

Championing our Students

Wilco Tymensen

Once a week, the Lethbridge Herald publishes a column written by a superintendent of one of five school jurisdictions in the Lethbridge area. This week's column is authored by Dr. Wilco Tymensen, Superintendent for Horizon School Division No. 67 and was published on March 7, 2018. CASS thanks the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on our website.

On February 7, 2018 Minister Eggen announced that effective September 2019 there will be a revised Teaching Quality Standard and a new Leadership Quality Standard and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard. School and system leaders will now be required to take leadership certification programs and become credentialed, on a go forward basis. All three standards have "Fostering/Building Effective Relationships" as a key competency. This is because we know that welcoming, caring, respectful and safe environments is part of building positive and productive relationships, which ultimately supports student learning. We know that those students that have a personal advocate; someone who champions them is far more likely to have a successful school experience and complete high school. When you look at resilient children, no matter what hardship they endure, the most common factor for resilient children is that they have at least one stable and committed relationship with an adult. For many this is a family member, but for others it is their teacher or a school staff member.

As educators, we are in the business of relationships. We know that children do not learn from people they do not like. Alberta Education knows this and that is why "meaningful relationships" is one of the ten foundational principles of High School Redesign and why annual accountability pillar surveys asks, "Do teachers care about your child?" and "Is your child safe at school?". As school staff focus on developing meaningful relationships it helps to ensure that no student remains anonymous in our school. A relationship that demonstrates genuine interest between students and staff brings a level of trust and healthy interaction that stimulates intellectual pursuit, collaborative learning, and strengthens the learning experience in schools. Students easily identify what is and what is not genuine. Given that students often go to that trusted adult for help, school jurisdictions are leveraging these relationship and partnering with organizations like the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre to discuss school's role in keeping our kids safe, especially with regard to child abuse.

Teachers are not teaching to a group of students – they are teaching individuals. They are farmers sowing healthy relationships that will aid our youth to grow into contributing global citizens and tomorrow's ethical leaders.