

SUMMARY OF THE BREAKOUT SESSIONS

COLLEGE OF ALBERTA SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS
AND
ALBERTA EDUCATION

ANNUAL JOINT CONFERENCE

MOVING AND IMPROVING: THE POWER OF NUANCES

EMERGING THEMES

In the review of notes from the annual conference breakout sessions six general themes emerged:

1. Participants are generally supportive of the provincial PATs and Diploma Exams
2. AE issued color coded reports and letters from the DM negatively impact trust and capacity building.
3. Recognizing high performing schools and having AE and district staff deal directly with non-achieving schools to develop an improvement plan would be viewed positively
4. Government and organizations are not managing the media well to support schools in the province
5. Participants suggest that AE needs to move from judgementalism to focus on improvement
6. Continued and purposeful collaboration, such as the conference, is needed to build and reinforce trust

SESSION I

MOVING BEYOND JUDGMENTALISM IN OUR WORKPLACES

GOAL: TO BRING AWARENESS OF JUDGMENTALISM IN OUR WORKPLACES
AND HOW TO MOVE BEYOND

DISCUSSION QUESTION I:

Do you believe our assessment policies in Alberta affect capacity building in our workplaces?

Common Themes:

- Jurisdictions manage results to create positive capacity building
- The data is used to improve and inform practice, build three year plans and improve capacity
- Data helps to establish collaborative goal and strategy setting focuses our conversation and gives us more precision
- Accountability is supportive and assessment policies are good
- Students benefit from PATs

Concerns:

- Trust is an issue and a legacy of distrust may impact capacity building in a negative way
- There is uncertainty that the intent of assessment policy is to build capacity
- Provincial assessment focuses more on accountability than capacity building
- The accountability pillar may not measure enough of what needs to be measured
- There is a critical need to balance pressure and support
- Access to the data needs to be easier
- Accountability pillar which ends in a letter is judgmental not supportive
- The colour coded accountability pillar chart report card is not helpful
- Local surveys convey different results than PATs

Suggestions:

- Government needs to be very public about media management and external use of data
- Strategies based on internal data need to be transparent within the organization
- Building ownership of data is important
- The emphasis needs to be on improving learning rather than on competition
- Relationships and support are very important in moving beyond judgmentalism to capacity building
- Alberta Education needs to move from judgmentalism to improvement
- A visible and proactive link is necessary between provincial testing, professional development days and school councils
- There is a need to identify the non-negotiables specifically without being judgmental

DISCUSSION QUESTION 2:

How can we manage assessment policies in Alberta so organizational capacity is further developed?

Common Themes:

- There is a need to develop a nurturing and trusting culture that provides time for deeper learning and better discussion
- Communication is the key and there is a need to engage teachers
- Leadership needs to be distributed and transparent
- Leaders need to “walk the talk”, build trust and not judge
- Move beyond judgmentalism to student benefit
- Build positive relationships to enhance collective responsibility
- Provide jurisdictions resources and support needed to build capacity
- There is a need to create more networking opportunities

Concerns:

- There is a need to avoid resistance regarding data analysis
- There is a perceived lack of input due to time constraints
- Leaders need to pay more attention to media management
- Learning Assessment and Curriculum Branches need to work more closely
- Assessment practices may not be aligned with policies

- There may be a data overload
- There may be a lack of recognition that assessment provides only part of the picture
- The “why” behind policy changes is not always clear

Suggestions:

- Create/build positive pressure to enhance assessment practices that affect capacity building
- Provide feedback re local assessment policies
- Move to outcome based assessments
- Develop non-standardized ways to assess students with special needs
- Allow school jurisdictions to “think outside the box” to show how students have met provincial expectations
- Create a team of Alberta education and district people to go to districts to learn from one another
- Focus on non-negotiables
- Reassess measures regularly
- Assessment needs to balance content and knowledge and skills and knowledge
- Policies around assessment and data use need to support student learning and building teacher capacity
- Jurisdictions need support and resources to build capacity
- There is a need to encourage cohesion with the post-secondary sector
- Additional diagnostic tools are needed

DISCUSSION QUESTION 3

What other actions can Alberta organizations take to build capacity?

Common Themes:

- Organizational synergy through shared responsibility is essential
- Continued, purposeful collaboration is necessary and organizations like AE, CASS, and the ATA need to listen to one another and respect diverse views in the best interests of students
- Ensure greater degree of respect and involvement of teachers and the role they can play
- Invite broad and diverse dialogue including parents and students

Suggestions:

- Government should maintain testing, provide the data and analysis and provide resources for teachers to use the analysis to inform instruction
- Provide coordination of requests for input and consultation
- Help public/stakeholders to understand what the data means
- Carefully plan implementation of assessment activities and tools
- Effectively share and use results and outcomes of AISI projects
- Develop more assessment tools beyond PATs and Diploma exams
- Support should be specific to a jurisdiction rather than regional
- Visibly take action that demonstrates trust in professional educator's judgment and capacity
- Look to other models of assessment which have more autonomy and valuing of teacher assessments
- Provide comparable school data directly to schools

ADVICE TO DIMENSIONS 1,4,5

DIMENSION 1:

Focusing directly on the student:

- Impacting results is a collective responsibility
- We must believe that success for every child is not just desirable but possible
- Measurement for student success should be multi dimensional and not only core academic
- Develop wide performance standards for students on non-graded programs and ESL learners
- Focus on the individual growth of all students
- Define the non-negotiables
- Emphasize improvement of classroom based assessment
- Focus on what research says about best practices
- Provide students the opportunity to have a positive and active role in assessment

DIMENSION 4:

District wide sense of efficacy on the part of school leaders:

- Provide more positive feedback
- There is a need to pool resources to meet the collective goal and to have opportunity to share and learn from others
- The role of the superintendent is to support and credit distributed leadership
- Foster the belief that we can make a positive difference
- Celebrate success
- Teachers and principals share the responsibility for ownership and sharing of best practices
- Leaders have the responsibility to convey trust and belief in the good work in quadrant 4
- Jurisdictions should report their own results and share a fuller story
- Principals must be actively involved in the change process and become effective team leaders
- Continue to build on positive relationships
- The key is for the leaders to pull together through dialogue and action

DIMENSION 5:

Building and maintaining positive relationships:

- A sense of community is necessary to build and maintain positive relationships
- Relational trust is necessary to engage support resulting in capacity building
- Avoiding judgmentalism will help to drive fear out of the system
- Celebrate what works well by doing awards locally through a divisional committee
- Develop indicators to describe or define trust
- Trust that results are used for improvement rather than judging
- Leaders must act with integrity build shared solutions to improve learning
- Have focused conversations around real issues
- Develop flexible exam schedules to allow more efficient school calendars
- Color coded reports and DM letters are judgmental and do not foster good relationships
- Listen to constituent voices
- Demonstrate transparency and provide opportunities to foster positive relationships

SESSION 2

DEVELOPING PURPOSEFUL PEER INTERACTION IN COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS

GOAL: TO RECOGNIZE THAT PEER INTERACTION ISN'T BOTTOM UP OR TOP DOWN AND THAT THE STAGE HAS TO BE SET. IT DOESN'T OFTEN HAPPEN WITHOUT FACILLITATION.

DISCUSSION QUESTION 1

What are examples of purposeful peer interaction in your organization?

Common Themes:

- Site based professional development days, including working groups and networking groups, which are planned, purposeful and flexible
- District professional development days for professional learning communities
- Defining purpose as part of the interaction
- Facilitated mentoring programs including: lead teachers, critical friends program, peer pairs and the learning coach model
- Book studies
- Issue sessions with CASS
- District leadership training focused on distributed leadership assigned in a specific direction
- Regional consortia
- Communities of practice, families of schools
- AISI meetings and conference
- Vision building process

DISCUSSION QUESTION 2

How has interaction with peers furthered the goals of the jurisdiction and/or Alberta Education?

Common Themes:

- Builds relationships resulting in increasing trust, a sense of responsibility, shared vision and shared values
- Develops willingness for change through sharing of experiences

- Communication assists in clarifying and focusing goals, priorities and strategies and moving from being self focused to being part of a big team
- Provides a common understanding of challenges and develops common approaches to solving problems and a strong sense of ownership
- Builds the professionalism of teachers and provides focus on priorities leading to being data aware and to improved curriculum implementation
- Creates an environment for action, more transparency and stronger more confident peers
- Produces more equity among schools

DISCUSSION QUESTION 3

Are there best practices for development of purposeful peer interaction?

Common Themes:

- Create opportunity for strong purposeful non-judgmental interactions in which there is a strong sense of common purpose, accountability and flexibility in order to build trusting relationships
- Provide teachers relevant research/data prior to discussion
- Free teachers for planning which is embedded in the school day, is regularly scheduled and sustainable
- Create a safe and respectful climate
- Always keep the mission at the forefront by using a narrow focus with appropriate resources and technology
- Develop a grass roots decision making process to increase ownership

ADVICE TO DIMENSIONS 6, 7, 8

DIMENSION 6

Investing in instructional leadership

- Reduce managerial expectations on administrators to emphasize the role of the instructional leader
- Develop master teachers in the jurisdiction to participate in mentoring programs
- Create leadership development programs which are research informed
- Attend to succession planning
- Create structures and resources to support principals in an intentional and deliberate manner
- Provide opportunity for principals to assume leadership in a specific area and share with others
- Create professional learning communities at the school and district levels
- Define outcomes using common language
- Create induction processes for new staff
- Provide leadership resources and opportunities

DIMENSION 7

Targeted and phased focuses of improvement

- Allow subject or multiple grade level teacher groupings for interaction
- Utilize AISI projects and three year plans
- Slow pace of new curriculum implementation to keep goals to a minimum in order to maintain focus
- Professional development must be targeted, focused, have measures and be sustainable
- Implementation must be planned at the district, school and Alberta Education levels
- Develop instructional leadership teams
- Communicate rationale to all stakeholders

DIMENSION 8

District wide job embedded professional development for leaders and teachers

- Focus professional development on what teachers are doing in the classroom
- Provide resources so teachers can work together or visit other class rooms to increase collaboration and build cross division teams
- Enable teachers to establish research groups to discuss issues and create a leadership pool for mentoring
- Follow up on professional development to ensure feedback
- Use embedded coaches
- Ensure ATA is on board with professional development activities
- Set up infrastructure and processes for the work and measure results
- Provide opportunities for leaders to learn along with teachers
- The focus should be on principals and senior leaders now
- There is a need for mentorship and peer coach training at all levels
- Assign each staff member to a specific implementation goal with responsibility to report back to the leadership team

SESSION 3

BUILDING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

GOAL: OUR GOAL IS TO HAVE PARTICIPANTS THINK BEYOND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS TO HOW THEY INTERACT WITH COMMUNITY AND HOPEFULLY BRING THIS LEARNING TO HELP BUILD PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

DISCUSSION QUESTION 1

Discuss these statements:

“A leader’s greatest legacy is the leader(s) he has left behind.”

- Building capacity through developing strong teams and succession planning is important
- Leaders need to portray their roles as inviting, interesting and doable
- Modeling is a strong form of leadership
- A leader’s greatest legacy is a community of leaders which allows others to shine
- If you’ve done your job you won’t be missed
- Create a culture of continued growth and innovation with ownership in the organization

DISCUSSION QUESTION 2

“Happiness requires combining meaningful work with regard for others.”

- The team is critical and must be valued and engaged
- An important core value is about serving one another
- Meaningful work and meaningful relationships are necessary for a balanced life for students, teachers and administrators
- They don’t care what you know until they know that you care
- Life is about joy, living with purpose, respect, understanding and personal engagement.
- Success of others brings happiness
- Education is meaningful work in which egalitarianism and cultural values promote happiness
- Organizations need to learn how to have fun
- Interaction with the community provides meaning to work

DISCUSSION QUESTION 3

How can the nuances of our work help meet the needs of our communities and society in general?

- Leaders need to be active in cross-agency partnerships in the community
- Parent willingness and freedom to challenge the school creates a high sense of entitlement
- Schools need to be transparent and open to the public and invest in collaborative decision making with committees
- The organization will be a strong model for the community if it is functioning well
- Schools need to support and build social capital with our students so they can be contributors to our communities
- Technology eases the job of informing the community of services and results

ADVICE TO DIMENSIONS 2, 3, 9, 10

DIMENSION 2

Evidence based decision making for planning, organizational learning, accountability

- There needs to be a balance between quantitative and qualitative data to ensure both are valued and communicated
- Good information leads to good planning and better questions
- We need a healthy doubt of the data and to provide information on how to collect data internally
- Public need to be informed on the purposes of data
- We need to define what is meant by evidence, break down data and make sure it is sound before making decisions based on it
- The focus for accountability may be dimming our focus on learning
- Sharing our evidence of student learning with and educating the public is vitally important

DIMENSION 3

Curriculum and instruction

- There is considerable public confidence in the appropriateness of the curriculum
- We need to continue to provide communication on the what and why of instructional practices
- We need to be cautious that new curriculum and implementation will be aligned with the philosophy and institutional practice
- All stakeholders need to realize that we teach students/children, not programs and subjects
- We require valid feedback from stakeholders prior to curriculum change
- We need to inform parents about expected learner outcomes and the what and why of instructional focus
- Supports must be focused on the outcomes you want students to achieve
- Curriculum must be relevant to student needs, liberal arts is not right for all students

DIMENSION 9

Strategic engagement with the province's agenda for change and associated resources

- Teachers need to have participation in the development of government documents
- Engagement of the ATA is important
- Marketing and publicity strategies need to be utilized effectively to connect with public sector members who don't have children in school
- We need to invite the public to advise on various topics and create dialogue that is meaningful and informs decision making
- There is a need to be transparent and practical
- The CASS voice has to be as powerful as others despite smaller numbers and a lesser degree of support as a professional organization

DIMENSION 10

Infrastructure alignment

- There is a need to ensure consistency with learning needs
- Policies need to be aligned with the current reality in maintenance and operation
- Create and adopt organizational support systems to support what is really important for students
- Align schools with other community services such as health
- Budgets for human resources, finance, capital and transportation need to be done in consideration of curriculum demands
- Infrastructure needs to look at the reality of initiatives like class size
- Equity is important and integration of technology with instruction is important