

# the **CASS** CONNECTION Fall 2023

The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents



## *Continuing the Journey:*

**Opening Doors  
and Expanding  
Opportunities:**

*PART TWO*



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## The CASS Connection

The official magazine for the College of  
Alberta School Superintendents  
Fall 2023

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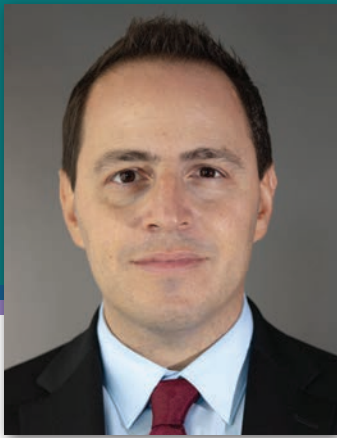
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# Message from the Minister of Education

Demetrios Nicolaides | Alberta Minister of Education

## Supporting Students Throughout Their School Journey

I was honoured to be named the Minister of Education last spring, and while the learning curve has been steep, it's a journey I've embraced and enjoyed. I quickly came to realize just how crucial the College of Alberta School Superintendents and its members are to the success of education in Alberta. Your experience, combined with a strong commitment to collaboration has been invaluable to me over the past few months. I truly appreciate your input as we work together to open doors and expand opportunities for Alberta students.

Ensuring every student is supported throughout their educational journey is a top priority for Alberta's government, which is why Alberta Education is operating with the biggest budget in provincial history – \$8.8 billion this school year. We're also addressing affordability and accessibility concerns with initiatives designed to target the high fuel prices, insurance costs, and rising inflation facing our education system partners.

Total funding support to the system is increasing by nearly \$2 billion over the next three years. This funding supports enrolment growth and the hiring of additional teachers and classroom support staff so school authorities can manage class sizes and the growing number of students.

Last fall, Alberta's government announced a new Supplemental Enrolment Growth Grant that provided school authorities with more than \$21 million in additional funding. This grant continues to be available in the 2023/24 school year to support school authorities experiencing significant enrolment growth. Over the next three years, we'll provide school authorities with more than \$820 million in additional funding to support enrolment growth.

Budget 2023 also provides targeted funding of \$126 million over three years, including

\$42 million in 2023/24, to help school authorities hire more educational assistants or increase their hours; provide more training opportunities for staff; and/or hire specialists such as counsellors, psychologists, and interpreters, and even more teachers.

With more classroom support staff, school authorities will be better equipped to help students who have unique cognitive, social, and emotional needs, as well as those learning English as an additional language.

We're helping to avoid more paperwork for school authorities by basing this funding on student enrolment and automatically including the new grant in operational funding amounts rather than requiring authorities to fill out applications.

School transportation funding increases by \$414 million over the next three years. Alberta's government has also made regulatory changes so approximately 80,000 additional students will be eligible for provincial

transportation funding. Along with supporting newly eligible students, Budget 2023's student transportation funding will continue to address cost and inflationary pressures faced by school authorities and bus contractors.

Alberta's government is also continuing the Fuel Price Contingency Program for the 2023/24 school year. This program provides school authorities with additional funding to address high fuel costs and protect school bus services. To date, the program has saved school authorities more than \$25 million and is projected to save a total of \$23.5 million in the 2023/24 school year.

Again, thank you so much for the work you do in supporting Alberta's students, families, and communities. I'm grateful that I've had the opportunity to meet many of you in person over the last few weeks, and I look forward to meeting more of you as the school year progresses.

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# Message from the President

Dr. Andrea Holowka | College of Alberta School Superintendents

## Reflecting on the Importance of School Leaders

**A**s we enter another fall together, it is critical to reflect on the importance of system leaders and their role in supporting optimal student learning. This issue's theme of *Opening Doors and Expanding Opportunities* accurately captures the creativity that system leaders must apply to address the increasing complexity within our schools. Moving systems forward requires the application of all competencies within our practice standards to encourage collective mindsets shifts and actions toward improvement.

This issue of *The CASS Connection* allows system leaders across the province to learn from those who have experienced challenges, successes, and opportunities for change in response to the needs of their students. These stories deeply examine best practices for student learning and support. Sharing these experiences provides inspiration and modeling for colleagues who are

This issue of *The CASS Connection* allows system leaders across the province to learn from those who have experienced challenges, successes, and opportunities for change in response to the needs of their students.

similarly grappling with complexity within their own contexts.

On behalf of the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), I would like to express appreciation for our authors who have taken the time to place their own learning on display. Our members

continue to play such a pivotal role in supporting each other and communally elevating our practice as system leaders. As our membership continues to grow and our organization further evolves, I look forward to our ongoing collaboration and learning together.

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#### Chief Executive Officer

David Keohane





# Message from the Chief Executive Officer

David Keohane | College of Alberta School Superintendents

## The Merits of Good Judgement

**K**nowing which door to enter next to expand one’s professional growth can be a quandary for any system leader. Those who take increasingly higher responsibility for organizational outcomes can at times feel like the rock star Bob Seger did when he commented on his rise to prominence through the song “Against the Wind” – “I’ve got so much more to think about / deadlines and commitments / what to leave in, what to leave out.”

When pursuing professional growth, what do great leaders do over time to increase effectiveness in making choices? In a recent article in the Harvard Business Review, scholars Noel Tichy and Warren Bennis provide the answer through their explanation of what “good judgement” means. As Tichy and Bennis explain, some experts define this attribute as being dependent upon a “gut feeling” that combines experience with analytic capacities that overtime becomes unconscious work. Thankfully, through interviewing a multitude of CEOs in many employment sectors overtime, these researchers have revealed that there lies a simpler explanation of good judgement, one that can be consciously leveraged by anyone and points to what our readership would be quite

comfortable demonstrating. Research shows that leaders with good judgement are first and foremost good listeners and good readers.

We are therefore thankful that the submissions in this issue of *The CASS Connection* provide a diverse offering of how colleagues within the work of system education leadership undertake a range of professional responsibilities ranging from responsiveness to practice standards and strategic leadership, to meaningful collaboration, and addressing student mental health.

The articles provided in this edition enable readers to assess their own experiences and relationships at work and discover parallels, analogies, validations, and new discoveries of opportunities that are all part of furthering growing through one’s career path.

In fact, through reading the enclosed stories of practice they can help inoculate us from the tyranny of growth that “experience” may bring to the equation. Experience is an irreplaceable teacher, but it reveals its dark side when it compels people to believe that they have already learned all that they need to know. The research behind “good judgement” cautions that when experienced leaders do not keep in touch with current practice, they may become professionally stuck by making judgments out of habit, complacency, or overconfidence.

Therefore, I wish to start this school year by praising the more than 450 members and affiliates to our college who will come together this year through zone meetings, conferences, and reading about our stories of professional practice to enrich their own growth and that of their colleagues.

Our professional organization is deemed to be a “college” in legislation for a very important reason. Our membership is now requested through the CASS Act, to organize around the specific aims, duties, and privileges that advance the leadership and superintendent leadership quality standards. Our members achieve this goal on an ongoing basis by learning what is foundational to this work and applying practice through self initiative and being attentive to the work of their colleagues.

Thanks to our contributors in this edition for bringing such learning to life. Thank you to all of our members for making good judgement an ongoing component of your professional practice.

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- Tiny-saurs (preschool)
- Bugs before time
- Geology rocks
- Fossils
- Rocks, fossils, and glaciation
- Mesozoic masters
- Dino tracker
- Lab tours (Gr.3+)
- Gallery tours
- Fossil casting
- C.S.I (Cretaceous Scene Investigation)
- Night at the museum
- Fabrics of time
- Fliers and gliders
- Palaeontology (grade 10 curriculum)
- Palaeontology 20 (grade 11 curriculum)
- Palaeontology 30 (grade 12 curriculum)
- Dinosaurs Among Us \* *New*

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# Building Leadership & Connecting Students with Indigenous Cultures and Ideas

By Teresa Di Ninno and Sara Fairbrother, CAPE Public Charter School

**F**oundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures and histories is an integral component of inclusive learning environments in our province, as clearly stated in the various quality standards. During the past three years, the Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence (CAPE) has been engaged in promoting excellence in leadership, excellence in teaching, and optimum learning through mentorship at all levels through the CAPE Indigenous Education Team (CIET).

Under the leadership of the superintendent, CIET has involved teachers and staff, who volunteer their time and knowledge in support of indigenous studies. The intent is to build staff capacity for seamlessly embedding First Nations, Métis, and Inuit concepts within mainstream education programming. This integrated approach aligns beautifully with CAPE's integration program and the focus on world cultures and multiculturalism that permeates our school. The CIET team members actively seek out community opportunities throughout the year and bring their experiences and new information back to the school. Having a dedicated group for indigenous education alleviates some of the workload for teachers allowing them to take more of an active learner role. These efforts have resulted in a coordination of leader education, streamlining the professional development of all CAPE staff.

Collectively, the team has curated a list of written and visual/oral resources and shared this with all staff. This document is routinely updated and revised by all staff. Individually, members of the CIET team have explored various avenues to expand and deepen their own understandings of indigenous culture and ways of learning. Some members have



Two of the winning student designs on orange shirts for Truth and Reconciliation Day.

sought online courses offered through Alberta's universities focusing on both historical and current issues. Other members have conferred with local, and distant members of indigenous communities in an effort to bring authentic voices into the school. The CIET team includes the south zone representative for the ATA Indigenous Education Committee. This individual can not only experience broad practices from around the province, but also share and collaborate within all faculties serviced by the ATA.

Connections made with groups across Alberta have facilitated a rounded and holistic approach to indigenous studies for both staff and students. Through an ongoing cultural exchange with Mother Earth Children's Charter School (MECCS), our schools have fostered student-led teachings serving the double purpose of providing students with authentic cultural educa-

tion and instilling confidence and pride in our students. Last year, this partnership included a three-day camp at the MECCS site for the grade 4/5 students. The teachers served primarily as guides, as the hosting students enthusiastically shared their culture and skills actively engaging guest students in activities. This education model has proven extremely effective for staff and students. The 'teachers' deepened their own knowledge and skills and the 'learners' were more comfortable in a peer-to-peer environment.

As much as the culture-share experience at MECCS places students in leadership roles, the CIET team at CAPE endeavours to do the same through student-directed initiatives. Working on the scaffolding model, the CIET team, through regular meetings, creates step-by-step programs that teachers

*Continued on page 14*



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Continued from page 11

then deliver. Starting with information sharing to ensure broad understanding, the team then puts together and provides grade appropriate resources tailored for each class. These, however, do not end with student-generated products, but

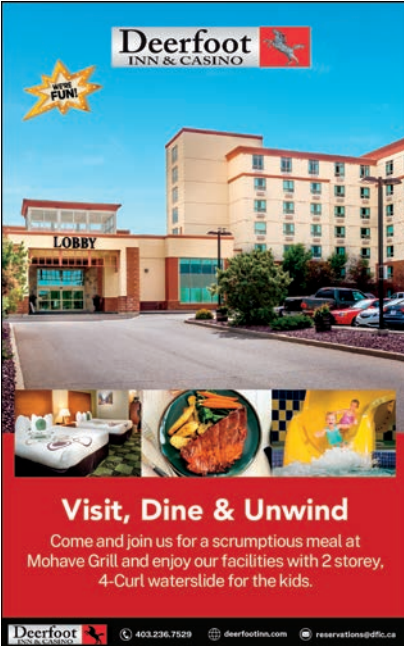
rather provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their own understanding in personal ways. For example, when the CAPE Board of Directors approved the purchase of orange shirts for each student and staff to be worn on Truth and Reconciliation Day, the junior high students, after education and reflection, were asked to generate designs. Through a voting process, two designs were selected, and silk screened onto the shirts.

As CIET evolves, leadership refines, staff knowledge and understanding deepens, student engagement and involvement grows, and the scope of programming changes. The available resources traditionally centre on teacher-focused teaching and learning that, regrettably, tend to result in student rote learning, surface understanding of customs and culture, and the relegation of indigenous cultural experiences to one-time events. CIET is finding that in order to promote holistic and whole student learning, the indigenous teachings need to be permeated into the daily school life. Indigenous education thus becomes woven into the culture of the school. With guidance

from teachers and staff, themselves guided and supported by the CIET team, students take ownership of their own learning, are better equipped to delve more deeply and meaningfully into First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts, and experiences have value beyond the classroom. Students move forward as leaders, sharing and living their new understandings. ■

*Teresa Di Ninno, CEGEP, B.A., B.Ed., M.A., is an alumnus of McGill University and the University of Toronto. Teresa began her teaching career in Alberta in 1980. She is also the founder, past principal and current superintendent of CAPE Public Charter School in Medicine Hat, Alberta.*

*Sara Fairbrother, B.Ed., is an alumnus of Mount Royal University and was born and raised in south Alberta. She had spent several years living in various countries abroad prior to entering the teaching profession which ignited her passion for cultural studies and understanding. Sara is entering her fifth year teaching at CAPE Public Charter School.*



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Be the Change mural for the OHS Sustainability Program. Graphics courtesy of Christopher Fuzessy.



# Aligned in

# Professional Practice

By Christopher Fuzessy,  
Foothills School Division

**A**lberta's professional practice standards are the foundation of The Foothills School Division's (FSD) work in placing education at the centre of a flourishing community. They remain woven throughout FSD's systems and structures. From the superintendent evaluation policy to professional learning structures, and from individual professional growth plans to emerging governance standards, each standard is essential to building a commitment to rich learning and well-being together for our community. Together, the standards drive and guide our work as a collective.

As a relative newcomer to the education context in Alberta in 2019, I was

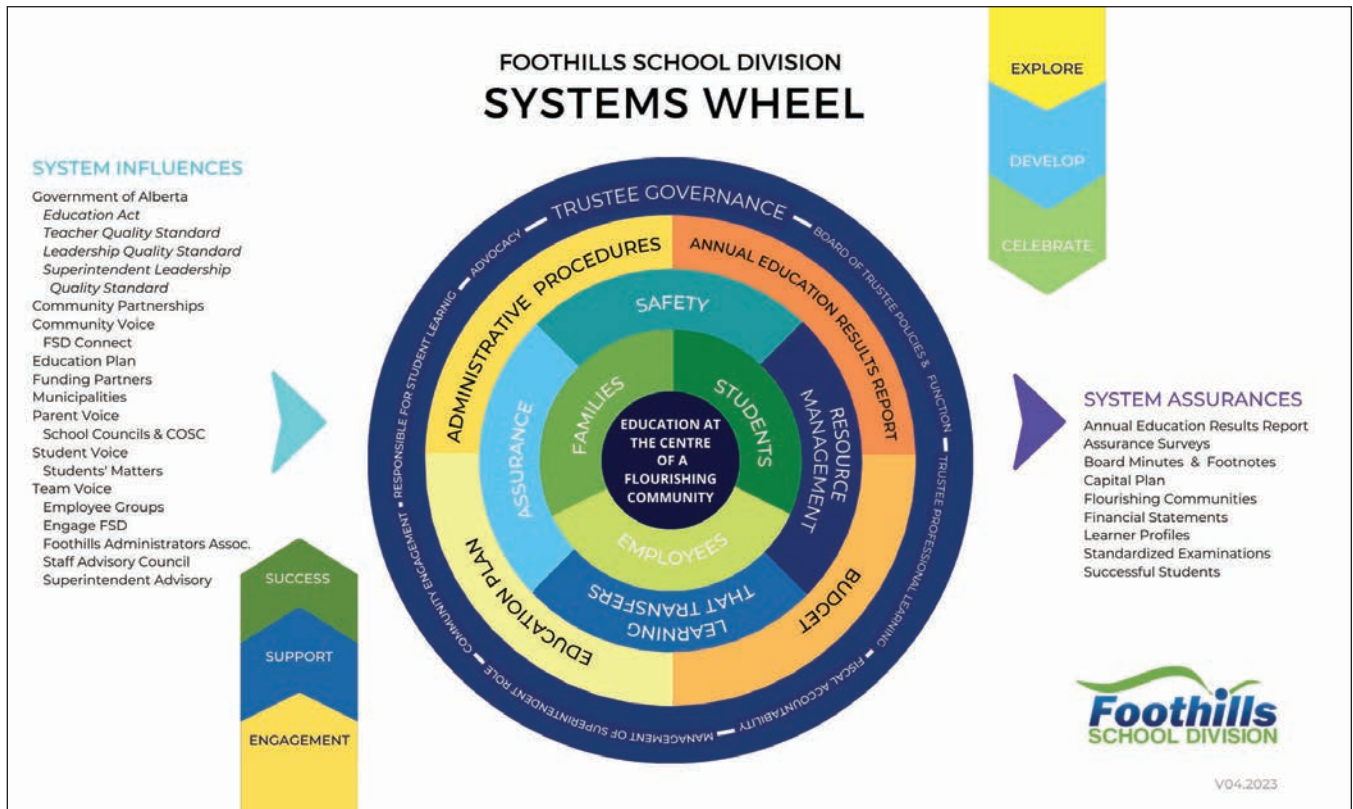
thrilled to see professional practice standards provincially. The Teaching Quality Standard (TQS), Leadership Quality Standard (LQS), and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS) provide excellent alignment in professional practice. They also offer an excellent opportunity to weave coherence and alignment into the work

From the superintendent evaluation policy to professional learning structures, and from individual professional growth plans to emerging governance standards, each standard is essential to building a commitment to rich learning and well-being together for our community.

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that we share. This is work we continue to advance in our structures and systems at FSD. We have embedded them as an influence in our Systems Wheel; we are grateful for the guidance they provide on striving towards excellent professional practice.

One of the first tasks we undertook when I arrived at FSD was to revise our Policy 10,



The Foothills School Division Systems Wheel.

*Role of the Superintendent.* This was an opportunity to rewrite the policy itself, and more importantly to define the role within the framework of the SLQS. It did not make very much sense to look at the policy otherwise. A corollary to this was also defining the superintendent evaluation process in the same terms. As Superintendents in the Alberta context, it is our work to exceed the SLQS on an ongoing basis. And an evaluation of our performance should be situated in the self-same standards. You can find this policy on our website at [www.foothillsschooldivision.ca](http://www.foothillsschooldivision.ca).

Our senior leadership team, school leadership team, and teacher team also use the standards to guide their reflections and planning for individual professional growth plans (IPGPs). Our IPGPs align in this way. A template at FSD that mirrors the different quality standards and allows each team member to voluntarily determine their level of confidence in actualizing the standards. From this reflection, colleagues can develop their professional growth plan that is representative of their areas of interest, and their self-identified areas of confidence as well as areas for professional growth. In this way, each of us is working within the same conceptual framework, thus ensuring that professional growth goals and our work

in achieving our system goals are coherent across the Division.

The design of our professional learning occurs with the standards in mind. For example, in working with our division and school leadership teams and planning for professional learning for next year, we asked which standards from the LQS and SLQS are most important to our learning. Through structured activities and discussion, we determined that Providing Instructional Leadership and Leading a Learning Community are a priority area for our own learning next year. This is not a surprise given the continued introduction of new curricula, as well as our continued work to improve upon student outcomes. Yet, we cannot understate the importance of having these standards anchor our work for the year. They provide a real and concrete ‘why’ for the work and our responsibility in moving this work forward. They also provide a framework that we consistently strive to exceed in bringing our learning to our teams across the Division.

Our Board of Trustees has noted the coherence we create through the professional practice standards, and they developed a set of Governance Quality Standards (GQS). Built upon the LQS and the SLQS models,

GQS speak to further alignment within our Division. It allows both our staff team and our community to see that our organization is guided by a similar set of professional practice, at the operational and governance levels. At the heart of this framework are high quality professional practices that contribute to student success and well-being.

The quality standards we are fortunate to work with in the education context in Alberta are a vital part of our coherence framework at FSD. They speak to the various aspects of the work we do that are necessary for system success. They provide a coherent approach to the work in education. They align across the separate roles in the system, granting us great opportunities to share in the same work, no matter the role we may play. The quality standards give each of us the opportunity to contribute our part to continued growth for ourselves as professionals, and guide our true purpose: student success. ■

*Christopher Fuzessy has worked in nearly every role in education over the course of his career, moving to Alberta from Montreal three years ago to join the Foothills team as Superintendent of Schools. He holds a B.Ed., M.A., and Ph.D. in Education.*



# A Catalyst for Educational Innovation and Collaboration

By Ian Gray, Joanne Higgins, Dean Lindquist, and Lynne Paradis, Alberta Charter Public Schools



◀ Students from Suzuki Charter School performing. Photos courtesy of Lynne Paradis and Ian Gray.

▼ Older students aiding younger ones flourish from Aurora Academic Charter School.

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, charter schools have emerged as a powerful force, introducing innovation and flexibility within the public system. Alberta, a province renowned for its commitment to educational excellence, has embraced the concept of charter schools, ushering in a new era of collaboration, unique programming, and heightened accountability to parents and government.

The history and evolution of charter schools in Alberta can be traced back to the early 1990s when the province embarked on a mission to infuse the public education system with fresh ideas and practices. The introduction of charter schools was a bold endeavour aimed at increasing flexibility to engage in innovative approaches to education while holding them accountable for delivering quality education. This new model challenged the status quo and fostered an environment of experimentation and programming to align with educational choice.

Charter schools in Alberta are an integral part of the public system, operating alongside traditional public schools and sharing



the goal of providing accessible, high-quality education to all students. What sets charter schools apart is their unique blend of flexibility and accountability. While receiving public funding, these schools have the freedom to develop innovative curricula and teaching methodologies that cater to the direction identified in a specific charter. Charter schools have the flexibility to augment curricula and specialized teaching methods to meet the unique interests and needs of their student population.

Accountability forms a critical component of the charter school model in Alberta. While charter schools enjoy greater flexibility, they are subjected to an additional layer of accountability through regular charter goal reporting and reviews. The frequency of these reviews depends on the length of the charter, ensuring that charter schools maintain high standards and fulfill their established objectives. This system of accountability fosters continuous improvement, prevents complacency, and guarantees

that students receive a quality education. By undergoing regular evaluations, charter schools are held to a higher level of responsibility, ensuring that they remain true to their educational mission.

Research is a mandate upon which the charter school movement in Alberta thrives. Charter schools actively engage in partnerships with reputable educational institutions and stakeholders, fostering a culture of knowledge exchange and continuous improvement. The priority of engaging in research with charter schools is attractive to post-secondary institutions because of the ease with which active research projects can be initiated and implemented. By collaborating with universities and research centers, charter schools are at the forefront of pedagogical advancements and are equipped to implement evidence-based practices. This collaborative approach not only benefits the students attending charter schools but also enriches the broader educational community by contributing to the collective body of research and expertise.

One of the key strengths of charter schools in Alberta lies in their ability to offer unique programming options to students. Whether it is an emphasis on arts, sciences, or

specialized vocational training, charter schools serve as incubators for specialized education. This varied programming allows students to explore their passions and talents in a supportive and stimulating environment, nurturing their individual growth and potential.


Charter schools in Alberta actively cultivate partnerships with secondary and post-secondary institutions, community organizations, and local businesses. These collaborations serve as bridges between academia and the real world, enhancing the educational journey of students. Partnerships with universities facilitate access to cutting-edge research and expertise, enabling charter schools to deliver top-quality education. Furthermore, collaborations with the community and businesses provide students with practical, hands-on experiences, equipping them with the skills needed to thrive in the modern workforce. By forging these partnerships, charter schools foster a holistic approach to education that extends beyond the confines of the classroom.

To create a broader understanding of charter schools in Alberta, it is essential to engage stakeholders at all levels. This necessitates proactive communication between

government bodies, educational institutions, parents, and the wider community. Public forums, workshops, and educational campaigns can play a pivotal role in disseminating accurate information, debunking misconceptions, and showcasing the benefits of charter schools. By fostering an informed and open dialogue, the province can ensure that all stakeholders are equipped with the knowledge required to make informed decisions about education.

It is important that charter schools better share who they are and what they do as one of the four public school systems in Alberta. Charter schools do not charge tuition, have governing boards, are inclusive, have low administration costs and have vigorous parent involvement. Accurate communication among all education stakeholders about the added value of all public schools will result in supporting a stronger education system. ■

*Ian Gray is the Superintendent of Aurora Academic Charter School, Joanne Higgins is the Superintendent of STEM Innovation Academy, Dean Lindquist is the Superintendent for Thrive Elementary Charter School, and Lynne Paradis is the Superintendent for Suzuki Charter Public School.*




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# Dodgeball, Anyone?

By Dr. Kathleen Finnigan, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools, and Val Olekshy, Education Consultant

**T**he game of dodgeball can illicit varying memories as you recall physical education class experiences. Teachers with limited professional learning in physical education can, and have, relied on simplistic games, like dodgeball, that require limited interaction and planning and are often not connected with the program of study outcomes. This article likens relying on one game, such as dodgeball, for a large portion of a program, similar to using one type of professional learning to meet the Division's and teacher's needs.

The ideal is to develop a well-rounded professional learning plan that incorporates a diverse range of strategies to meet the unique needs of teachers. This plan should be tailored to align with students' learning needs and support the school division's goals and outcomes. To do this, most impactfully, a comprehensive professional learning plan, intentionally designed, includes measures to know if efforts are having an impact on teacher growth as well as student learning. The plan should be designed to set the strategic direction for teaching and learning and, ensure alignment at the school level creating a cohesive, unified focus and a system of accountability within the school division. A comprehensive professional learning plan should be developed in partnership with all those that it will impact, led by system leaders to ensure coherence with system needs.

In Alberta, all school divisions are required by provincial education policy to develop a yearly education plan that addresses provincial priorities and is influenced by local context. The plan includes strategies set to achieve the goals and these often focus on building the capacity of the school division team. The effectiveness of almost all education initiatives relies on the ability of educators to successfully implement these initiatives. Therefore, one of the most important interventions in a system's plan is the design of an effective comprehensive plan for professional learning.

The tremendous efforts placed on capacity building strategies imply a need for efficiency and effectiveness that results in teacher and school leader growth and capacity. What we must



ensure is that we do not have a disjointed, fragmented collection of professional learning opportunities that have been developed in response to specific needs as they arise. Lots of dodgeball games and not a cohesive, comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive professional learning has been described as “a set of purposeful, planned actions and the support system necessary to achieve the identified goals. Effective professional learning programs are ongoing, coherent, and linked to student achievement (Killion, J. 2008).

Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools has implemented a plan to support growth of instructional leadership known as the *Four Pillars of Instructional Leadership* namely setting the direction, leading learning, instructional walk-throughs, and collective leadership. The focus is framed on the professional practice standards, research, school leader's needs, and system student learning data. We designed a plan to reach our outcome of supporting the development of strong instructional leaders and then worked backwards to implement, with a focus on designing effective professional learning. School leaders were involved in the establishment of goals, strategies, and measurements so they were setting the direction for their growth and role leading continuous improvement at the school. We found that it was not enough to create a vision for instructional improvement; rather, school leaders needed to engage in targeted actions to improve student learning. The most difficult areas for leaders were developing specific, measurable goals and then developing a professional learning plan to meet these goals thus focused on work on lead and lag measures (Covey, Kosinski, Thompson, 2021). A *Wildly Important Goal* (WIG) would be identified with teachers, for example, “in Grade 2 most students will write two sentences on a topic

using proper structure and using detail words.” The lead measure would include collecting students' baseline writing samples and then implement focused instructional strategies within six weeks. The lag measure, reviewed at the end of the cycle, would compare baseline writing to end of cycle writing providing evidence of sentence structure improvement with an increased use of detailed words. The instructional leadership professional learning would focus on understanding effective literacy instruction practices as well as coaching for pedagogical growth.

Literature about effective professional learning has grown through the years and efforts to improve system practice are evident. We also know that if we want to continue to improve “optimum learning for all students” we need to ensure that staff have the capacity to do so. Often this is interpreted as the need to provide “more” professional learning days, conferences, or funding. Often the game of dodgeball, or the yearly PD Day, regardless of how many are provided, is seen as an event and, if not planned intentionally as part of a comprehensive plan, will be ineffective and have limited impact/results. We believe that system leaders are essential to getting to the result succinctly represented in our professional practice standard: “...result in quality school leadership, quality teaching...” and that this can be influenced by the design and application of a comprehensive professional learning plan led by system education leaders.

For any additional resources and supports, visit <http://bit.ly/3P5eMEp>. ■

*Dr. Kathleen Finnigan is the Chief Superintendent at Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools, and Val Olekshy is an Education Consultant.*

# Hop on the Wellness Bus:

## Inspiring Healthy Schools Through Quality Leadership

By Magdalena Pawlowski and Jenn Flynn, APPLE Schools, and Paul Corrigan, Elk Island Catholic Schools

**E**lk Island Catholic Schools (EICS) has been working with APPLE Schools, a school-based health promotion project, since 2008 and the collaboration has resulted in remarkable success for student and staff well-being. EICS's excellence in leadership has played a significant role in implementing APPLE Schools' best practices and establishing quality healthy teaching and learning environments in the district and beyond.

APPLE Schools is a proven initiative, creating healthy school environments that enable students to make positive choices and develop lifelong healthy habits. The project applies a comprehensive school health approach, rallying the symbiosis between mental health, physical activity, and nutrition.

EICS superintendents have for a long-time upheld Leadership Quality Standards to drastically enhance student wellness initiatives within the entire district. Six EICS schools officially partner with APPLE Schools to improve health behaviours through the unique model, however, the project is tightly woven into the entire district's wellness approach due to the many years of sharing and collaboration between schools and other districts. The cross-pollination of ideas has established many APPLE Schools-inspired practices into each school community.

APPLE Schools' research-based practices include taste tests, where classes mindfully try new nutritious foods together to expand their palette.

District leaders have committed to well-being through supporting a health champion role in each school. Perhaps the greatest impact on district well-being has been providing spaces for quality knowledge exchange between schools, and an openness to collaborate across districts.

The Wellness Bus is one cutting edge example of leadership's demonstrated commitment to wellness. In 2019 and early 2020, EICS teachers hopped onto a bus, for a tour of EICS schools that were applying innovative and forward-thinking health initiatives to transform student health behaviours. Paul Corrigan,

Happy students. Photos courtesy of Jenn Flynn.



It's important to teach lifelong habits.



EICS's superintendent, was the assistant superintendent responsible for wellness at the time:

*"Ideas garnered from our day on the bus still feature prominently in many of our schools. The opportunity to collaborate as well as the time to process were key pieces to a successful initiative."*

On the first day of the Wellness Bus, teachers visited several schools to learn about the many ways they engaged their communities in wellness practices. In between site visits, they broke into mini professional development sessions where they answered reflection questions in their journals. Day two of the Wellness Bus was critical – instead of going back into the classroom, the participants took a full day to collaborate and share, ensuring to carve out time and space to inspire and inform next steps.

EICS's exceptional district leadership efforts were not only reflected in the innovative event

itself, but the cross-partnership between districts. EICS invited teachers from Evergreen Catholic School Division on the Wellness Bus to learn from their healthy best practices, including those inspired by APPLE Schools like taste tests and posting healthy messaging throughout the school, so they too can embolden and invigorate their schools across the district. APPLE Schools were also integrated into the event because of the collaborative and sharing process across EICS schools.

*"APPLE Schools has a way of being the line of communication to the people in power. APPLE continually provides the information that this is a priority, and makes it a priority. They are well-established and have that weight to their message that leaders are listening to."* – Sarah Balla, Previous Wellness & Curriculum Consultant, EICS.

*Continued on page 22*

# 55 Years of Dedication to Alberta's Education Sector



The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is an employee life and health trust governed by 10 Trustees. It offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for more than 63,000 covered members and their dependents.



By Kelli Littlechilds, ASEBP

**E**volution is a fascinating thing. Something starts in one form, then gradually, with hard work, care, and attention, it transforms into something entirely new—something that is better suited and equipped for its current environment. And as that transformation happens, it acquires the knowledge and ability to continue its evolution should it need to adapt again.

This perfectly encapsulates what has happened here at ASEBP over the past five and a half decades. As we mark our 55th anniversary, I am drawn to reflect on where we started and how far we have come as an organization, employer, and health partner.

Our organization's story begins back in 1968. Recognizing the need to provide a tailored benefits solution to support the unique needs of education workers, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Alberta School Trustees Association (now

known as the Alberta School Boards Association) came together to sponsor a group insurance plan for the province's education sector. Little did anyone know at that point, that this would be the catalyst for more than half a century of dedicated service and commitment to the health and well-being of Alberta's education workers.

Our next transformation occurred throughout the 1970s. ASEBP originally started out offering Life Insurance, Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance, and Extended Disability Benefits – what we refer to as income replacement benefits. Soon after, driven by the desire to ensure that education workers had a full suite of benefits designed for their specific needs, ASEBP embarked on expanding our offerings to include extended health care, dental care, and vision care benefits. Being able to provide a fulsome benefit plan based on the needs of our covered members, set the foundation for the decades to come.

Our evolution continued into the 1980s, when we were able to start self-funding some of our benefits, due to having built such a strong membership base. This meant we could invest premium dollars, securing our financial stability and using investment returns to further tailor our benefits to the education sector. This decade also saw ASEBP establish a Deed of Trust, which transformed our organization into a health and welfare trust (now known as an Employee Life and Health Trust), governed equally by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta School Boards Association.

Through our experience in working with Alberta's education sector and collaboration with the University of Alberta's Faculty of



Education, we continued to evolve our understanding of the unique attributes of educator health and started partnering with education sector employers to identify the characteristics and factors at play when it comes to education worker health and wellness. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, ASEBP was focused on the desire to provide compassionate and service-driven sustainable health benefits, programs, and services for all stages of life.

This foundational work allowed us to further develop and grow our programs and services, from helping covered members access their benefits for existing health concerns, to proactively monitoring and managing their health before concerns arise. Through the introduction of offerings like health spending accounts and a more integrated and whole person approach to disability management, we started to meet education workers where they were at on their health journey, rather than simply waiting for a problem to arise that our benefits could potentially address. This re-envisioned health and well-being approach breathed new life into the organization and re-enforced our commitment to becoming a recognized leader in providing comprehensive health benefits and services to Alberta's education sector.

In 2010 and beyond, our offering grew once more based on evolving employer and

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Wellness on Wheels increased access for teachers to best-practice well-ness activities. It provided a cross-district sharing platform which deeply enhances sustainability of a healthy school environment seen in schools across EICS. The event spurred innovation, brought people with similar goals together, and built connections so they can rely on each other for support. It filled their idea tank for engaging their communities in sustainable changes and empowered them to jump into action.

District innovation can embody many LQs and profoundly impact district wide wellness, and beyond. The LQs demonstrated through the Wellness Bus include:

- Embodying Visionary Leadership,
- Developing Leadership Capacity,
- Leading a Learning a Community,
- Modelling commitment to professional learning, and
- Fostering effective relationships.

The APPLE Schools approach requires leaders to demonstrate commitment to embedding sustainable healthy initiatives by providing time and space for planning, collaborating, and implementation to send a strong message district wide that *this is a priority*. EICS's quality leadership and the trickle-down effect has benefited everyone in communities, most notably students, who experience engaging lifelong education to make healthy choices today and well into the future.

If you are interested in building a healthy school community through APPLE Schools' model, visit their website at <https://appleschools.ca>. ■

*APPLE Schools is a registered charity and 100% funded by corporate and private donors. We ask for no financial commitment from the schools we support.*

Continued from page 21

covered member needs. With the introduction of the Early Intervention Program, Wellness Spending Accounts, an Employee and Family Assistance Program, and workplace wellness advisory services, we solidified our footing in the school community health landscape and our role as a trusted health partner. This role has led to more collaboration opportunities like the *Compassion Fatigue, Burnout, and Emotional Labour Research Study* we helped launch in 2020 with the Alberta Teachers' Association and the University of Calgary, which provided a wealth of insight on education workers' lived experience. We used this insight to inform new resource development (similar to our It Takes a Village website, [www.wellness.asebp.ca](http://www.wellness.asebp.ca)) and benefit enhancements (like adding counselors to the list of eligible mental health service providers and increasing yearly maximums for psychology services).

As I reflect on where ASEBP started in 1968, when we mainly processed income replacement claims, to where we are now as a health organization, it is truly awe-inspiring to see how far we have come. Our unwavering commitment to serving the education sector underscores all that we do. We were created with you in mind and continue to serve that purpose even now, 55 years later.

If you would like to join in our 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, please visit our website, [asebp.ca](http://asebp.ca), and our Instagram (@asebp\_benefits) and Facebook (AlbertaSchoolEmployeeBenefitPlan) feeds for celebratory content throughout the rest of 2023. ■

*Kelli Littlechilds is the CEO of ASEBP and has more than 35 years of experience in the health and benefits industry. As the leader of one of Alberta's Top Employers for 2023, Kelli is a champion for personal and workplace well-being.*

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