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Final Report

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT REPORT

ORGANIZATION: THE ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

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The Evolution of Collaborative Leadership Learning in Alberta's Charter Schools

The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools (TAAPCS) is pleased to submit this final report on the 2013-2014 TAAPCS *School Leadership Learning Initiative* (SLL). Our report shares insights from research into the second funded year of the SLL initiative undertaken by the province's public charter school superintendents and school leaders. Through reflection, co-learning, and inquiry, participants report a deeper understanding of leadership links to student success within the draft *Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders in Alberta* (PPCSLA). The report's three key lessons for leadership learning will be of interest to school and jurisdiction leaders in other Alberta settings.

We begin with a detailed overview of the initiative, followed by a short account of our research design. General research results are then presented along with more specific findings in relation to each of the four *School Leadership Framework Implementation Project* deliverables established in our Alberta Education funding agreement. The three leadership learning lessons that may support similar work in other Alberta settings are then provided and next steps for this initiative are delineated.

Section One: An Overview The TAAPCS School Leadership Learning Initiative

This first section provides background information on the Alberta Association of Public Charter Schools before describing the SLL in five general areas: leadership roles, a short history, the format of the 2013-14 SLL, a summary of 2013-14 activities and a budget statement.

The Alberta Association of Public Charter Schools. The Alberta Association of Public Charter Schools (TAAPCS) is an association comprised of Alberta Education approved charter schools that choose to be members and that support the objectives of TAAPCS.

A charter school is a tuition-free public school that provides choice in education. Recognizing a need for enhanced learning options, Alberta Education legally established charter schools in 1994, making Alberta the first Canadian province to move forward on this exciting path. There are now 13 charter schools operating in Alberta, each designed to implement unique innovations in the organization and delivery of education that lead to improvements in student learning.

TAAPCS is governed by a Board of Directors that helps member charter schools work together toward the following four objectives.

- To promote and facilitate public charter school education in Alberta
- To speak with one voice on behalf of public charter schools in Alberta
- To promote a forum for public charter schools to meet in support of common goals
- To advocate for continued innovation and choice within public education

SLL Leadership Roles 2013-2014. The initiative's leadership structure is comprised of four main roles.

Steering Committee. A steering committee made up of the Executive Director (Garry Andrews), charter school superintendent and administrative representatives (Jay Pritchard, Garry McKinnon, Joe Frank, Dale Bischoff, Phil Butterfield, Kathy McCauley and Judi Hadden), Alberta Education representative (Karen Shipka) and the project consultant (Jim Brandon) provided direction and oversaw the implementation of the project plan. Members of the committee have considerable expertise and experience in school and system leadership in the province of Alberta. Five members have served in the superintendency in other public school systems and all ten worked as school leaders during their careers. Six individuals hold doctoral degrees. Four committee members have had extensive involvement in the development of the PPCSLA in varying roles since the spring of 2005.

Executive Director. The Executive Director attended meetings, provided administrative direction and support, and oversaw the preparation of this final report to Alberta Education.

Project Consultant. Jim Brandon was contracted to serve as an *outside expert* to assist in project planning, implementation and assessment. He worked with others in the charter school community to lead professional learning sessions and completed the research component.

Superintendents. Charter school superintendents served in two key roles in the initiative. In addition to their ongoing roles in providing feedback and maintaining ongoing working relationships with school principals and others on school leadership teams, they participated as co-learners in the project.

A Short History of the SLL¹. In May 2011, school principals and assistant principals from the 13 charter schools in Alberta began a journey of learning to develop a deeper understanding of school leadership and to grow in their abilities to positively impact learner engagement. Dr. Garry McKinnon facilitated this highly successful program comprised of interactive dialogue focused on each of the seven leadership competencies. With the support of Alberta Education funding since the fall of 2012, TAAPCS has continued this important work in the current *School Leadership Learning Initiative*.

The draft PPCSLA has served as the guiding framework for our evolving leadership capacity building efforts since the spring of 2011. In year one the focus was on engaging school principals and assistant principals toward a deeper understanding of the seven professional practice competencies and making the PPCSLA a living document. The program focused dialogue on each competency, provided opportunities to problem solve around related scenarios and helped participants to make connections to their real-life experiences in their specific leadership contexts.

From the beginning, participants were encouraged to make the learning session experiences meaningful by maintaining a reflective journal based on their day-to-day experiences as school leaders and to access the expertise of the network of co-learners. Dr. McKinnon prepared a series of blogs based on the seven competencies to further ongoing dialogue, personal reflection and the development of professional learning plans and action strategies. The inquiry-based leadership blogs are posted on the Connect Charter School website (<http://goo.gl/SmFts>). Each blog offers questions to ponder and school leadership suggestions for further consideration.

Over 40 participants representing each of the 13 charter schools in the province have been involved in SLL initiative. Focus on the seven leadership competencies has continued and several school administrators and superintendents have taken on an active role in facilitating our learning sessions. Dr. Jim Brandon, Director of Professional Programs at the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education is serving as an *outside expert* who coordinates the learning sessions, supports the multiple program elements and conducts the participatory research component. Learning sessions have focused on fostering engaged leadership development through differentiated and job-embedded professional learning experiences designed to address the realities of varying school contexts.

Overview of the 2013-14 SLL. This sub-section explains the SLL project's purpose and describes its major professional learning components in the reporting year.

Purpose. The goal of the second phase of the TAAPCS *School Leadership Learning* initiative was to deeply engage charter school and system leaders in reflection, inquiry and

¹This section of the report has been excerpted from Brandon, J., McKinnon, G., & Bischoff, D. (2014, Spring). Engaged leadership learning, *The CASS Connection*, 10(1), 18-21.

action-research to identify, refine and implement exemplary school leadership practices within the PPCSLA framework to *support students to be engaged, ethical and entrepreneurial citizens*.

Professional Learning Sessions. Charter school community expertise was utilized to deepen understanding and application of the PPCSLAs through a series of four professional learning sessions: three in Calgary and one in Edmonton. These sessions built upon the highly successful charter school leadership learning programs offered during the preceding two school years. The sessions fostered school leader growth through differentiated and job-embedded professional learning experiences designed to address the realities of varying school contexts.

School administrators and system leaders engaged in the program as co-learners. A variety of charter school and system leaders facilitated the sessions. Nine school and two system leaders facilitated the 2013-14 program. In the 2012-13 10 superintendents led sessions and four school based administrators. Opportunities were provided at each session to reflect on implementation of the project plan, to share feedback, and to make modifications to the plan.

Professional Leadership Growth Plans. Each school leader developed a professional leadership growth plan based on one or more of the PPCSLAs. The growth plan was shared with the superintendent and served as a primary school leadership learning and inquiry document within the SLL program.

Reflective Leadership Practice and Co-Learning Tools. Our initiative was based on the shared belief that exemplary leadership emerges from personal reflection that identifies areas of strength and areas for growth to inform action strategies. Hence, opportunities were provided to consider evidence to guide professional practice with the aid of a variety of co-learning tools.

Leadership Survey. The SLL consultant developed a survey based on the *competencies* for two purposes. It was used for research purposes by the consultant in first year to gauge the impact of the initiative. In the second year, it was made available to school leaders for individual reflection and to gather feedback data from school staff members for leader reflection, dialogue and growth planning.

Leadership Rubric. A *Draft Charter School Leadership Rubric* based on the PPCSLAs was also provided to foster participant reflection, dialogue and co-learning. In contrast to its use during learning sessions in 2012-13, the rubric was not specifically utilized in any of the four sessions in the reporting year.

Co-Learning Partners. Arrangements were made for participants to develop peer learning partnerships and to engage in co-learning visits to partner schools between sessions in relation to their professional leadership learning and inquiry plans and in keeping with system expectations. In addition, the interactive engagement of experienced and those newer to school and system leadership in all aspects of SLL helped to build on our open community of leaders concept.

Book Study. Viviane Robinson's (2011) research informed and highly readable book, *Student-centred leadership*, was provided to participants to foster reflection, dialogue and evidence informed leadership actions. Aspects of Robinson's research on leadership practice were the focus of leadership learning conversations in three of the four sessions.

Reflective Writing. Participants were asked to maintain a reflective journal of their leadership learning experiences within the initiative with emphasis on making the PPCSLA framework a living document.

Summary of 2013-14 SLL Activities. The first table below summarizes the major activities carried out during the 2013-14 SLL initiative. The second is a budget summary.

Date	School Leadership Learning Activity	Notes
September 18, 2013	SLL Session One Deerfoot Inn, Calgary Facilitators: Denise Budgen, Judy Gray, Jim Brandon	Overview of 2013-14 SLL Initiative The Essential Purpose of Educational Leadership – Creating Communities of Contribution and Care (PPCSLA #1-7) Visions of Possibilities for 2016..... for Principals, Teachers and Students” through the lens of the Professional Practice Competencies (PPCSLA #1,7) Gathering ideas and people to further our leadership learning (PPCSLA #1, 5)
February 6, 2014	SLL Session Two Deerfoot Inn, Calgary Facilitators: Chris Hooper, Darrell Lonsberry, Garry McKinnon, Scott Petronech, Jim Brandon	Deepen understanding of the Ministerial Order on Learning (PPCSLA # 4, 7) Gather, share and reflect on evidence of current classroom practice in relation to the Student Learning MO (PPCSLA #1, 3, 4) Share and support leadership learning goals and co-learning plans related (PPCSLA #1, 3)
February – May	Co-Learning School Visits	School visits were conducted by several participants
April 10, 2014	SLL Session Three Connect Charter School, Calgary Facilitators: Rabih El Masri, Chris Hooper, Darrell Lonsberry, Garry McKinnon, Scott Petronech, Jim Brandon	Working with Teachers to Support Students to be Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens with an Entrepreneurial Spirit – Open to Learning Conversations (PPCSLA #1, 3, 4) Visiting CCS Classrooms (PPCSLA #1, 4) Sharing and Reflecting on Classroom Evidence in Relation to the Ministerial Order (PPCSLA #1, 4) Sharing/Planning Leadership Learning/Co-Learning (PPCSLA #5)
May 7, 2014	SLL Session Four Westin Hotel, Edmonton Facilitators: Scott Meunier, Karen Spencer, Janet Rockwood, Ted Zarowny, Jim Brandon,	Open to Learning Conversations (PPCSLA #1, 4) Sharing/Planning Your Leadership Learning/Co-Learning Update 2 by 2 (PPCSLA #1, 4) Task Force on Teaching Excellence Recommendations (PPCSLA #1, 4) Educational Leadership Book Study for 2014/15 (PPCSLA #5) Next Steps – Setting up for SLL 2014-15 (PPCSLA #5)

May 2014	Individual / Group Interviews	Individual or focus group interviews in Edmonton
July – August, 2014	Data Analysis and Report Writing Meeting/Teleconference	Preparation and approval of 2014-15 proposal Preparation of 2013-14 final report

Budget Item	Description	Budget	Actual
Four Learning Sessions	Travel, meals, accommodations, room rentals	\$20,000	\$11,126
Co-Learning Visits	Participant visits to schools for leadership learning inquiry	\$5,000	\$4,334
Project Consultant	External expertise, project coordination, research	\$20,000	\$14,693
Materials and Supplies	Materials, books	\$1,500	\$1,400
Administration	Administrative time, travel, materials, books	\$3,500	\$2,500
		\$50,000	\$34,053

Section Two: Research Design

This section outlines the research plan utilized in phases one and two of the SLL in four parts: (a) research purposes, (b) research questions, (c) research design, and (d) data collection and analysis methods. Key findings are displayed in Section Three below.

Research Purposes. Our research study of the 2012-14 SLL initiatives had three purposes. One purpose was to examine ways in which school and system leader understanding and application of the PPCSLA were impacted through participation in the initiative. Second, the inquiry sought to assess the usefulness of the tools and strategies employed in the SLL. A third purpose was to gain insights into school and system leader perspectives on the importance of, benefits from, and challenges related to practicing educational leadership within the PPCSLA framework.

Research Questions. The following three research questions guided this study:

1. How have school and system leader understanding and application of the PPCSLA been impacted through participation in the 2012-14 SLL?
2. In what ways have the tools and strategies utilized in the 2012-14 SLL enhanced participant understanding and application of the PPC?
3. What perspectives do TAAPCS school and system leaders express about the importance of, benefits from and challenges related to practicing educational leadership within the PPCSLA framework?

Mixed Methods Research Design. This study utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods research design. In keeping with the principles and assumptions of this research approach, qualitative and quantitative methods were combined to provide a better understanding of the research purposes and questions than either method by itself (Creswell, 2012). The rationale for using a mixed methods approach was to gain insights from both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative online survey provided the opportunity to gather data from

a large number of participants at the beginning of the initiative, while the qualitative interviews, focus groups, field notes and session evaluations allowed for a richer, more in-depth exploration of perspectives.

Qualitative data collection and analysis was informed by case study methods (Stake, 1995). A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2012). “*Bounded* means that the case is separated for research in terms of time, place or some physical boundaries” (Creswell, 2012, p. 465). The issue under investigation within the bounded system of the Alberta charter schools in 2014 is “school and system leaders perspectives related to practicing and developing educational leadership within the PPCSLA framework.” Such inquiry called for a range of research methods to do justice to the complexity of the case synthesis and explanation (Yin, 2009).

The convergent parallel mixed methods research design placed equal emphasis on the two forms of data: qualitative and quantitative. Each data source was collected independently and then analyzed separately. The quantitative and qualitative data were integrated during data analysis, following processes outlined by Creswell (2012, pp. 548-560).

Data were collected from the following sources from September 2012 to June 2014:

- Individual and focus group interviews
- Field notes from the site visits
- Documents, artifacts and participant evaluations of the professional leadership learning sessions
- Participant reflections and blogs
- An online survey

Data Collection and Analysis. All interview and focus group data, survey data, field notes and documents were reviewed and analyzed through iterative processes of reading, rereading, theme development, and review as explained below.

Online School Leadership Self Reflection Survey. The *School Leadership Self Reflection Survey* asked participants to think about each of the seven Professional Practice Competencies (PPCSLA) and to use a four point scale to

1. assess their present levels of leadership practice in relation to each competency;
2. assess their present levels of leadership practice in relation to each of the indicators for each competency;
3. indicate the degree of importance of each competency in their leadership practices; and
4. indicate the level of challenge presented by each competency in their leadership practices.

Interviews and Focus Groups. A total of 22 educators were involved in individual or focus group interviews in May, June and July of 2013. The first round of interviews took place in 11 schools in six Alberta communities: Valhala, in the Peace River region; on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River south and west of Stony Plain; Ardrossan, Edmonton, Medicine Hat

and Calgary. Eleven school principals, six assistant or associate principals, and six superintendents participated in this portion of the data collection process. A second round of interviews engaged 13 participants in two hotels in downtown Edmonton in May, 2014.

Analysis of the interview data was informed by the view that “coding is deep reflection about, and, thus, deep analysis and interpretation of the data’s meanings (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014, p. 72). In first cycle coding, summaries and field notes from the interviews and focus groups were initially read in their entirety to get a sense of their content and context, without imposing a specific analytic lens. The next reading of the texts looked for themes to determine coding categories and to become familiar with the overall content and to determine the level of interest in relation to the research questions. Emerging themes were identified and analyzed.

In second level coding, pattern codes were developed (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86-104). Using the descriptive categories and criteria that emerged from the initial data analysis, more detailed pattern codes – larger categories or themes – were created to form the basis for the analysis. Then the research literature was consulted to further inform and validate the categories and themes selected. Themes that emerged from the participants’ accounts form a comprehensive picture of the collective experience. In this way, it was determined which themes and sub-themes fit together in a meaningful way.

Section Three: Research Results

Section Three presents the results of our research in two parts. Findings related to each of the three research questions are presented first. Findings are then categorized and displayed in relation to each of the four *School Leadership Framework Implementation Project* deliverables established in the Alberta Education funding agreement.

General Findings. Research generated insights presented under each of the three research questions in this section may be helpful to the Ministry in moving the adoption and implementation of the *School Leadership Framework* forward.

Research Question One. *How have school and system leader understanding and application of the PPCSLA been impacted through participation in the 2012-14 SLL?*

Participants who have been interviewed over the past two years have consistently reported that the SLL initiative has helped them to move to a deeper understanding of the competencies.

New principals found that the PPSCLA was a useful framework for their first year evaluations by their superintendents.

Almost all participants indicated that the work in the SLL initiative heightened awareness of the complexity of school leadership and underlined the importance of ongoing growth and development through reflection, dialogue, and inquiry.

We have found that sustained engagement with and knowledge-building around individual competencies is most helpful when it leads to thoughtful application, further reflection and supportive dialogue in the company of leadership colleagues. Iterative cycles of learning, acting, reflecting and sharing hold even greater promise.

Although the competencies can be understood well in isolation, skillful application requires a more holistic approach.

Understanding the complexities of school leadership practice and the inter-relational nature of the competencies can be deepened through evidence informed dialogue about problems of practice, scenarios, cases and stories.

Research Question Two. *In what ways have the tools and strategies utilized in the 2012-14 SLL enhanced participant understanding and application of the PPCSLA?*

Through feedback at the conclusion of each session and then again in the research interviews and focus groups over the past two years, participants have been provided with several opportunities to weigh in on the effectiveness of each of the initiative's tools and strategies.

Professional Learning Sessions. Participants consistently indicated the benefits of utilizing the *wisdom in the room*. The use of charter school community expertise to foster school leader growth through differentiated and contextually specific professional learning has been a key component. Having experienced school and system leaders facilitating the sessions was seen as strength.

Participants identified several additional strengths of the learning sessions.

- Each session was led by a design team, which planned and co-facilitated the agenda with the support of the consultant.
- Opportunities were provided at each session to reflect on implementation of the project, to share feedback and to make modifications to the plan. This data was distributed to participants shortly thereafter. Suggestions were acted upon by subsequent design teams.
- There was an ongoing focus on the realities of leadership practice in relation to the Ministerial Order on Student Learning (2013) and the evidence of leadership links to student learning from Robinson (2011). Ongoing conversations about the importance of relationships of respect and challenge with teachers and structured observational visits to classrooms heightened session relevance.
- Participants saw value in the sessions as means to connect with other administrators, to reduce isolation, and to help each other face similar challenges. Interaction in the sessions has created lasting support networks in several cases.

Two suggestions to improve the learning sessions were raised.

- The plea for additional talk time so that table conversations could more consistently go to deeper levels was a theme emerging from the data. In this same vein, more time could have been devoted to the Robinson (2011) book study.
- There were also repeated calls for increased and more effective use of online networking mechanisms. Connected to this was the expressed desire for greater use of videos and scenarios to spur conversation to impact practice.

Professional Leadership Growth Plans. While each school leader developed a professional leadership growth plan based on one or more of the PPCSLAs, it was felt that our work on these growth plans could go further in the direction of serving as an ongoing guide to leadership learning and inquiry.

Leadership Survey. The survey based on the *competencies* was used for research purposes in first year to gauge the impact of the initiative. In the second year it was made available to school leaders for individual reflection and to gather feedback data from school staff members for leader reflection, dialogue and growth planning. The survey remains available for participant use.

Leadership Rubric. A *Draft Charter School Leadership Rubric* based on the PPCSLAs was also provided to foster participant reflection, dialogue and co-learning. In contrast to its use during learning sessions in 2012-13, the rubric was not specifically utilized in any of the four sessions. It also remains available for participant use and is seen as a valuable tool to guide reflection and growth.

Co-Learning Partners. More workable arrangements were made for participants to develop and to engage in peer learning partnerships in 2013-14. Co-learning visits to partner schools were better facilitated this year. In addition, the interactive engagement of experienced and those newer to school and system leadership in all aspects of SLL helped to build on our open community of leaders concept. Co-learning remains a distinctly valued approach.

Book Study. Viviane Robinson's (2011) *Student-centred leadership* was provided to participants and was agendized in three of the four sessions. A more deliberate reading schedule would have made use of this resource even more worthwhile.

Reflective Writing. Many participants maintained a reflective journal of their leadership learning experiences within the initiative. Participants value time for individual reflection.

Research Question Three. *What perspectives do TAAPCS school and system leaders express about the importance of, benefits from, and challenges related to practicing educational leadership within the PPCSLA framework?*

The *Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders in Alberta* document is appreciated by TAAPCS school and system leaders and is seen as a useful framework for shaping and supporting school leadership practice.

The need for ongoing research and evidence gathering to strengthen and adapt the PPCSLA over time is felt to be an important component in document's continuing relevance.

Findings in Relation to the Four Project Deliverables. This section presents research generated findings in relation to the four deliverables itemized in Schedule A from the 2012-2014 TAAPCS Grant Agreement.

Deliverable One: Establish a Project Steering Committee. The SLL Steering Committee was established in the spring of 2012. It sets direction and oversees the implementation of the project plan. The purpose and composition of the committee are more fully described on p. 2 of this report.

Deliverable Two: Design, Implement, and Evaluate an Implementation Strategy. Details about our implementation strategy have been presented in Section One of this report. The professional learning approach we used has been loosely based on Timperley's (2011) notion of iterative cycles of inquiry.

During each of the four learnings session all seven of the competencies were displayed and briefly reviewed. More specific attention was paid to the first five competencies in 2013-14: *Fostering Effective Relationships, Embodying Visionary Leadership, Leading a Learning Community, Providing Instructional Leadership and Developing and Facilitating Leadership.*

In addition to more detailed work on understanding and applying the competencies in school settings within the context of *Inspiring Education*, there were aspects of several presentations and conversations that took school leader recruitment, hiring, supervision, and evaluation into account.

Selected school leaders indicated that their superintendents in selection, orientation, and evaluation processes used the PPCSLA Framework.

Participants reported that the SLL sessions served their learning needs best when evidence informed leadership practices were presented and sufficient time was provided for reflection, deep dialogue and action-oriented inquiry.

The opportunities to co-learn with colleagues from various organizational levels and to take professional learning into each other's school contexts were two additional aspects of the SLL implementation approach that were highly valued by participants.

Participants were asked to provide feedback on each session. Comments and suggestions were summarized and distributed to all TAAPCS leaders and Alberta Education representatives. Adjustments to programming were made in response to the suggestions and feedback.

Deliverable Three: Tools and Processes. Findings related to each of the tools and processes utilized in the SLL have been summarized in the preceding sub-section under Research Question Three on pages 9 and 10.

Deliverable Four: Engage an External Researcher. Jim Brandon was contracted as the external researcher in June of 2012. He continues to provide assistance with all aspects of the project: planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, research, and reporting.

Deliverable Five: Share information related to the project. Though we have not yet presented our research at a stakeholder event in Alberta, we have written about the project in the

following published article: Brandon, J., McKinnon, G., & Bischoff, D. (2014, Spring). Engaged leadership learning, *The CASS Connection*, 10(1), 18-21.

Section Four: Lessons for Leadership Learning

Initiative participants have embraced *Inspiring Education's* transformative agenda and used the sessions, blogs, and conversations to deepen leadership practice and to grapple further with the challenges of helping teachers and students to move further in these directions. This section presents leadership learning lessons that have surfaced through our research. We believe they may be helpful to other jurisdiction and school leaders in the province.

Leadership Learning Lesson One: Focus on Student Success. The SLL is clearly focused on student success – the “Essential Purpose of Educational Leadership” as described in the PPCSLA (Alberta Education, 2012). This first research generated theme – *focus on student success* – has been evident in every aspect of the initiative: in every learning session, in every research interview, in every growth plan, in every blog and in every co-learning school visit (Whelan, 2009).

In 2013-14 we worked to deepen understanding of the PPCSLAs by focusing on leadership learning inquiry related to Alberta's new student outcomes, other Ministry initiatives within the umbrella of *Inspiring Education*, problems of practice and important educational issues. In and between the SLL sessions this approach was being formalized into what Helen Timperley (2011) describes as *Leader Inquiry and Knowledge-Building Cycles*. Such professional learning cycles include (1) identifying competencies your teachers need to meet important student learning goals (the Ministerial Order on Student Learning in our case); (2) identifying competencies your leadership team requires to support teacher and student learning; (3) identifying actions to deepen professional knowledge; (4) engaging teachers in reflection and new learning; and (5) gauging impact – bringing evidence to illustrate leadership, teacher and student growth (p. 22).

Leadership Learning Lesson Two: Co-Learning in a Community of Leaders. Collaboration within an open community of leaders (Barth, 1990; Whelan, 2009) emerged as one of the most powerful themes from our work together. As superintendents, experienced principals and those newer to school leadership reflected on leadership practice and talked about the complexities of their daily work through the filters of the seven leadership competencies, it was impressive to observe the evolution of openness, trust and willingness to engage in dialogue and knowledge-building. Responsiveness to participant feedback and the use of participant facilitators importantly indicates that leadership was being *developed with* participants rather than being *developed for* participants.

This second key finding from the SLL initiative indicates that leadership learning is enhanced within open, trusting, and diverse communities of leaders. The construct of *co-learning* – wherein superintendents, experienced principals and those new to formal school leadership positions actively engage in facilitating, sharing, learning and inquiry – has considerable potential. Learning with and from colleagues at other levels and from other settings is viewed as

a powerful leadership development approach. For the participants who took this concept further and engaged in reciprocal school visits, the depth of co-learning was even greater.

A related co-learning element might be described as *using the wisdom in the room*. Of the 25 members of this learning community who have facilitated sessions to date, five have served in the superintendency in other public school systems, six hold doctoral degrees, and all have worked as school leaders during their careers. Four facilitators have had extensive involvement in the development of the PPCSLA in varying roles since the spring of 2005. Their credibility, expertise and openness to learning from others have been a vital component of the SLL.

Leadership Learning Lesson Three: Multiple Forms of Leadership Learning. There are multiple ways for leaders to develop and learn. It was evident in the variety of approaches to supporting student engagement, learning and well being that were demonstrated, discussed and digested by the diverse array of leadership learners who participated in the SLL.

The best evidence on professional learning is instructive.

No activity or process, whether facilitated by others (e.g. coaching, modeling and engaging with professional readings) or self-directed (e.g., discussing mutually identified problems, reflection and inquiry) was consistently associated with improved student success. What was important? The knowledge and skills learned as a result of engagement with the activity or process. (Timperley, 2011, p. 6)

The variety of leadership learning tools utilized in this initiative supported multiple forms of leadership learning. There is no one best way to become a more competent school leader. No standardized template dictates a one size fits all mandate for leadership development. Rather, our initiative suggests that the PPCSLAs enable multiple forms of leadership learning (Barber, Whelan, & Clark, 2010; Timperley, 2011; Whelan, 2009).

Section Five: Next Steps – Enabling Charter School Teaching Excellence Through Collaborative Leadership Learning

Based on the success of this initiative as verified by the research findings and lessons learned noted in the preceding pages, Alberta Education funding has been approved for the 2014-2015 school year. This section explains the purpose of the 2014-15 SLL project and describes its major professional learning components.

Purpose. The goal of the third phase of the SLL is to deeply engage charter school and system leaders in collaborative leadership learning practices within the PPCSLA framework that *enable charter school teaching excellence that supports students to be engaged, ethical and entrepreneurial citizens.*

Principles. The following four principles will guide our leadership learning work in phase three. The first three principles have been derived from the leadership learning lessons outlined in the Section Five of this report. The fourth guiding principle is an outgrowth of the TAAPCS commitment to innovation and knowledge mobilization.

Principle One: Focus on Student Learning. Enabling student success – learning, engagement and well-being – as outlined in the Ministerial Order on Learning within the diverse learning contexts of Alberta’s public charter schools.

Principal Two: Collaboration and Partnering. Enabling teaching excellence through collaborative school communities within a collaborative system of public charter schools.

Principal Three: Multiple Pathways. Enabling leadership excellence through multiple forms of collaborative leadership learning applicable to the diverse learning contexts of Alberta’s public charter schools.

Principle Four: Innovation and Knowledge Mobilization. Enabling and distributing collaborative leadership development processes within the Alberta educational community.

Collaborative Leadership Learning. Participating charter school and system leaders will be expected to deeply engage in the following six leadership learning elements. Together the six elements respond to the *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* Recommendation 16: *School leadership preparation*. In total, the SLL purposefully addresses six of the report’s recommendations.

Community of Leadership Learners. Collaboration within an open community of leaders emerged as one of the most powerful themes from phases one and two. In this approach, superintendents, experienced principals and those newer to school leadership will continue to learn together, reflect on leadership practice and take actions to address the complexities of their daily work through the filters of the seven leadership competencies. Other features include openness, trust and willingness to engage in dialogue and knowledge building.

Responsiveness to participant feedback and the use of participant facilitators reflect the notion that leadership is being *developed with* participants rather than being *developed for* them. *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* Recommendations 16 and 17.

Professional Learning Sessions. Charter school community expertise will be utilized to deepen understanding and application of the PPCLAs to enable charter school teaching excellence through a series of four face-to-face professional learning sessions within an open community of leadership learning concept. The sessions will foster school and system leader growth through action-oriented professional learning experiences designed to address the realities of varying school contexts. Superintendents and school administrators will engage in the program as co-learners and co-facilitators. *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* Recommendations 2, 3, 16, 17 and 18.

Online Leadership Network. Phase three of the SLL will devote resources to the establishment and maintenance of an easy to access and workable online learning management system. The intent is to provide ongoing opportunities for participants to informally and formally connect for leadership learning purposes between face-to-face sessions. *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* Recommendations 2, 3, 16 and 17.

Professional Growth, Supervision and Evaluation. Phase three will focus more intentionally on the professional growth, supervision and evaluation for school and system

educators. Each participating school and system leader will develop and share a professional growth plan based on one or more of the *Professional Practice Competencies* and in keeping with school, system and provincial guidelines. The growth plan will serve as a primary leadership learning plan within the initiative.

The 2013 *Charter School PPCSLA Leadership Rubric* will continue to be used to foster critical reflection, dialogue and co-learning. Participants may wish to use variations of the *SLL Leadership Learning Survey* for two purposes: for individual reflection and to gather feedback data from school staff members for leader reflection, dialogue and growth planning. *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* Recommendations 2, 3, 11, 16, 17 and 18.

Co-Learning / Co-Mentoring. Participants will be provided with opportunities to develop peer learning and mentoring partnerships and to engage in co-learning visits to partner schools between sessions in relation to their professional growth plans and in keeping their system's expectations. In addition, the interactive engagement of experienced and those newer to school and system leadership in all aspects of the SLL initiative will build on our open community of leadership learners. *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* Recommendations 2, 3, 16, 17 and 18.

Book Study. Michael Fullan's (2014) research informed and highly readable book, *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact*, will be provided to participants to foster reflection, dialogue and evidence informed leadership action in relation to the seven competencies. *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* Recommendations 2, 3, 16, 17 and 18.

Section Six: Conclusion

An important aim of our ongoing TAAPCS work on school leadership development is that it should not only benefit public charter school leaders, but should also serve to inform leadership learning throughout the province. Based on evidence from our research so far, exemplary school leadership practice can emerge from multiple forms of iterative inquiry cycles that are clearly focused on student success within a supportive community of leadership learning. In the longer term, these approaches hold promise for sustained leadership learning in a wide array of Alberta leadership contexts.

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