listen will eventually be surrounded by people

who have nothing to say. Leaders of change should build strong lines of communication, model gratitude, listen with the intent to understand, and apologize for mistakes.

Channel Marker 2: **Build trust**

One of the leading practices for leaders in times of uncertainty is taking actions that build trust because when trust exists, change can happen rapidly.² The more trust, the more agile and responsive your team will be. By creating safe spaces with transparent communication, teams will trust your judgment and believe that you did what was necessary with their best interest at heart.

Channel Marker 3: Steer with empathy, humility, and compassion

Rebuilding strong connections lost in uncertain times with empathy and compassion is necessary to understand and allow space for healing to move forward.³ Compassionate leadership begins with the intention to see as others see and feel as others feel. Wise compassionate leaders “do hard things in a human way.”⁴

Channel Marker 4: Slow down, read the landscape, adjust your sails

Especially in rough tides, leaders must be contextually literate to deeply understand the culture they are in.¹ Strong leaders patiently read the context through connections with their team. They try to understand the issues at hand, observe existing relationships between various groups, their beliefs, and norms. Then, they adapt their leadership style to those newly adjusted norms.⁵

Channel Marker 5: Model collaborative practices

Leaders need to lead from “within” and reclaim connections. Teams gain strength and sustenance from connections, from feeling seen, heard, and valued. Model collaborative practices, engage with your team in the same way you expect them to engage with one another. Serve as a member of the team, with teachers, from the inside.

Channel Marker 6: Model inclusive practices

Responsive, inclusive leaders are generally known to have teachers who feel supported, who do better work, experience more professional satisfaction and are more likely to stay in the profession.⁶ Actively engaging in building inclusive identity-conscious communities that perpetuate shared commitment, and culturally responsive teachers, while challenging exclusionary policies and behaviors will result in increased belonging and a sense of welcome. This will especially keep you on top of the waves toward change.⁷

Channel Marker 7: Foster student voice

An equitable leader sees the critical need to move away from traditional practices to the increased need for

students to be engaged in the learning process with greater agency and voice. Creating spaces where students learn and practice skills about agency have direct implications on student engagement and increased achievement. Foster an environment where students are asked about their learning experiences regularly and have it built into the instructional design.⁸

Channel Marker 8: Harbor teacher agency and meaningful professional development

Teachers will have limited ability to develop student agency unless leaders give them more agency in areas like collective decision-making and professional development. Provide open-ended, workshop-driven professional learning that offers teachers authentic experiences and helps them set personal goals that also relate to the collective goals of continuous improvement. Teachers don’t always need involvement in decision making but many may want more transparency about how decisions are made and who to talk to when they have feedback about decisions.¹

Channel Marker 9: Be a lead learner

With learning at your core, this type of leader learns alongside their teachers, examining and reflecting on what works and what doesn’t, proactively seeking resources and professional development that are available, and builds teacher’s capacities so that they can reach all learners. A lead learner understands how to model the power of connectivity through sharing new knowledge and how they too can continuously be learners.⁹

Channel Marker 10: Embrace conflict with a growth mindset

A leader’s role, especially in times of volatility, is one of inviting and validating feedback, creating a culture where the team actively seeks it so that they can improve.¹⁰ Acknowledge that change can be hard. Cultures of fear are palpable in schools. Teachers are already afraid to make mistakes because of the impact on student outcomes, expectations and pressure from parents who expect teachers to be flawless. Teachers need to know that mistakes aren’t only

inevitable, but also valuable in building knowledge and creating change.

As you sail through the ups and downs of your leadership journey remember, everyone wins if you help make the storm worth weathering. ○

Anna Villalta is a CASSA Board Member and the Assistant Director of Educational Services at the English Montreal School Board, and a Ph.D. Doctoral Student at McGill University.

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Consultant

Reimagining System Leadership in BC

Those in leadership say that leadership is both art and science. There is the “what” of leadership tasks, the “how” as leadership unfolds as action, and there is the “why” that gets at the values and beliefs behind what leaders do every day in service of children. Describing and explaining the nuances of system leadership is no small task. Over the past decade, our concepts of leadership, and the contexts and challenges we encounter have changed dramatically. Amid the pandemic, the time seemed right to re-examine Dimensions of Practice, which were our existing leadership competencies. The leadership required for the future calls for a set of competencies that adequately capture the complexity and nuances of system leadership,

as well as the rapidly changing educational landscape of our province. This article shares our journey of updating our competencies to the publication of *The Spirit of Leadership*.

In the fall of 2020, an Advisory Group of 15 British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) colleagues was formed to help review and revise our current competencies, the “Dimensions of Practice.” The intention was to create an inclusive process that engaged our members and created ownership of the final product. We have made significant strides with inclusion and

much remains to be done. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission completed its work in 2015, and the global impact of the pandemic and the climate crisis have demonstrated the enormous complexity we all face. Our context for leadership has changed. More is being asked of both school and system leaders than ever before. It is important that our declared set of competencies mirror the leadership we need for the future.

As we began a literature review, there were three important contextual pieces that emerged. First, in jurisdictions around the

globe, there was enormous overlap in the competencies that we reviewed. Everyone seemed to describe leadership, and in particular system leadership, in somewhat similar ways. Next, it was clear that a revision would be insufficient, we would likely have to rewrite Dimensions to capture our changing world. Finally, we needed to have a way to authentically include an Indigenous lens in our writing if we were to demonstrate our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

The Committee reached out to the BCSSA Indigenous Leaders' Group to ask for their direct involvement and support in the development of competencies. We asked for their willingness to help author a document with an Indigenous lens on leadership that reflected the west coast and the enormous diversity of Indigenous peoples. This group also selected Rain Pierre as an artist to create a graphic to capture the emerging competencies and Indigenous perspectives on leadership.

An early decision was made to have the competencies model our newly revised curriculum with Big Ideas and Core Competencies. With the extensive help

of local and international critical friends, primarily David Burns, Louise Stoll, and Michael Fullan, the Advisory Committee began the writing and editing process. BCSSA regional Chapters were regularly updated on the progress of the work and several progress reports were presented as resources for Chapters as competencies emerged. Jordan Tinney, as Advisory Chair, interviewed several international partners and these interviews were broken down into guiding conversation starters for Chapters to use locally to openly discuss leadership challenges we all face and how a revised set of competencies could respond to that need.

As the final document was coming to completion, all that was missing was a title. The term "Spirit" had emerged in several different conversations, some within the Indigenous Leaders' Group, and some from Michael Fullan and other international partners. The title "The Spirit of Leadership" was proposed to the Advisory Committee and was supported. It was seen as bold and different, embodying what we were trying to accomplish with an aspirational, forward-thinking document for leaders of all levels.

The Spirit of Leadership is intended to be a watermark for the BCSSA's work. We have now translated it into French and have proudly shared it with our educational partners and rightsholders. The graphics represent our collective journey toward a better future for all children. The transformation of education is captured by the paddles which can also be viewed as feathers allowing us to take flight. The work of leaders is not a checklist of technical tasks to be completed. Leadership is based on relationships, values, respect, and courage. These personal qualities and attributes are equally important to all tasks required as part of our daily work. As we reimagine leadership, we hope that the Spirit of Leadership provides an uplifting example of the leadership we need as we move through the complex times ahead. ○

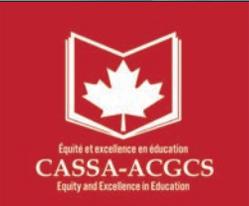
Claire Guy is Executive Director at BCSSA, and Jordan Tinney is the retired Superintendent of the Surrey School District and was Chair of the Advisory Committee. As Executive Director and Committee Chair, both Claire and Jordan led and participated throughout the entire journey of the creation of The Spirit of Leadership.



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A Partnership Between School Districts and Communities

Welcoming Newcomer Students from Ukraine

By Tim De Ruyck, Wolf Creek Public Schools

Education Services
Coordinator Kacey
Oehlerking supports
classroom teachers and
newcomer EAL students.



On February 24, 2022, the world looked on with dismay as Russia began its invasion of Ukraine. Thanks to our veterans, whose sacrifices secured our freedom, most Canadians have not experienced this type of anguish and disruption. Support and compassion have poured from Canada and other countries to Ukraine since the invasion began. Though we of course want to do all we can to ease the suffering of the Ukrainians who have been victimized by this instability, we may also feel somewhat helpless. As school districts, we can help within the scope of what we do best and meet the needs of every student we serve.

Within Wolf Creek Public Schools, we are accepting and supportive of all students within our



The Talk About Overview graphic. Photos courtesy of Tim De Ruyck.

care. This is our mantra. Though we are a rural school district, we are very familiar with providing support for English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. Currently we have 400 EAL students out of a total student population of 7,500. Beginning in the early spring of 2022, we began to learn of various organizations who are sponsoring newcomer families from Ukraine. By drawing from our experience supporting EAL students, we are working to help newcomer Ukrainian families.

Since then, we have welcomed 17 students from Ukraine, along with other EAL students in general, and we fully expect this trend to continue. As a school district we partner with various community organizations, such as “Community Connections for Ukrainians Arriving in Lacombe,” whose membership is made up of volunteers and is affiliated with several local churches in the community of Lacombe. It is this organization, as well as others such as the Church of Latter-Day Saints, who have been very involved in helping families settle into our region in central Alberta. These volunteer organizations often serve as the family sponsor, solidifying transportation for the family to Alberta, and helping the family settle into housing. These organizations then reach out to Wolf Creek Public Schools to initiate the registration process for students.

A meeting is held between the family, student(s), school administration, and one of our Coordinators of Education Services. An oral language assessment is conducted as soon as the student is comfortable doing so, and the Education Services Coordinator then meets with the classroom teacher(s) to plan accordingly for the student’s programming and ensure the appropriate supports are in place.

Our Coordinator of Education Services conducts regular check-in where the services provided are continually reviewed and adjusted as required. It is important to note that at times, depending on what the family has

experienced, social-emotional supports may be required in addition to support for learning and language acquisition. When this occurs, we involve our School Social Workers as well as any outside agencies as needed. Overall, success requires an intentional and sustained wrap-around approach involving numerous personnel, agencies, and community organizations.

In rural settings such as Wolf Creek Public Schools, we often do not have the ability to offer dedicated classes for EAL learners given we may only have a few students in any one school at any one time. As a result, we must be creative and intentional with a more targeted approach. At the school level, it has been helpful for schools to designate time within the school day focused specifically on language interventions for any students needing this support. Our Education Services Coordinator works with the school staff involved to provide strategies and resources.

Even with sustained support being provided to students and their families, circumstances for these students are challenging. Low-beginning EAL students need explicit instruction in phonological awareness, and intervention structures within schools may not always align well with what is needed on an individual basis. For older students, academic language and the pacing of content is challenging. To assist with these challenges our Education Services team and classroom teachers have utilized several tools/resources:

- Imagine Learning and Literacy;
- Talk About Series (Scholastic Canada);
- Various early literacy programs which vary by school, examples including Heggerty, Smart Start, Animated Literacy, Levelled Literacy Intervention, Building Readers;
- Audio books, as well as dual language books; and
- Translation and ESL apps, such as Google Translate, VOCRE, iTranslate, and Read Write Gold.

We know one of the greatest strengths we enjoy as Canadians is our diversity. We have also known for years that our percentage of EAL students within Canada is rapidly increasing, as is noted more than 10 years ago from the Peel District School Board in Ontario.¹ This discussion has been ongoing across Canada, including Alberta, as is noted from the ASBA Fall Annual General Meeting even from 2018.²

In 2018, EAL students were estimated to equate to 15-16 per cent of the student population. There is no doubt this number is much higher now and growing.

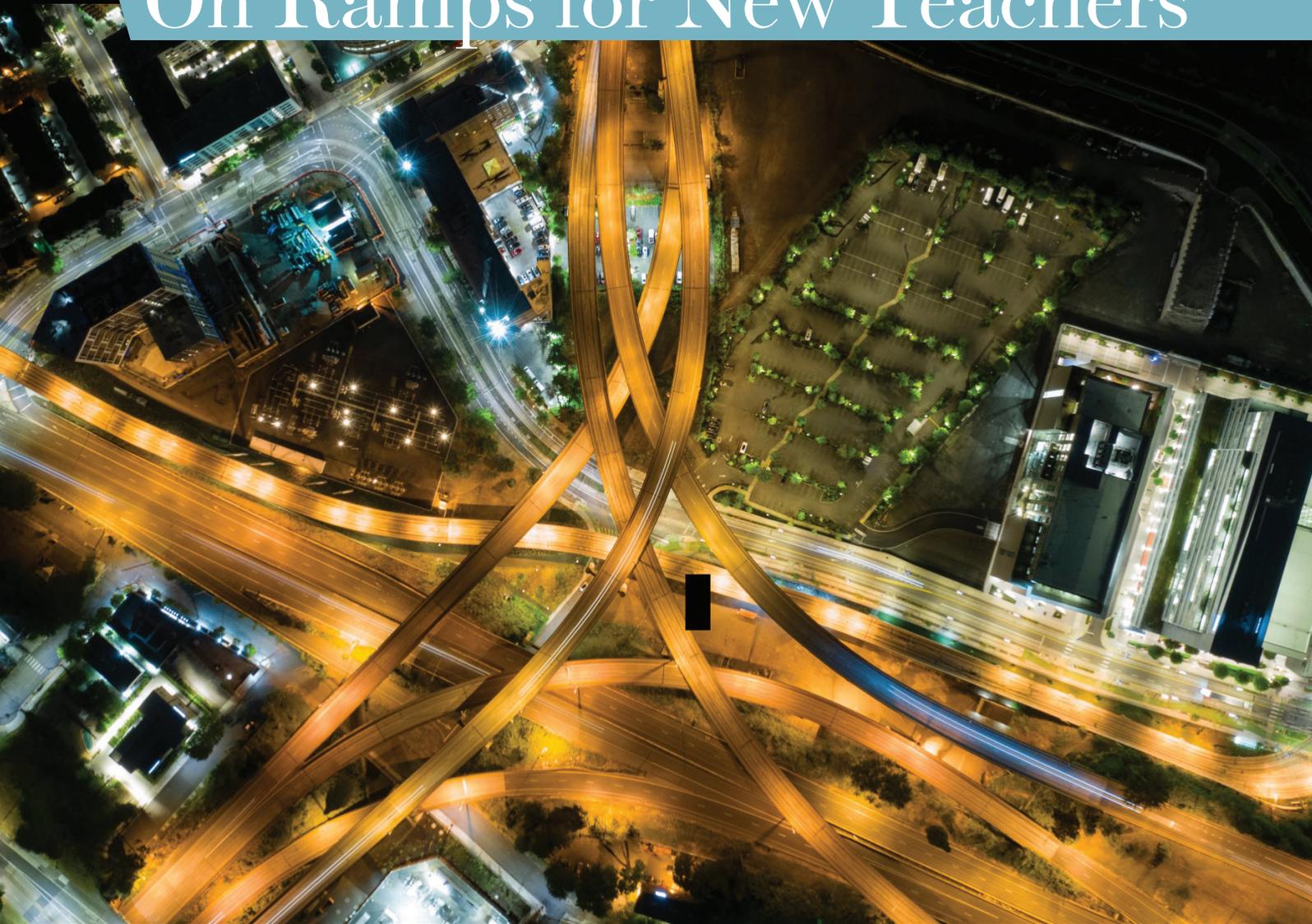
Rural districts such as Wolf Creek Public Schools are accustomed to being creative when seeking solutions and supporting EAL students is no exception. Our ongoing work with EAL students has served us well as we continue to receive new families to our communities and schools, including over the last eight months as we have realized a steady intake of newcomer students from Ukraine. Continued targeting of resources for EAL programming will remain important as we see the number of EAL students in Alberta, and indeed Canada, continue to rise. ○

Tim De Ruyck is the Superintendent and CEO for Wolf Creek Public Schools.

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The Importance of On Ramps for New Teachers



By Heather Bell-Williams

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is still affecting school systems across Canada, most notably in that many schools have more brand-new teachers than ever before. Large numbers of newly minted teachers and local permit people with no teacher certificate are now the norm in the classrooms of our schools. School leaders and districts must provide these new teachers with supports in order that they thrive and not just survive.

It was early September when I received my first call to supply teach after retiring from the principalship in June. By the end of day one, two brand new teachers, neither of whom knew me before our day together, confided in me how hard they were working and how generally awful it was! A colleague, another newly retired supply teacher commented to me, “We expect a lot of teachers.”

As I reflected on the needs of the brand-new teachers, I concluded that we do expect new teachers to know a lot and to have expertise and intuitive ideas that often come after years of experience.

I considered the analogy of a highway to guide my thinking – the school is a freeway where traffic is zooming at 110 km/hour and our new teachers need on ramps to support their integration into the heavy and quick flow of traffic. Three on ramps are needed:

1. Co-teaching programs for new teachers during their first six weeks of school;
2. Ongoing, school-based mentor teams to provide support; and
3. Like all drivers on a freeway, new teachers need a GPS or a map to guide their journey, so they know where they are headed and what the goal is (exemplary practice).

First, new teachers need a co-teaching coach. To expect a new teacher to know how to set up a classroom, what routines to instill, and how to teach those routines, much less consider curriculum delivery and all the planning, assessment, and non-instructional tasks, is quite outlandish. During the first six weeks of school, onboard new teachers with a mentor teacher who is with them for co-planning and with them for the first five days in the classroom and then checks in and gradually releases by Thanksgiving. These costs would far outweigh the lost learning time, lost work time, etc. of leaving the new teacher with no on ramp.

Second, ongoing mentoring is needed for new teachers. Anthony Muhammad in “Transforming School Culture” advocates for a mentoring team.¹ In our school we did this as well: I picked several people that I wanted on the team, and then opened it up to anyone who wished to participate, knowing that the few I chose would navigate it positively. Mohammad points out that new teachers are going to be coached and informally mentored by someone or a group anyway – and those you may not want them to emulate will step in if you as the leader don’t act first and create a mentoring team!

Finally, new teachers need a map or GPS to guide their work for growing professional judgement. As part of my professional growth as a school leader, I was coached by Justin Baeder (www.theprincipalcenter.com) and as I was chatting with Justin one day about how to help teachers grow, he said, ‘Heather, it sounds like you are trying to operationalize common sense.’ “That’s it,” I replied. “How do I instill in my staff the ideas of decision making and growing professional judgement?”

The answer, we found, is in a tool called Instructional Frameworks: a tool that we developed that maps out a pathway for growth for teachers in a particular area of practice where judgement is required to move along from a beginning to more developed stage of fluency in the practice.² Recently, we have developed instructional frameworks for several new teachers, to serve as growth pathways along their journey to proficiency. This tool holds tremendous promise for new teachers in that leaders can observe and can zoom in and know with precision the

needs of the new teachers and map out a pathway for them as they are immersed in the life of the school at highway speeds.

In conclusion, we do expect a lot of new teachers, and for good reason. The learning of our children depends on teachers being successfully assimilated into the fast lane of teaching very quickly and with precision. Co-teachers for the first six weeks of school, an ongoing school based mentoring team, and an instructional framework to serve as a map for areas of practice all hold promise as on ramps for our new teachers. ○

Heather Bell-Williams is a retired school principal located in New Brunswick, Canada. She has been in education since 1988 in a variety of roles.

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Recommendations for Leading During Challenging Times

As Perceived by Alberta Senior School District Leaders During the Global Pandemic



By Dr. Gloria Antifaiff, and Dr. Heather Henderson, City University in Canada

In this study, the practice of adaptive leadership was examined by considering the perspectives and lessons learned by Alberta senior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) school district leaders as they led through the global pandemic. Technical and adaptive challenges, as identified by Heifetz et al. (2009),¹ served as a framework for analyzing the qualitative data findings and subsequent recommendations for leaders who lead during a challenging situation.

One of the research questions for this study was: What are the recommendations identified as key when facing another pandemic or critical moment of crisis? From the collected data, the researchers identified six key recommendations.

1. Communicate Clearly

Participants identified clear communication as a recommendation for leading during this current pandemic or another crisis. Overall, the underlying sentiment

was to communicate and even to over-communicate. One participant shared: “Communication is important. People are hearing things in the news, and then the question is, how does this impact me personally?” Overall, participants spoke of the value and the need for clear and consistent communication with intent, direction, clarity, and responsiveness.

2. Demonstrate Empathy

Participants expressed the importance of demonstrating empathy while being an advocate for others, including the community and parents. One participant noted: “Don’t underestimate the need for us to check in with our various stakeholders and see how they’re doing. We need to be patient, understanding, and compassionate.” Another added: “As advocates for people, senior K-12 school district leaders agreed that we must work and stand together, be advocates for all, and remember that we are all in this together.” Overwhelmingly, the

participants highlighted how important it is to speak and act with empathy as well as remain true to one’s morals and values. It is critical in these times of crisis to show care and concern for one another.

3. Take Time for Self-Reflection

Several participants spoke of the need to take time for self-reflection. One participant summed up the learning journey and recommendations for the future: “I’ve been doing a lot of reflecting because COVID-19 made us react. There was a lot more reaction than being proactive compared to other decisions a person will make in this leadership role. I’ve been trying to go back to the reflective piece.”

The participants were unanimous in their recommendations to take time to reflect, be kind to each other, and be honest with oneself.

4. Be Flexible

Many participants noted the pandemic was a time to be flexible and adaptable. Not

everyone reacts and deals with things in the same way; it is important to be open to others' views and feelings. One participant stated: "The most important takeaway I've noticed is that we don't tend to react in the same way as we did early in the pandemic. It's just become the way of doing business in our school division." Another participant recommended: "Remain adaptable, flexible, open minded, compassionate, caring. Think very differently about how to meet students where they're at." All participants expressed similar thoughts; be open and flexible when working with others, hear how others are reacting, and consider the next moves.

5. Invite Others into Solutions

Participants indicated the strength of working with others, by inviting them to the problem and asking them to be part of the solution. For example, one participant stated, "Invite people on your team; surround yourself with good thinkers and divergent thinkers. Define your problem, define what the dilemma is, and then consider everything. Really open your mind to let's just talk and explore solutions." Another participant expressed: "Collaboration and

communication is vital. Use the people around you. You're not an island and it's important not to make unilateral decisions. Look at things from a variety of [perspectives]." Another participant shared: "If [people] don't trust you, they won't follow you. So, you can be whatever kind of leader you want but if no one's following, you're not doing much." Harness the strength of trust in self, others, and in systems of thinking.

6. Be Courageous

As the final recommendation, many participants spoke to being courageous: "Don't be afraid to take the leap ... and make decisions. We've made mistakes, we're human beings. All individuals in all school districts must be courageous and be willing to take the leap into the unknown." The participants were unanimous in their thoughts related to making mistakes, recognizing support for student learning and stakeholders during this challenging time.

This research study examined the perceptions and lessons learned from senior K-12 school district leaders. These six recommendations, reflective of the interviews, show the clear thought, directives, and

advice expressed by senior K-12 school district leaders during the global pandemic. Their words speak to the need to be resilient and open to divergent solutions in future crises. ○

Dr. Heather Henderson, a life member of CASS, is an educator and facilitator who works with others to achieve their goals. For the last ten years, Heather has worked with City University of Seattle and is currently the Canadian Director of the Educational (M Ed) Leadership program.

Dr. Gloria Antifaiff is currently the Principal Leadership Consultant for the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS). She recently received the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching from City University in Seattle, where she is a principal faculty member in the M.Ed. in Leadership program.

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Reimagining Mental Health During a Global Pandemic

Exploring how initiatives to maintain a healthy and safe community transformed the lives of students and staff, and how they learned and shared their learnings to help overcome obstacles.

By Dina Vourdouis, Carlyle Elementary International World School

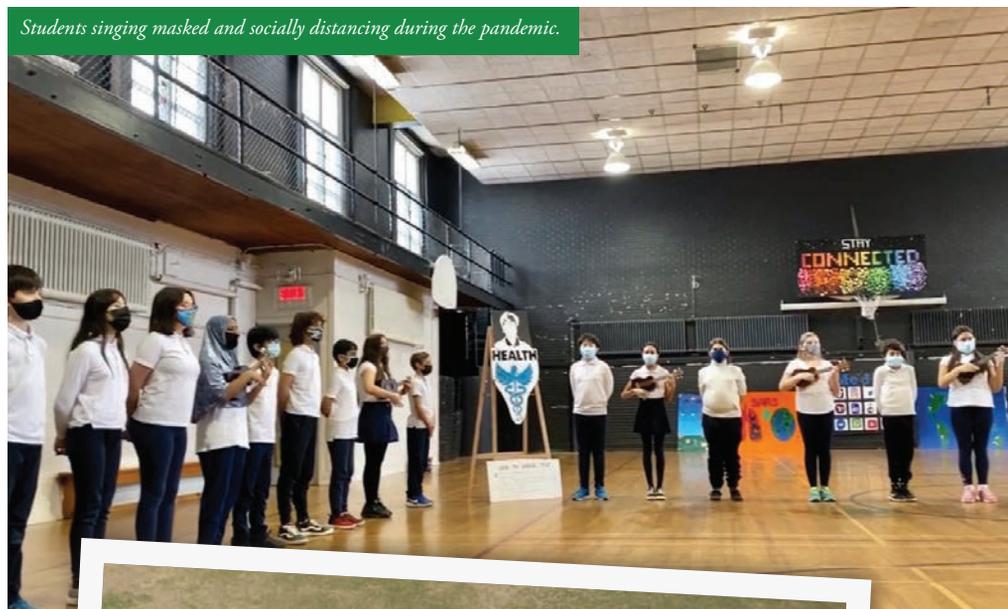
The global COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for learning new educational approaches to thinking clearly and being mindful during a time when the journey has been unclear and confusing. Any journey that threatens the physical and mental health and well-being of humankind can manifest into fear unless creativity grounds the learning community in problem solving initiatives. Upon reflection, at Carlyle Elementary International World School, the International Baccalaureate program is our foundation and Carlyle's International Music program is the glue that keeps us together and makes us stronger.

The pandemic has shown that the Carlyle community comes together in times of crisis to comfort one another. Through honing, owning, and making their creative learning their own, each student shares and makes the Carlyle International Baccalaureate (IB) community a welcoming place to explore learning styles, grow intellectually, and gain experience that strengthens character and camaraderie.

A culture of seasoned creative IB trained professionals, supporting each member's unique talents, while exploring ways to improve their community members' emotional well-being, is a testament to their commitment to excellence. Our IB training proved to be effectively employed to accommodate the unique mental health needs brought on by the pandemic.

Our IB program is the one consistent component in the rapid everchanging and uncharted pandemic world. It is our

Students singing masked and socially distancing during the pandemic.



Carlyle Elementary International World School students captured laying out in the letters "IB." Photos courtesy of Dina Vourdouis.

foundation and cemented at the core are the IB learners' profile attributes of being open minded, balanced, an inquirer, a communicator, principled, a thinker, a risk taker,

knowledgeable, caring, and reflective are brought out significantly during a crisis, appealing to students' and the team's inner benevolence and kindness.

As a high integration Special Needs IB school, Carlyle students' social and emotional learning are part of student agency. Social emotional wellness is fundamental to the student driven learning. Students have a voice and a choice, and they take action and are accountable for those actions. Being able to engage our community is central to our IB training. Upon shutdown, we immediately used various online programs to continue to connect with one another. Our social counsellor contacted families by phone to check in on parents and children. It was a fragile time and hearing familiar voices and encouraging conversations had impacted students' ability to focus. It also helped parents and guardians have a sense of community when speaking with school members. Our team of childcare educators, teachers and special education technicians kept in touch by phone, mostly to ensure socialization and avoid isolation.

Part of our IB training embeds learning to adapt and be flexible in everchanging and unsettling times. Flexibility enables the Carlyle team to focus our minds and investigate how we would be able to present our next IB Exhibition in 2020/2021. Padlet,

a platform presented at an IB workshop teachers had attended in Ohio in 2019, was employed for our first online IB exhibition in 2020/2021. By this time students were curious and decided on the IB Exhibition topic of "Pandemics across the ages and its effects on the world."

The Carlyle team are masters of initiating new technology to effectively communicate in building successful community liaisons to support students' learning initiatives. The Grade 6 music students composed the song "We Need Each Other" as a reflection of how difficult these times were. We needed each other more than ever, no matter how far we were from each other, music travels through the air across boundaries. Singing with a mask and practicing while social distancing showed the students' resilience through using the power of music. It brought the entire community together in a sense of unison empowering our endurance. Some had mentioned how sad it was going to be for music class this year, especially because live concerts were not allowed. The music students overcame the live performance obstacle by creating this awe-inspiring song and video.

Surprisingly, students grew tired of relying on technology. The Grade 6 students also created a song for the 2022 PYP Exhibition entitled "A Little While," to reflect on how technology affects society and our daily lives. Now more than two years into the pandemic, technological tools have proven to be essential to communicate and navigate today's world. "A Little While" emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between screen time and enjoying life without constantly relying on technological devices. This creative process has brought us all together, encouraging us to move, sing, dance, and enjoy every moment in life.

The inspirational virtual concerts that we created school wide over the past two years, has taught us to be mindful of having fun in creating music together. These were all new and wonderful learning experiences for the students in the music class and especially the Carlyle community. In hindsight, the pandemic positively influenced our imagination and instilled in us that mental health is central to maintaining the well-being of a caring community. ○

Dina Vourdouzis is the Principal for Carlyle Elementary International World School.

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You are the Strategy... But It's Not About You

By Ashley McLellan, Nelson Education

Education is never short on necessary and urgent demands to do more for every learner. Efforts to build leadership capacity and competencies in leading anti-racist education, culturally relevant and responsive approaches to teaching and learning, working towards education for reconciliation, and establishing a common language in supporting mental health and well-being across systems are an ongoing part of the leadership journey. Leading this work is complex and it may feel difficult to find the throughline that connects these

priorities. We at Nelson are proud to partner with you in this work and have been steadfast in building resources for educators that support the many demands you face and are grounded in the belief that *you* are the strategy that matters most.

“As we think about creating anti-racist education systems, we must remind ourselves that this work is a journey. Change will not happen overnight. But understanding that this may be a long process does not mean we can be complacent; we need to engage and persist. We need to actively work to create an anti-racist education system – and the work begins with ourselves.”¹ (Jo Chrona)

Over the last many years, particularly since the onset of the pandemic, we have

worked alongside system leaders to ensure that Nelson’s resources are supported with professional learning that is backed by research, building teacher confidence, and ensuring classroom success. This strategy supports learners across Canada as they persist toward more just, equitable, and inclusive learning environments.

As the educational landscape evolves, we continue to meet the demands for digital, virtual, blended, and asynchronous models for learning while ensuring connectivity is at the core. Connected to one another through learning resources that are authentic, engaging, and innovative in the ability for all users to curate experiences that help us listen, connect, reflect, and most importantly, act.

Nelson Professional Learning offerings graphic, courtesy of Nelson Education.

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Our ability to support the ongoing modernization of education has been built on the foundation of Nelson’s digital ecosystem, Edwin. Through Edwin, we offer educators and students the ability to engage in learning with the most relevant and up-to-date resources available in education. In this ecosystem, we also partner with leading voices across Canada to ensure our newly published resources are culturally relevant and contextually significant. This is to support all students in strengthening their identity at school by fostering a sense of belonging in the learning environment. Just like the educator is responsible for creating these relationship-based conditions in the classroom, leaders do the same for their learning community – including parents and caregivers.

“A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don’t function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.” (Brené Brown)

Nelson has been listening to the calls of parents of Black children to ensure that the Black Canadian experience is present in the

curriculum. We are honoured to work with leaders nationwide, who are helping us to develop resources that present the historical foundations of the Black experience through a uniquely Canadian lens. At the heart of this work we must learn, unlearn, and reflect on the important role we each play in engaging and persisting in what Dr. Andrew B. Campbell refers to as “not just hard work, but heart work.”

“My school board has been promoting culturally responsive pedagogy for several years now, but in order to do that, every teacher needs to be aware of the different cultures represented in the classroom. I’ve been teaching for 20 years, and I’m being reminded that my knowledge of Black History in Canada just skims the surface. By broadening my own knowledge, I’m increasing capacity for locating rich and relevant learning materials and opportunities for my students.” (Ontario Educator)

Professor and Nelson professional learning author of *The Third Path*, Dr. David Tranter, reminds us of the importance of viewing “education as a path that one walks, rather than a series of strategies that one adopts.”

Working in partnership with schools and thought leaders enables us to create

resources that empower educators and inspire Canadians to walk humbly together and promote understanding of different cultures, and respect and empathy for each other. This work continues to bring us closer to our mission to create the possible. One learner at a time.

To continue your learning journey, join Nelson’s professional learning offering, “*See Us, Learn Us*,” to explore new perspectives on how to strengthen identity and belonging through teaching about the Black Canadian experience. ○

Ashley McLellan is the Director of Professional Learning for Nelson Education.

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 James Lorimer & Company Ltd. 6

EARLY LITERACY PROGRAM

Strong Start..... 10

ELECTRONICS REUSE AND RECYCLING PROGRAM

Computers for Kids..... 21

FITNESS SERVICE PROVIDER

Fit Boots International Inc. 4

FUNDRAISING

Make It Sow 23
 Recipes in a Jar/Recettes en Pot..... 27

HAND HYGIENE AND COMMERCIAL RESTROOM PRODUCTS

Dobbin Sales Ltd.IFC

PROCUREMENT

Public Services & Procurement Canada 25

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Solution Tree..... IBC

STEM CLASSROOM AND PL RESOURCES

Let's Talk Science 8

STUDENT GROUP TRAVEL IN MANITOBA

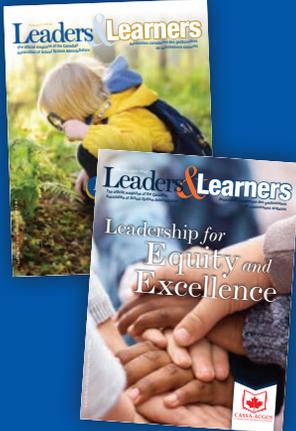
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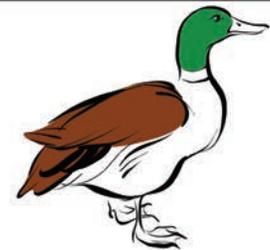
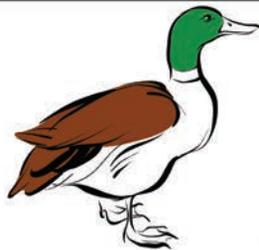
Queen's University 15
 St. Mary's University 21
 Trinity Western University..... 3
 University of Calgary 29

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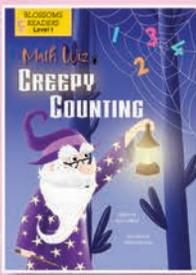
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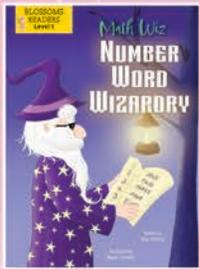
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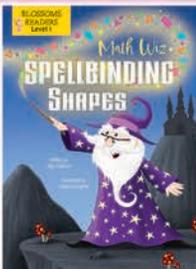
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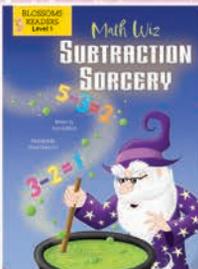
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