

Preparing for a very different future!

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 October 3, 2018. CASS thanks the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on our website.

Last week, Holy Spirit hosted an event with Apple Canada entitled, "Preparing students for today's mobile workplace." Our division was well supported through the attendance of board members, senior and school leaders and students. The conversation about preparing students for the future is of critical importance, not just for educators but business and industry and the general public at large. So it was refreshing that some of our local leaders were able to be present.

Why is it so important for business and industry to be present and, more importantly, involved in this conversation? In the just released report, *Humans Wanted - How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption*, RBC predicts that, "more than 25% of Canadian jobs will be heavily disrupted by technology in the coming decade. Fully half will go through a significant overhaul of the skills required." Disruption most commonly means automation and a significant overhaul of skills is complete re-training.

Even with the Canadian economy expected to grow by 2.4 million jobs over the next four years, much different skills will be required for workers to stay employed and employers to remain competitive in the global market. Unfortunately, the paper suggests that, "Canada's education system, training programs and labour market initiatives are inadequately designed to help Canadian youth navigate this new skills economy." Arguably, Canada (when you factor in that most students access publicly funded education and we educate one of the most diverse populations) has the best K-12 education system in the world and our post-secondary system ranks well too! But even with these strong supports, our youth will be left unable to transition from one career to another without a more concentrated effort on skill development. And it doesn't get better as the report further suggests that, "Canadian employers are generally not prepared, through hiring, training or retraining, to recruit and develop the skills needed to make their organizations more competitive in a digital economy."

Canada is a small country and, with the speed of technological change occurring, we must get ahead of the curve to stay globally competitive. That means that our students need digital fluency at a level that is far more in depth than simply searching for something on Google or interacting with the latest social media tool. We need students and youth to be critical thinkers in cross disciplines with the ability to see interconnections. Future jobs will require employees who can think outside the box, are resilient and adaptable. We must be constantly and collectively building for tomorrow.

Our solutions must revolve around collaborative partnerships between education, business and industry. We can ill-afford to fall into an "if only" mentality or the blame game. Rather, we must begin having productive discussions on how we can eliminate our silo thinking and look at learning through life instead of just learning in school. They say the youth is our future and, if we want to demonstrate our belief in that statement, we need to invest in them now at all levels and in all areas.