

## Divisions can't work in silos

Chris Smeaton

*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 Chris Smeaton, Superintendent for Holy Spirit Catholic School Division and was published on November 22, 2017. CASS thanks the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on our website.*

Before I began to write this week's article, I went back and read my colleague's articles in the past. While some of the articles are about specific initiatives within a particular division, most articles highlight education from a more global perspective or focus on areas that all school divisions prioritize. A correct assumption from reading these articles is that many of the goals in education are similar from division to division. Living in this area, it would make good sense that there would be a common focus on our First Nations population. Literacy and numeracy, cornerstone skills for all students, would also be a common objective. Student wellness, effective transitions to post-secondary and the work world, and the continued need to manage the changing face of education would all be reflected in area divisions.

But what might not be as easily recognized, and is very unique to this area, is the strong connection between the school divisions. Put simply, we get along, we work together, and we support each other. That doesn't mean that we are not highly competitive with each other, but it is neither "cut throat" nor "win at all costs." Our competition focuses on getting better and then raising the bar so that, ultimately, the winners are the students, parents, and communities as a whole. We are all learning organizations and, as such, take lessons from each other and apply them to our own context.

A couple of weeks ago, senior education leaders from across the province attended our College of Alberta School Superintendents' (CASS) annual conference. One of the keynote presenters, education guru Michael Fullan, spoke about leadership in the middle and the importance of connecting outwards and collaborating beyond. For us in the southern part of the province, that lateral capacity building is just common practice. During the year we gather a minimum of four times as CASS colleagues from Zone 6. This gives those who oversee human resources or those who are responsible for curriculum or inclusive education an opportunity to come together to share best practices and brainstorm solutions. It is about helping all students, not just the ones in your own division.

For years, research has said that education is far too complex for teachers to be isolated and working alone. Schools have made great strides in providing more time for teachers to work in collaboration. Divisions have also worked hard to develop networks of schools so they can learn from each other. It just makes good sense that divisions apply that same research with each other. Divisions need to continue to work collaboratively, eliminating any silos that may exist. Students deserve the highest quality of education, parents deserve publicly funded choice, and our communities need to see the advantage of working with, not against, each other.