CASS
College of Alberta School Superintendents

SUPERINTENDENTS WHO LEAD LEARNING

Lessons from Six Highly Successful School Jurisdictions

UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

Prepared for the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)

Jim Brandon | Paulette Hanna | Dot Negropontes

October 2015

Abstract

This collective case study provides insights into the ways that superintendents lead learning in six highly successful and learning focused Alberta school jurisdictions. Each of the six individual case descriptions illustrates one contextualized set of leadership practices employed by a superintendency team in its specific geographic, social, economic, and educational setting. Findings and themes from our cross-case analysis generated five major assertions offered as *lessons for superintendency teams*: framing leadership research in action, leading learning through superintendency teams, building purposeful professional relationships, accessing external and internal expertise, and travelling the pathways of collaborative leadership learning. Our research team collected data through 23 focus groups and 16 individual interviews. In total, 114 educational leaders participated: 53 principals, 33 central office or middle level jurisdiction leaders, and 28 superintendency team leaders. We also gathered evidence from documentary sources, artifacts, field notes, and an online survey in pursuit of transferable insights that will be helpful to jurisdiction leaders practicing in other settings.

Foreword

One of the three goals outlined in the current Strategic Plan for CASS states "Leadership Capacity is built and supported." An objective within the goal is to "build capacity and knowledge around the transformation to enable system improvements that foster effective teaching and learning practices."

It is within this context that CASS supported this research study by Dr. Brandon, Dr. Hanna, and Dr. Negropontes. The learnings of the study, which are specific to the education environment in Alberta, add to the knowledge of how superintendents and superintendency teams of system leaders can positively impact student learning in their respective jurisdictions.

I believe that superintendents and teams of system leaders are best positioned to establish the practices and to provide the supports required within their respective jurisdictions to achieve this goal.

I base my belief, in part, on research by Robert Marzano and Timothy Waters, published in 2009 in *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance*. Not surprisingly, the research by Marzano and Waters affirms that the single most influential factor impacting student learning is the effectiveness of the teacher. They found that a teacher identified as exceptional (98th percentile), teaching in a jurisdiction identified as being in the 50th percentile, could result in an increase in student achievement by as much as 20 percentile points in reading and 26 percentile points in math, as compared to a teacher identified in the 50th percentile.

What is striking in the study by Marzano and Waters, and affirmed in this study, is the impact that superintendents and system leadership can have on student learning and achievement. Marzano and Waters found that exceptional system leadership (98th percentile) could result in an increase in student achievement, when the student was taught by a teacher identified in the 50th percentile, by as much as 13 percentile points in reading and 17 percentile points in math.

As you read through this publication you will see the evidence that demonstrates the importance of education leadership by superintendents and system leadership teams, and the positive impact that leadership can make on student learning and achievement.

It is also important to note that the lessons learned and identified in this study corroborate and supplement the findings within *The Alberta Framework for School System Success,* published by CASS in 2013.

School jurisdictions, led by superintendents and system leadership teams that make decisions based on research and in the best interests of students, will attain the goal as stated by Marzano & Waters, "Imagine a school where you become a better educator just by being part of the staff. Imagine a school division where this exists everywhere."

Barry Litun

Executive Director, College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS)

Acknowledgements

The welcoming hospitality and cooperation we experienced throughout the study is gratefully acknowledged. This report would not have been possible without the contribution of many people.

Foremost, we would like to thank the superintendents, senior administration team members, middle level leaders, and principals who generously gave of their time to participate in the focus group and individual interviews, respond to the online surveys and offer their insights that provided the opportunity to gather data from a large number of people to generate substantive results.

We also wish to express our gratitude to the school superintendents of the six specific school jurisdictions for agreeing to participate in this study and allowing us to gather evidence about the variety of ways superintendency teams lead learning: Naomi Johnson and David Stevenson, Chief Superintendents, Calgary Board of Education; Kurt Sacher, Superintendent Chinook's Edge; Barry Wowk, Superintendent, St. Albert Public; Betty Turpin, Superintendent, Holy Family Catholic; George McGuigan, Superintendent Fort McMurray Catholic; and Ken Sommerfeldt, Superintendent Westwind School Division. We appreciate their efforts by allowing us to schedule interviews with their senior administration team, middle level leaders, and school principals.

CONTENTS

Leading Learning – School Jurisdiction Contributions to Student Success
Five Lessons for Leading Learning at the Jurisdiction Level
Organization of the Report

General District Leadership Studies
A Framework for School System Success
Leading Learning at the Jurisdiction Level
    Jurisdiction Wide Focus on Student Learning
    Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
    System Efficacy
    Expecting and Supporting Instructional Leadership
    Leading Professional Learning
Summary and Conceptual Framework

Research Purpose
Research Question
Research Design
Selection of Six Highly Successful and Learning Focused School Jurisdictions
Data Collection and Analysis
    Focus Group and Individual Interviews
    Jurisdiction and School Leader Surveys
    Individual Case Analysis
    Cross-Case Analysis
    Triangulation
Summary

The Alberta Educational System
Six Highly Successful School Jurisdictions
Chinook's Edge School Division
    Leading Learning in the Chinook's Edge School Division
    Emerging Themes

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Introduction

Superintendents Who Lead Learning: Lessons from Six Highly Successful School Jurisdictions was designed to contribute to the small, but growing research field that studies system based instructional leadership. Our collective case study provides insights into the various ways that superintendency teams lead learning in highly successful and learning focused school jurisdictions. This introductory section is presented in four parts. We begin by describing what we mean by the phrase *leading learning* and then refer to three seminal research studies on the contributions of school jurisdiction leadership to student success as a prelude to summarizing our report's five main contributions to this vein of scholarship. We conclude the section with an outline of the structure and organization of this research report.

LEADING LEARNING – SCHOOL JURISDICTION CONTRIBUTIONS TO STUDENT SUCCESS

The focus of this study was on a broad conception of instructional leadership – *leading learning* – as practiced by educational leaders at the school jurisdiction level. Instructional leadership is often defined more narrowly in the literature than how we used the term in this report. Such narrow definitions generally focus on actions by principals that directly impact instruction (Hallinger 2003; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Fullan (2014) described this more narrow approach as *direct* instructional leadership. We aimed to better understand the wider range of leadership practices that are purposefully employed by jurisdiction leaders with the intention of positively impacting teaching and learning in schools. *Overall* instructional leadership is the term Fullan (2014) used to describe this broader range of practices.

Evidence to support the claim that system leadership does play a significant role in improving student *success* – student engagement, learning, and well-being – has been documented in an increasing number of recent studies. Of the research reports featured in the next section's literature review, three are viewed as seminal studies that together provide a general overview of the most compelling evidence of school district leadership contributions to student success. Leithwood's (2008, 2010a) meta-analysis of 31 published reports of high performing school district effects identified 12 common characteristics of such jurisdictions. Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson's (2010) massive study investigated school and district links to student learning over a six-year period. They underlined the importance the district leadership in four areas: setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. The meta-analysis of school system leadership by Marzano and Waters (2009) provided substantive evidence that district leadership matters and "that when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected" (p. 5). More detailed commentary on each of these three foundational studies is provided in the literature review in the next section.

FIVE LESSONS FOR LEADING LEARNING AT THE JURISDICTION LEVEL

The purpose of our collective case study was to illuminate the *overall* instructional leadership practices of six school superintendency teams who have been identified as leaders of educator and student learning. To this end, we collected and analyzed qualitative data from 23 focus groups and 16 individual interviews that accessed the perspectives of 53 principals, 33 middle level jurisdiction leaders, and 28 superintendency team leaders. We also gathered evidence from field notes, observations, and documentary sources. An online survey was also administered to 48 participants to augment the qualitative data in pursuit of a deeper and richer understanding of the following question:

In what ways do successful superintendency teams lead educator and student learning?

Descriptions of each superintendency team's efforts to lead educator and student learning are presented in Section Four. In accordance with the collective case study research design outlined in Section Three, the six case portraits were constructed from a careful analysis of multiple evidence sources examined in each school jurisdiction. In each instance, our descriptions are organized within a five part conceptual framework derived from a critical review of the literature on school district leadership effects (see Figure 2.2 below). Key findings and emerging themes conclude each of the six individual cases.

Though findings presented in each of the six cases are important and will be of interest to both practitioners and policy makers, the primary purpose of this investigation was to yield insights into the phenomenon of *overall* instructional leadership in a more general manner, as practiced by superintendency teams in highly successful and learning focused school jurisdictions. Each case was studied to gain understanding of the complex meanings of this phenomenon in some of its situations (Stake, 2006, p. 41). In addition to uncovering particularistic and contextuality specific knowledge, we have sought to advance our understanding of jurisdiction level instructional leadership with the goal of improving practice, policy, and theory (Andres, 2010, p. 10).

Building on the findings and emerging themes from each individual case, our cross-case analysis identified nine larger themes. In turn, further analysis of these nine cross-case themes generated five major assertions about the ways in which successful superintendency teams lead educator and student learning. These five *analytical generalizations* are based on the research team's reasoned judgment and assertational logic about the extent to which the findings and themes of this study are transferable and can be used to guide superintendency team practice in other settings.

These assertions have been framed as five *lessons for superintendency teams* who seek to more effectively lead learning in their jurisdictions. The five lessons are detailed in Section Five, but, simply stated, they are as follows:

> Leadership Lesson One*: Framing Leadership Research in Action*
> Leadership Lesson Two*: Leading Learning Through Superintendency Teams*
> Leadership Lesson Three*: Building Purposeful Professional Relationships*
> Leadership Lesson Four*: Accessing External and Internal Expertise*
> Leadership Lesson Five: *Travelling the Pathways of Collaborative Leadership Learning*

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

Our report is comprised of six sections. Section Two situates the current study in the existing research literature that links school district leadership to student outcomes. Next, the collective case study research design is explained. The processes used to gather the multiple sources of data and our insider/outsider perspectives are outlined along with the strategies we employed to guide analysis, interpretation, and assertion formulation. Section Four focuses on the six individual school jurisdiction cases based primarily on our analysis of focus group and individual interviews. Contextual background information is provided on each school system followed by descriptions of the specific leadership approaches employed in each. Individual case findings and emerging themes are then developed further into nine cross-case themes in Section Five. The final section itemizes five ways in which these larger themes may be transferable and can be used to guide superintendency team practice in other settings.

Literature Review

The research literature that informed our study is presented in three major sub-sections. First, we provide a short review of the evidence of the district leadership impact on student success stemming from three seminal studies. Second, we examine the *Alberta Framework for School System Success* (*Alberta Framework*) (Brandon, Hanna, Morrow, Rhyason, & Schmold, 2013), which was founded on these three seminal studies of district leadership impact as well as additional current research in this same vein. Third, insights from research that has identified more specific district practices that impact student outcomes are detailed in five dimensions of the *Alberta Framework*: (a) a jurisdiction wide focus on student learning, (b) the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, (c) system efficacy, (d) expecting and supporting instructional leadership at the both the jurisdiction and school levels, and (e) research informed approaches to professional learning. These five *Alberta Framework* dimensions served as the conceptual framework that shaped our study and are portrayed in Figure 2.2 on page 19 below.

GENERAL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP STUDIES

The three studies or groups of studies featured in this subsection provide a general overview of the current research evidence that connects district leadership efforts to positive student outcomes. In chronological order, we begin with Leithwood's (2008, 2010a) meta-analysis of 31 studies of high performing school district efforts to improve student learning. In this first group of studies, we also examine more recent related research by Leithwood (2010, 2011) in the Canadian provinces of Alberta, and Ontario. Our attention then turns to the second significant meta-analysis completed by Marzano and Waters (2009). The Wallace Foundation funded the third group of studies, each of which reports research from portions of the "largest in-depth study of education leadership conducted to date in the United States" (Wallace Foundation, 2010, p. 1).

The key finding from Leithwood's (2008, 2010a) meta-analysis commissioned by the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) is that district leadership does have a significant role to play in improving student learning. Three criteria were used to determine the research included in the meta-analysis: (a) the research had to be published in a refereed journal or comparable source, (b) the study needed to report original evidence about the association between one or more system characteristics and "some valued set of outcomes," or (c) the research could describe one or more practices within a system previously found to be high performing (p. 3). According to this foundational evidence, substantive correlations could be established with 12 characteristics of high performing school districts. These characteristics have shaped the *Alberta Framework for School System Success* (Brandon, Hanna, Morrow, Rhyason, & Schmold, 2013), which is discussed below.

Leithwood's (2010) second CASS sponsored research study of district improvement processes concluded that the district leadership team is the single most important influence on district turnaround processes and that the superintendency team should be held directly accountable for tasks it is uniquely positioned to accomplish (p. 28). Related work for the Council of Ontario Directors of Education in Ontario (CODE) generated the Ontario *District Effectiveness Framework* (DEF), which itemized 13 research-supported district characteristics within four categories (Leithwood, 2011). The DEF described the qualities of school systems that are "exceptionally effective at educating all students well. It is based on systematic reviews of relevant empirical evidence, as well

as an original, multi-methods empirical test, which confirmed the effects on student achievement of the qualities included in the framework" (p. 1).

Marzano and Waters (2009) completed a second seminal meta-analysis on district leadership practices (Marzano & Waters, 2006). The report combines their review of research on district effects on student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2006) with their analysis of "research and theory on high reliability organizations and the research regarding the highest-performing school systems in the world" (p. 22). The study added weight to the claim that district leadership matters and "that when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected (p. 5). Marzano and Waters detailed what they believed to be "a new view of district leadership—one that assumes district leadership can be a critical component of effective schooling" (p. 13).

Their new conception of district leadership is made up of four components. First, nonnegotiable instructional goals are established at the district level. Second, leadership at every level of the district supports these goals. Third, resources are dedicated to professional development that ensures high-quality instruction, strong and knowledgeable instructional leadership, ongoing monitoring of instructional quality, and the impact of instruction on learning. Fourth, despite this tight coupling, there is sufficient autonomy and flexibility at the school level to respond quickly and effectively to early indications of error and individual student failure (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 21).

The third seminal study that informed *Superintendents Who Lead Learning* was a large-scale, longer-term study rather than a meta-analysis. Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) investigated school and district effects over a six-year period through research funded by the Wallace Foundation. Their massive study examined linkages between educational leadership and student learning in 180 schools in 43 school districts in nine American states. About 8,400 teachers and 470 school administrators were surveyed. The researchers interviewed about 580 teachers and administrators, 304 school district staff members and 124 state personnel. Observational data were gathered from some 310 classrooms and student achievement on language and mathematics standardized tests were analyzed (Wallace Foundation, 2010, p. 1). Several research reports have been published as portions of or related to what has been described as the "largest in-depth study of education leadership conducted to date in the United States" (Wallace Foundation, 2010). Thirteen components of the larger study were included in *Linking Leadership to Student Learning* by Kenneth Leithwood and Karen Seashore Louis (2012). Key findings from two of these related studies conclude our review of general district leadership studies and point us toward the more specific guidance provided in the next sub-section of this report.

In a policy focused report from the larger Wallace Foundation study, Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010b) claimed that there is a convergence of research "on a common set of actions and policy conditions associated with district-wide improvement and effectiveness" (p. 17). Anderson and Louis (2012) found that individual principals cannot go it alone and called for district practices that encourage wide participation in and distribution of leadership focused on teacher capacity development and instructional improvement. They found that district policies and practices that are sufficiently powerful and focussed on instruction can be "observed by teachers as an animating force behind strong, focussed leadership by principals" (p. 190).

A FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL SYSTEM SUCCESS

The *Alberta Framework for School System Success* (*Alberta Framework*) (Brandon et al., 2013) was founded on findings from a number of recent influential studies that highlight the important, but indirect connections between district leadership and student learning. The *Alberta Framework* is focused on the qualities of highly successful school systems and was conceived as an *artful* synthesis of the best available evidence combined with the wisdom and experience of practicing superintendents. Working with leading international researcher-consultants – Ken Leithwood, Michael Fullan, Ben Levin, Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley – superintendents in the province have been using versions of the *Alberta Framework* to improve jurisdiction results since the fall of 2008.

The 2009 version of the *Alberta Framework* was the product of intense CASS member and education partner engagement with Leithwood's (2008) meta-analysis over a 15-month period (Schmold & Morrow, 2009a, p. 1). Approximately 140 CASS members and numerous partner representatives brought their practical wisdom to bear on these research findings through deep conversations over the three separate day-long interactive sessions. Four additional drafts were shaped by similar efforts to meld research and experience through dialogue over the summer of 2008 and through implementation of one or more specific *Alberta Framework* dimensions in ten pilot school systems during the 2008-2009 school year (Schmold & Morrow, 2009b).

At the conceptual level, the *Alberta Framework* is designed to funnel evidence informed school system leadership practices in one direction: to improve student learning. Undergirding the *Alberta Framework* is a dynamic research and evidence core that is growing and developing over time as school jurisdictions implement, refine, and share evidence based professional dialogue, professional learning, and organizational learning.

The current (2013) version of the *Alberta Framework* features 12 research verified leadership dimensions organized within four areas of collective practice as outlined in Table 2.1 below. Whereas each of the dimensions is a system leadership quality positively correlated to student learning, the four practice areas – *vision and direction setting, capacity building, relationships* and *system design* have been established to formulate a conceptually coherent structure for thinking and acting from the perspective of a jurisdiction leadership team member. The four practice areas are similar to the four classifications employed in Leithwood (2012) and derived from earlier studies by Leithwood and colleagues: *setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization* and *improving instructional practices.*

Table 2.1: The Alberta Framework for School System Success

Vision And Direction Setting	Relationships
Dimension 1: Focus on Student Learning	Dimension 7: System Connections
Dimension 2: Curriculum and Instruction	Dimension 8: Parent – Community Engagement
Dimension 3: Uses of Evidence	Dimension 9: School Board Leadership
Capacity Building	**System Design**
Dimension 4: System Efficacy	Dimension 10: System Alignment
Dimension 5: Leadership for Learning	Dimension 11: System Improvement
Dimension 6: Professional Learning	Dimension 12: Leveraging Technology

LEADING LEARNING AT THE JURISDICTION LEVEL

We now consider research from a variety of sources, but organized within five *Alberta Framework* dimensions, that we believed to be more specifically applicable to informing jurisdiction instructional leadership practices: (a) a jurisdiction wide focus on student learning (*Framework Dimension One*); (b) the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment (*Framework Dimension Two*); (c) system efficacy (Framework Dimension Three); (d) expecting and supporting instructional leadership at the both the jurisdiction and school levels (*Framework Dimension Five*); and (e) research informed approaches to professional learning (*Framework Dimension Six*). The five areas of the *Alberta Framework* describe the qualities of school systems that are exceptionally effective at educating all students well.

Jurisdiction Wide Focus on Student Learning

Considerable research supports the claim that leadership practices aimed at creating a widely shared sense of purpose that focuses jurisdiction energy and efforts on teaching and learning can have a significantly positive impact (Friesen & Lock, 2010; Leithwood; 2008, 2010a, 2011, & 2012; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010a, 2010b).

Leithwood's review (2008, 2010a) referred to a number of studies that illustrate the importance of developing a school system vision that clearly and unambiguously focuses on the teaching and learning. The four *significantly improving* Alberta systems examined by Maguire (2003) had vision statements "that were more sharply focused on student learning and more widely promulgated and internalized at all levels" than other jurisdictions (p. 10). There was "widespread, top-to-bottom understanding of the jurisdiction's mission and goals" (p. 11). In these school systems there was "a powerful concentration by the jurisdiction's administration on improving student achievement, coupled with at least one senior leader whose passion and energy was sufficient to fuel the jurisdiction's vision" (p. 11).

The same review (Leithwood, 2008, 2010a) reported that studies of both New York City's District #2 and the San Diego School District illustrated the importance of the clarity of vision that focused all district work on the improvement of teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Darling-Hammond, Hightower, Husbands, LaFors, Young, & Christopher, 2003; Hightower, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). Other studies in Leithwood (2008, 2010a) support the importance of *clarity*. For example, four of the five high performing jurisdictions in Togneri and Anderson's (2003) study "began their reform efforts by reassessing and revising their visions. Significantly notable "was the extent to which these jurisdictions used their visions to guide instructional improvement" (p. 12).

For school districts to be truly successful, it involves more than generating comparatively high scores on standardized tests. Highly successful school systems focus on being exceptionally effective at educating all students well. Attention must be placed on engaging students intellectually, academically, and socially (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009) to support their learning and their welfare for the near term and the years after graduating from school. Inspirational visions require grounding in specific achievable goals if longer-term results are to be realized and sustained. While the notions of vision, mission and goals are central to most contemporary planning practices, a key challenge for school jurisdictions is to develop these purpose statements in ways that lead to the vast majority of staff adopting them as their own.

Cawelti's (2001) evidence supports the importance of district efforts aimed at developing shared beliefs "about learning and how the school system should operate, and a vision of the future" (p. 2). This evidence also stressed the importance of getting "beyond the rhetoric of 'all students can learn' by developing programs, policies and teaching strategies that lead to higher levels of achievement" (p. 2). It is not enough to create a compelling image of the future, highly successful and learning focused districts take action.

The research presented in this sub-section underlines the importance of district leadership practices and structures that focus collective attention, energy, and resources on a widely shared vision and beliefs about student learning, engagement, and well-being in the 21st century. Such focus requires that school system leaders be disciplined in the number and type of goals selected. Focusing on a few clear, widely understood priorities on teaching and learning leads to powerful results for the learning and welfare of all children. Focused school districts have a limited number of defined priorities that are clearly articulated, collaboratively developed and effectively communicated. Such jurisdictions avoid the "Christmas tree" glitter of numerous innovations and initiatives that invariably lead to "initiative fatigue" and lack of coherence (Fullan, 2001).

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

As significant as it is to focus system efforts on teaching and learning, it is even more important to take steps to ensure that the actual curriculum and instruction offered to students are of the highest quality. This sub-section examines the ways in which effective school systems strongly support the efforts of schools to implement curricula that foster deep understanding of *big ideas* and to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings. We begin with 21st century conceptions of teaching and learning and move on to the importance of and challenges with maintaining a system's focus on its core business – teaching and learning.

Recent studies of learning (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; OECD, 2001, 2007, 2008; Sawyer, 2006, 2008) seek to better understand the cognitive, emotional, and social processes that result in the most effective

learning and to use this knowledge within the design of curriculum, teaching and assessment so that people learn more deeply and effectively. These approaches to learning are not only different in degrees, but also significantly different in kind. It is important for teachers to keep abreast of new advances in learning, as the task of teaching is to sponsor learning. Research from the learning sciences – an interdisciplinary field which includes cognitive science, educational psychology, computer science, anthropology, sociology, information sciences, neurosciences, education, design studies, and instructional design – is yielding new insights into learning and pointing to new ways of designing more effective learning environments in school classrooms as well as in other settings.

Learning environments emerging from contemporary research recognize learners as core participants, requiring active engagement, and developing in them an understanding of their own activity as learners. Such learning environments recognize that learning is not merely a solo activity, rather it is a distributed undertaking, social in nature, and involves the processes of interaction, negotiation, cooperation, collaboration, and participation. They are further characterized by being highly attuned to the inextricably entwined nature of the emotional and cognitive dimensions of learning. Learning within these environments is organized to sponsor deep conceptual understanding rooted in disciplinary ways of knowing, doing, and being connected both vertically within the discipline and horizontally across disciplines. Such learning environments are learner-focused and acutely sensitive to the fact that students differ in many ways, including their prior knowledge. Learning within these environments is maximized when each learner is sufficiently challenged and supported to reach just above their existing level and capacity. Assessment and instruction work together in these environments to ensure that learning goals are transparent and learners receive substantial, regular, timely, specific, meaningful feedback to improve learning (Friesen & Lock, 2010).

Highly successful school systems work effectively with schools to provide all students with engaging forms of instruction. Significant investments in ongoing instructional improvement are likely to be the most direct and powerful initiatives system can make: research consistently points to the quality of teaching practice as the most important factor in student learning and engagement. High performing systems are much more likely to capitalize on the full range of teaching capacities their staffs possess and to build on this range - not to restrict it.

Resnick (2000), for example, proposed five classroom enablers: instructional time, content coverage, instructional quality, diagnostic adaptation and student engagement. Evidence suggests that children who traditionally struggle at school benefit from the same rich curriculum and engaging forms of instruction, as do traditionally successful students. High quality instruction is "constructivist" and is defined by (a) academic rigour across task and assignments, (b) the centrality of ideas, (c) encouragement of a range of cognitive engagement, (d) clear expectations about what high quality work is for students, (e) high frequency of student - teacher accountability talk, and (f) little off-task time.

Friesen and Lock's (2010) review indicated that the mindful infusion of networked digital technologies leads to rich, robust and meaningful learning through pedagogical practices which (a) nurture active and in-depth learning, (b) require authenticity, (c) foster collaboration, (d) utilize prior knowledge and experience, (e) use formative assessment, (f) organize knowledge around key concepts and connections, and (e) support the development of meta-cognitive skills.

Hattie's (2012) conception of teaching built on his ground breaking 2009 synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses in the largest ever collection of evidence-based research into what works in schools to improve learning. The additional meta-analyses reviewed in this work brought the total cited to over 900 studies. Hattie (2012) outlined the 42 most successful interventions within a five sequence lesson framework: (a) preparing the lesson, (b) starting the lesson, (c) interpreting learning, (d) providing feedback during the lesson, and (e) post lesson follow up. In this frame, expert teachers were distinguished from experienced teachers by the learning outcomes achieved (pp. 30 – 31).

For Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) the importance of focusing system improvement efforts on developing and sustaining *professional capital*, "the systematic development, and integration of three kinds of capital – human, social and decisional – into teaching," cannot be overstated (p. xv). Their view of teaching grounded in an analysis of the world's top educationally performing countries articulates that good teaching is (a) technically sophisticated and difficult, (b) requires high levels of education and long periods of training, (c) is perfected through continuous improvement, (d) is a collective accomplishment and responsibility, and (e) maximizes, mediates, and moderates online instruction. (p. 14)

Robinson (2011) explained that quantity and quality are both important to student success. Instructional time is lost in a variety of ways: when students are not on task, when there is misalignment of activities to learning outcomes and a lack of cognitive engagement. Other inhibitors include mismatching learning outcomes to student prior knowledge or interest, and not designing to promote success.

Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) described the features of *direct*, *constructivist*, and *focused* teaching models. Direct teaching involves teachers setting learning outcomes, strategies for classroom management, content, and pacing – a teacher centered approach to instruction. On the other hand, constructivism requires teachers to design student activities that engage students in exploration and induction. Teachers serve as guides to help students construct meaning. *Focused* instruction combines elements of each model. The teacher controls the pace and content of lessons, allowing students to take charge of their own learning and to construct their own knowledge. This combined approach is framed with these underlying principles:

> The teacher enables students to construct their own knowledge. Disruptions of classroom time are minimized. The teacher assumes that most students in the classroom are capable of taking charge of their own learning (in age appropriate ways). The teacher emphasizes the development of deep knowledge of the core subject(s) that are being taught. A rapid pace of instruction in the classroom is being maintained. (p.28)

Successful and learning focused districts work with schools to align curriculum, instruction, teaching resources, and assessment in extensive and ongoing ways. In the improving systems in Cawelti's (2001) study, central office staff encouraged school staffs to make decisions about how to best to use their funds to meet district targets. Ongoing professional development was provided to all teachers and administrators in NYC's System #2 to prompt continuous efforts to align all elements of the instructional core (Elmore & Burney, 1998).

Highly successful and learning focused jurisdictions, then, support and encourage efforts to address longer-term concerns about how the current curriculum might need to be changed in order to better prepare the next generation of students for the challenges they will face as adults.

System Efficacy

Self-efficacy has long been considered a key cognitive variable regulating leader behaviour in dynamic environments. According to McCormick (2001), every major review of the leadership literature lists it as an essential characteristic of effective leadership. Self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and course of action needed to meet given situational demands" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 408). Bandura (1997) refined his definition as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments." Collective efficacy is a belief about the ability of one's colleagues, as a whole, to perform a task or achieve a goal.

The evidence indicates that superintendents and principals in highly successful districts convey a strong belief in their own and their colleague's capacities to accomplish good things for all students. Wahlstrom and her colleagues claim that system efficacy is an important contributor to school and district success. A key finding of their six year Wallace Foundation study was that educational leaders "who see themselves as working collaboratively towards clear, common goals with district personnel, other principals, and teachers are more confident in their leadership" (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood and Anderson, 2010, p. 30). In such settings, two district leadership strategies were employed. First, the school jurisdiction provided extensive opportunities for staff to develop expertise relevant to achieving the district's goals. Second, the district created organizational structures and settings that supported and enhanced staff's work and learning.

The potential impact of a school or district staff's sense of efficacy (both individual and collective) finds considerable support in a rich empirical and theoretical literature, much of it based on Bandura's seminal research (1977, 1986, 1989, 1997). High levels of efficacy are associated with persistence in solving problems, and effortful responses to challenges that might cause others to give up. According to Bandura, sources of efficacy include experiences of mastery, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and involvement in work settings perceived to support one's work.

Leithwood's (2008, 2010a) research summary examined four studies that associated a district sense of collective efficacy as an important explanation of high district performance. Further research by Leithwood and colleagues (2010, 2012) found that this sense of collective efficacy on the part of a district's principals was a significant factor in accounting for district effects on student achievement.

In Fullan's (2011) view, a sense of efficacy is not so much advance confidence that you can succeed but rather that you can make things work, that what you are asked to do is within your control. Efficacy is very close to realized purpose because it stems from your experience that you can be successful. It may be a struggle, but you, working with others, will get there (p. 8).

Leithwood, Anderson, and Louis (2012) found that the district contribution to school leaders' sense of efficacy is most powerful through five strategies: (a) unambiguously assigning priority to the improvement of student achievement and instruction; (b) investing in the development of instructional leadership; (c) ensuring that personnel policies support the selection and maintenance of the best people for each school; (d) emphasizing teamwork and professional community; and (e) providing worthwhile programs of professional learning, aimed at strengthening educator capacity to achieve shared purposes (p. 119).

In their inquiry into the relationship between principal efficacy and district-led professional learning, Leithwood, Anderson, and Louis (2012) found that districts that help their school leaders feel more efficacious or confident about their school improvement work have positive effects on important school conditions, as well as student learning. Districts can do this through the provision of "worthwhile programs of professional development, aimed at strengthening their (principal) capacities to achieve shared purposes" (p. 119).

Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) claimed "leadership practices targeted directly at improving instruction have significant effects on teachers' working relationships and indirectly on student achievement" and that "when principals and teachers share leadership, teachers' working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher" (p. 25). The effect occurs "largely because effective leadership strengthens professional community, a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning" (p. 25).

Expecting and Supporting Instructional Leadership

The suggestion that senior district leaders, far removed from daily contact with students, and typically embroiled in the management of complex organizational, legal, financial, and political issues should somehow be *learning leaders* may at first glance seem implausible. Yet, there is considerable research evidence that points to pathways in which jurisdiction leaders can move forward in this broad direction. Three such pathways are now presented: (a) senior leader commitment to broader views of instructional leadership, (b) focusing jurisdiction level educators on instruction, and (c) developing instructional leadership capacity in schools.

Broader Views of Instructional Leadership

In their analysis of the literature on instructional leadership, Leithwood and Louis (2012) focused on a few well-developed models of instructional leadership that posit a "set of responsibilities for principals that goes well beyond observing and intervening in classrooms – responsibilities touching on vision, organizational culture and the like" (p. 6). This conception is in keeping with an earlier view by Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006) that *instructional leadership* has been mostly used as "a slogan to focus administrators on their students' progress" (p. 6). They point to a more detailed three-category model described in Hallinger's (2003) review of the evidence on instructional leadership: (a) *defining the school's mission,* including framing and then communicating the school's goals; (b) *managing the instructional program,* including supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress; and (c) *promoting a positive school learning climate* encompassing protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, and providing incentives for learning.

Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe's (2008) landmark meta-analysis of the available evidence linking school leadership to student outcomes resulted in five broad and similar categories of leadership practice that have been elaborated in Robinson (2011): (a) establishing goals and expectations, (b) resourcing strategically, (c) ensuring quality teaching, (d) leading teacher learning and development, and (e) ensuring an orderly safe and caring environment. As in related leading learning frames, these five dimensions are inter-connected and work together with three leadership capacities to foster strong learning and teaching environments: (a) applying relevant knowledge, (b) solving complex problems, and (c) building relational trust.

A final study that yields a broader view of instructional leadership is the teacher perception research undertaken by Wahlstrom (2012). She concluded "principals need to be held accountable for taking actions that are known to have direct effects on the quality of teaching and learning in their schools" (p. 84). This means expecting principals to both have a vision (creating *instructional ethos*) and to regularly undertake *instructional actions* by being "very intentional about each classroom visit and conversation, with the explicit purpose of engaging with teachers about well-defined instructional ideas" (p. 83).

Focusing Central Office on Instruction

Anderson and Louis (2012) observed, "district policies and practices around instruction are sufficiently powerful that they can be felt, indirectly, by teachers as stronger and more directed leadership behaviors by principals" (p. 181). Among the most import findings, were the benefits of focusing central office efforts on teaching and learning through the following six jurisdiction leadership practices:

- Communicating a strong belief in the capacity of teachers and principals to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and in the district's capacity to develop the organizational conditions needed for that to happen (high collective efficacy).

- Building consensus about core expectations for professional practice (curriculum, teaching, leadership).

- Differentiating support to schools in relation to evidence of implementing these core expectations, with flexibility for school-based innovation.

- Setting clear expectations for school leadership practices and establishing leadership-development systems to select, train, and assist principals and teacher leaders consistent with district expectations.

- Providing organized opportunities for teachers and principals to engage in school-to-school communication, focusing on the challenges of improving student learning and program implementation.

- Coordinating district support for school improvement across organizational units in relation to district priorities, expectations for professional practice, and a shared understanding of the goals and needs of specific schools. (p. 181-182)

Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010b) found that school district leaders fostered stronger instructional leadership through the following approaches:

- Ensuring coordination and coherence in support for schools across different organizational units at the district level. Schools benefit from coordinated support provided in relation to district goals and based on shared understandings of school- improvement plans and needs.

- Being crystal clear and repetitive when communicating the district's agenda for student learning. Effective superintendents are visible and articulate, but they also work with others in the district office so that all central office staff members convey the message.

- Providing increased opportunities for administrators to collaborate on common work. Without collaboration, principals' collective sense of efficacy is unlikely to increase. In addition, as with teachers, collaboration is associated with increased job satisfaction and motivation.

- Prioritizing assistance and support to secondary schools. Secondary school administrators need significantly more support in all areas of practice than they are receiving in most settings.

- Providing a wide range of intensive opportunities for teachers and school-level leaders to develop the capacities they need to accomplish the district's student-learning agenda. These opportunities will often take place in schools and be aimed at meeting pressing challenges unique to individual school.

- Spending time in schools. Most principals report that the administrators who evaluate them rarely visit their schools (other district staff members may be more visible). Use school visits as well as district meetings to help build principals' sense of efficacy or confidence in their abilities to accomplish the priorities for student learning agreed on in the district.

- Differentiating the support provided to schools in light of schools' individual priorities, strengths, weaknesses, and circumstances. One-size-fits-all district interventions are typically of much less value to schools than many districts believe.

- Gathering and using data about how well district policies are working at the school level. Working continually to increase synergy among district policies, procedures, and practices aimed at guiding and supporting the district's agenda for student learning. (pp. 3-4)

Through her inquiry into midlevel leader roles and practices in five rural Alberta school systems, Steele (2010) found that interdependent approaches were most highly effective. She found that effectiveness was enhanced when educators with specialized expertise enacted their roles as members of interdisciplinary teams, "because of the structures and processes established, creates a truly distributed model of leadership whereby leadership is stretched over multiple leaders within the system, who are dependent on each other to achieve the core work of the organization (p. 15).

Developing Instructional Leadership Capacity in Schools

Most districts that have succeeded in moving from low to high performing have provided intensive long-term opportunities for principals to further develop their capacities as instructional leaders (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Many of these districts have developed their own leadership development programs rather than relying on programs available from universities and other external agencies.

Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) argued that principal preparation and professional development programs "should continue to emphasize both the "softer" (emotional) and the "harder" (behavioral) sides of leadership" (p. 40). Their justification was as follows:

> While our results suggest that principals' behavior is more important than the levels of trust principals evoke, behavior and levels of trust are empirically part of a bundle that is difficult to disentangle. Trust without instructional and shared leadership to support it may be of little consequence for students, but our data suggest that teachers' relationships with each other, and their trust in the principal cannot be easily disaggregated. (p. 40)

Another key finding of Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) was that though there are still controversies in the research literature on instructional leadership, with some scholars emphasizing principal work with individual teachers and others focusing more on the creation of learning cultures in schools, there is value in studying both elements (p. 30). In their analysis, leadership efforts to improve instruction positively impact student learning through improved working relationships with teachers. "When principals and teachers share leadership, teachers' working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher" (p. 25).

The need to pay closer attention to the benefits of collective and shared efforts to improve instruction is supported by evidence from Louis and Wahlstrom (2012.) One of their significant claims is that "leadership effects on student achievement occur largely because effective leadership strengthens professional community, a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning" (p. 39). They explain this result as follows:

> Professional community, in turn, is a strong predictor of instructional practices that are strongly associated with student achievement. The link between professional community and student achievement may be explained by reference to a school climate that encourages levels of student effort above and beyond the levels encouraged in individual classrooms... Increasing teachers' involvement in the difficult task of making good decisions, and introducing improved practices must be at the heart of school leadership. There is no simple short cut. (p. 25)

Wahlstrom (2012) grouped instructional leadership practices into two complementary categories: *Instructional Ethos* and *Instructional Actions*. School leader efforts in the *Instructional Ethos* category aim to build a culture that supports continual professional learning. "Principals whose teachers rate them high on *Instructional Ethos* emphasize the value of research-based strategies and are able to apply them in the local setting" (p. 68). Wahlstrom found that setting a tone and developing a vision for student learning and teacher growth is present in high-performing schools of all grade levels, K-12. The second category– *Instructional Actions* – involves explicit engagement with individual teachers about their own professional growth and is more evident in

elementary schools than in secondary settings. *Instructional Actions* include direct observations and conversations with teachers in classrooms and in team meetings.

Professional Learning

Evidence supporting the importance of professional learning was claimed in 21 of the 33 studies reported in Leithwood's (2008, 2010a) review. This was the largest number of studies reporting evidence about any of the 12 dimensions of high-performing districts. Strategies to optimize the benefits of professional development, according to this evidence involve:

1. Ensuring that the time and money allocated to professional learning reflects its value to the district;
2. Refocusing routine institutional practices in the service of professional development;
3. Aligning the focus of professional development with district and school improvement initiatives;
4. Differentiating professional development opportunities to reflect the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers; and
5. Using contemporary learning theory as the foundation for designing professional development methods.

Leithwood (2011) indicated that the central priority awarded to professional development in highly successful and learning focused districts is reflected in institutional practices that would normally be devoted to routine administrative matters. For example, the monthly meetings many districts have with their principals involve delivery of information and discussion of district management issues. In contrast, high performing districts dedicate this valuable time to the continuing professional development of principals.

The uncontested focus on student learning and the improvement of instruction in highly successful and learning focused districts is accompanied by careful alignment of professional development. At both the district and school levels, time spent on professional learning is clearly aimed at providing staff with the knowledge and skills needed to accomplish the improvement goals established by the district and school (Leithwood, 2008). As Firestone and Riehl (2005) concluded: "districts play a key role in supporting instructional reform by being the primary designers and deliverers of learning opportunities for teachers, and if they do so in a focused, coherent fashion they can influence teaching practice" (p. 316).

Several studies have referred to the key features of this type of professional learning. Pritchard and Marshall's (2002) study of "healthy" districts – districts that, among other things, produced better than average achievement – found that effective district-led professional learning (a) addressed fundamental issues of curriculum and instruction as part of an integrated district strategy; (b) was driven by a shared district focus on learning; and (c) included a shared school focus aligned with district vision. In these districts, consistent district purpose came before individual selection or preference, and there was an expectation that professional learning was a responsibility of everyone in the district. In a similar vein, Opfer, Pedder, and Lavicza (2007) determined that the relationship between reform efforts and improvements in student achievement depended on what teachers knew and did in their classrooms, a consequence of their professional learning. Coherent and aligned professional learning provided by districts, according to this study, has three key features: (a) consistency of focus: teachers have opportunities to develop in-depth knowledge on a specific subject or topic; (b) extended and distributed time spent on professional learning to promote long-term change; and (c) the

systematic provision of learning opportunities that model the instructional approaches teachers are expected to employ, including problem solving, learning in authentic settings, and the examination of actual student work.

An increasing body of evidence ties effective professional learning to positive changes in teaching practice. Timperley (2011) observed that when professional learning is not driven by identified student and teacher needs, teachers might find the experience interesting but in the absence of a need to solve a specific problem of practice or to improve a particular outcome for students, there is little urgency or motivation to change and improve (p. 47). Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, and Fung (2007) described professional learning as an intentional, ongoing, and systematic process and noted that "the term *professional development* has taken on connotations of delivering some kind of information to teachers in order to influence practice whereas *professional learning* implies an internal process through which individuals create professional knowledge" (p. 3). Bredeson and Johansson (2000) defined professional learning as "opportunities that engage teachers' creative and reflective capacities to strengthen their practice" (p. 387).

SUMMARY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section presented the research literature that informed our collective case study in three parts. Following a short review of the evidence of the district leadership impact on student success, an overview of the larger conceptual frame that shaped this study was provided through reference to relevant components of the *Alberta Framework.* Research on the more specific district practices that impact student outcomes was then reviewed in five areas: (a) a jurisdiction wide focus on student learning, (b) the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, (c) system efficacy (d) expecting and supporting instructional leadership at the both the jurisdiction and (e) school levels, and the research informed approaches to professional learning.

These five dimensions are displayed below in Figure 2.2 make up the conceptual framework that guided and shaped data collection, data analysis, and interpretation in this study. We now turn to an overview of our research design in Section Three.

Figure 2.2: Superintendents Who Lead Learning – Conceptual Framework
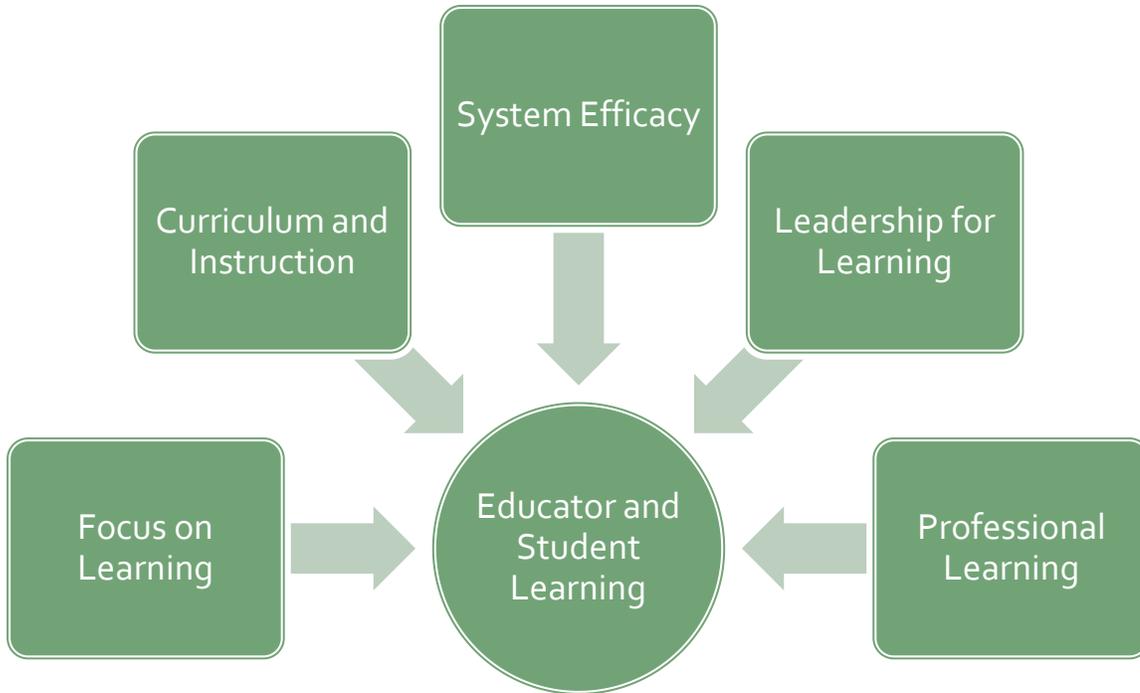
Research Design

The collective case study design that guided our research is outlined in this section, which consists of the following eight parts: (a) research purpose, (b) research question, (c) research design, (d) selection of the six cases, (e) data collection, (f) individual case analysis, (g) cross-case analysis, and (h) triangulation. The study was conducted within the protocols of the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

Superintendents Who Lead Learning was designed to contribute to the field of system based instructional leadership. The aim was to provide insights into various ways that superintendency teams lead educator and student learning in highly successful and learning focused school jurisdictions.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research question guided our study:

> *In what ways do successful superintendency teams lead educator and student learning?*

RESEARCH DESIGN

We utilized a mixed method collective case study design to address the research question with the intent of illustrating and illuminating ways through which selected Alberta school superintendency teams lead educator and student learning. In keeping with mixed methods principles and assumptions, qualitative and quantitative methods were combined to provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by its own (Creswell, 2012). The rationale for using a mixed methods approach was to gain insights from both quantitative and qualitative data. The online survey that contributed to Section Five's cross-case analysis enhanced our triangulation efforts through anonymous data gathering from participants in four of the six case settings. The survey also provided an opportunity to further test a revised and not-yet-widely used instrument. The qualitative interviews, focus groups, field notes, observations, documents, and artifacts allowed for a rich and in-depth exploration of perspectives in each of the six cases.

Data collection and analysis in the six school jurisdiction cases were informed by collective case study or multicase methods (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995, 2006; Yin, 2009). 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, 2007). "*Bounded* means that the case is separated for research in terms of time, place or some physical boundaries" (Creswell, 2012, p. 465). In collective case study, multiple cases – generally four to ten – are described and cross-referenced to better understand the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenon investigated within the bounded system of the Alberta school system in 2014 was "school and jurisdiction leader perceptions of the ways superintendency teams in successful and learning focused school jurisdictions lead educator and student learning". Such inquiry called for a range of research methods to do justice to the complexity of the case and to facilitate cross-case analysis and explanation.

Yin (2009) contended, "mixed methods research can permit investigators to address more complicated research questions and collect a richer and stronger array of evidence than can be accomplished by any single method alone" (p. 63). The mixed methods component of our research design placed emphasis on the qualitative data, which was augmented by quantitative data during the cross-case analysis. Each data source was collected independently and then analyzed separately. The quantitative and qualitative data were then integrated during the final stages of data analysis, following processes outlined by Creswell (2012); Merriam (1998); Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014); and Stake (2006).

As a former school superintendent and two former deputy superintendents with more than 60 years of experience on senior leadership teams in five Alberta school jurisdictions, we have tried to transparently locate ourselves as researchers through all phases of this study. Our histories as jurisdiction leaders as well as our lengthy involvements on the provincial executive of the College of Alberta School Superintendents *positioned* us as *insiders* in this research (Andres, p. 18). From this position, we were able to gain access to school jurisdiction personnel, documents, and artifacts quite readily. Through our vantage points as experienced members of the superintendency and as career long advocates of *overall instructional leadership* we were able to continuously collect, analyze, and interpret data through the lens of our professional experiences. As researchers who have transitioned away from the daily life worlds of practicing educational leaders and into the academic and consulting domains, we were also positioned as *outsiders* in this research. From this vantage point, we were consciously committed to adhering to the principles of mixed methods and collective case study research. We were also diligent in critically establishing a clear *chain of evidence* from the research question through the multiple sources of data to our findings and assertions and back to the question (Yin, 2009, p.p. 122-123). Throughout the study we aspired to meet Yin's (2009) expectations:

> Case study investigators therefore need to feel comfortable in addressing procedural uncertainties during the course of a study. Other desirable traits include the ability to ask good questions, "listen," be adaptive and flexible, have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, and know how to avoid bias. (p. 69)

SELECTION OF SIX HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL AND LEARNING FOCUSED SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

Our collective case study focussed on six Alberta school jurisdictions as *instrumental cases* (Creswell, 2012) to illustrate and illuminate ways through which Alberta school superintendency teams lead educator and student learning. Evidence from multiple-case studies is "often considered more compelling, and the study is therefore regarded as being more robust" (Yin, 2009, p. 53) and is a "common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings" Merriam (1998, p. 40). The determination of the six specific cases was purposeful in two major respects. First, we selected six school jurisdictions that could be described as "highly successful" and "focused on learning." In the province of Alberta there are many school jurisdictions that could be described in these ways. With the help of the Ministry of Education, we considered jurisdictions whose Annual Educational Results Reports showed strengths on three measures: (a) student achievement; (b) provincial survey results (on such factors as safe and caring environment, school satisfaction, and program quality); and (c) school completion rates.

In the next phase of the selection process, we consulted with a small group of respected educators who had worked with jurisdiction leaders across the province. With this input, we generated a list of jurisdictions viewed as particularly "focused on learning." From these lists, we made our final selections with the intent of achieving a representative mixture of public and separate; urban and rural; and large and small school jurisdictions. We further decided to limit consideration to jurisdictions that had not previously been studied in research conducted through the support of the College of Alberta School Superintendents (Brandon, Hanna, & Rhyason, 2013; Friesen & Locke, 2010).

Second, within each of the six jurisdictions we invited school principals, middle level leaders, and superintendency team members to participate in our study. Our decision to focus on these three groups of educators was premised on the notion that individuals occupying such positions would be well versed in the jurisdictions approaches to educator and student learning. Moreover, we further expected that these individuals would be interested in the content of our study and would be comfortable in responding to our individual or focus group questions. Though interview data were gathered separately from each group in each jurisdiction, their perspectives were merged into one case unit for purposes of analysis. In the cross-case synthesis, however, the survey data are reported across the cases in three intermediate units: principals, central office leaders, (middle level leaders) and superintendency teams members.

Table 3.1. Jurisdiction Demographic Information

Jurisdiction	Students	Teachers FTE	Schools	Jurisdiction Notes
Chinook's Edge School Division	10,768	580	43	Large Rural Central Alberta
St. Albert Public Schools	7,202	387	14	Small Urban Edmonton Region
Westwind School Division * plus 19 Hutterite Brethren schools	4,326	248	13*	Small Rural Southern Alberta
Holy Family Catholic Regional Division	2,165	158	9	Small Urban / Rural NW Alberta
Fort McMurray Catholic Schools	5,482	315	10	Small Urban NE Alberta
Calgary Board of Education	110,165	6,035	225	Large Urban Calgary Region

Table 3.1 provides an overview of selected demographic information about the six school jurisdictions arranged in the chronological order of our data collection visits. The jurisdiction list includes two northern jurisdictions (Fort McMurray Catholic and Holy Family); two separate jurisdiction (Fort McMurray Catholic and Holy Family); two urban jurisdictions: one small (St. Albert Public) and the other large (Calgary Board of Education); one southern jurisdiction (Westwind); one central (Chinook's Edge); one Calgary area (Calgary Board of Education); and one Edmonton area (St. Albert Public).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In keeping with the requirements of case study research (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995, 2006; Yin, 2009), multiple sources of evidence were gathered and analyzed during our inquiry. In maintaining a clear *chain of evidence* (Yin, 2009), our interview protocols and survey items were derived from the study's five-dimension conceptual framework presented earlier in Figure 2.2. The framework was then used as an organizational guide for the coding, descriptive, and report writing processes we employed. Research team members travelled to each of the six jurisdiction contexts to collect data through 23 focus groups and nine individual interviews. In total, 114 educational leaders participated in our inquiry: 53 principals, 33 middle level leaders, and 28 superintendency team leaders – including seven chief superintendents. During the course of the year one superintendent retired. Both the retiring and the new superintendent were interviewed, thus bringing the number of superintendents in the six jurisdictions to seven.

Focus Group and Individual Interviews

A total of 23 focus group interviews were conducted in March, April, and June of 2014 in the six school jurisdiction offices. Sixteen individual interviews were also conducted. Ten of the individual interviews were completed in the summer and the fall of 2014. The final interview took place in February 2015. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the 114 focus group and individual participants from the six school jurisdictions. In four of the first five jurisdictions visited, two members of the research team conducted three one-hour focus group interviews and one individual interview with the superintendent during a single-day visit. Each researcher interviewed a small group of principals to start each data collection day. We then combined forces for the remaining two focus group interviews: one with the middle level leaders and the other with the superintendency team. Four of the five data collection days ended with a 30-minute individual interview with the chief superintendent. In the fifth case, one of the researchers interviewed the chief superintendent at another mutually convenient time.

In the sixth school jurisdiction (CBE), three one-hour focus group sessions were undertaken by one of the researchers. Two additional focus group interviews were conducted with middle level leaders and third session engaged two members of the superintendency team. The other 14 CBE participants provided their perspectives through individual interviews of varying lengths in variety of locations. Four of the 14 CBE interviews were conducted by telephone.

Table 3.2. Focus Group and Individual Interview Participant Summary

Date	Location	Principal Participants	Middle Level Leader Participants	Superintendency Team Members Participants	Total Participants
March 3, 2014	Chinook's Edge School Division Office, Innisfail	7	4	6	17
March 6, 2014	St. Albert Public Schools District Office	10	5	4	19
March 10, 2014	Westwind School Division Office, Cardston	10	2	5	17
April 17, 2014	Holy Family Catholic Regional Division Office, Peace River	7	5	4	16
April 28, 2014	Catholic Education Centre, Fort McMurray	10	10	5	25
June, 2014 – February 2015	Education Centre, Calgary Board of Education	9	7	4	20
	Total Participants	**53**	**33**	**28**	**114**

Our general *constructivist* approach to research interviewing aligned with the following description by Brinkman and Kvale:

> A research interview is flexible, context sensitive, and dependent on the personal interrelationship of the interviewer and interviewee. Rather than attempt to eliminate the influence of the personal interaction of interviewer and interviewee, we might regard the person of the interviewer as the primary research instrument for obtaining knowledge, which puts strong demands on the quality of the interviewer's craftsmanship. (2015, p. 198)

As individual and focus group interviewers, we sought rich, specific, and relevant perspectives from the interviewees. We tried to use time effectively, while giving participants ample opportunity to explain their views. To a large extent, the meanings of participant responses and comments were probed and clarified throughout each interview. We attempted to verify our interpretations of participant answers over the course of the interview. We believe that these intentional interview strategies adhere to the criteria for effective qualitative interviewing itemized by Brinkman and Kvale (2015, p. 192).

Among the strengths of focus group interviews is the ability to effectively and efficiently collect in-depth information that is relatively easy to understand. Focus group interviews can provide both shared understandings while at the same time shedding light on different perspectives (Creswell, 2012). Focus group interviewing is seen to be effective with groups of similar individuals, such as we have just described (Creswell, 2012).

Jurisdiction and School Leader Surveys

The *Jurisdiction and School Leader Survey* asked participants to reflect on the 50 items related to jurisdiction level instructional leadership from their perspectives as members of the superintendency team, central office leaders, or school principals. The purpose of surveys was in keeping with what Creswell (2012) described as an *exploratory sequential mixed methods design,* in which quantitative data is collected to help explain findings and themes from earlier collected qualitative data (p. 543). As with our qualitative data collection, participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of their involvement and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. They were further informed that the online survey was administered by QuestionPro©, an American software company. As such, their responses are subject to U.S. laws, including the USA Patriot Act and that risks associated with participation are minimal, however, similar to those associated with many email programs, such as Hotmail© and social utilities spaces such as Facebook© and MySpace©.

The 50 survey questions and prompts employed three, four, and five point scales and were organized into the 12 Leadership Dimensions of the *Alberta Framework*. In five of the school jurisdictions participants were invited to compete the survey through an email invitation shortly after their focus group participation in the spring of 2014. The survey was not distributed to the sixth jurisdiction because of the unanticipated extension to data collection time frame. A total of 48 surveys out of a total possible of 77 were returned from leaders in four of the jurisdictions. A summary of the survey data collected is provided in Section Five in the cross case analysis section. Survey results have not been disaggregated by jurisdiction. The distribution of survey participants is shown on Figure 3.3 below: 67% of respondents were principals, 16% were central office leaders (middle level leaders), and the remaining 17% were superintendency team members.

Figure 3.3. Distribution of Survey Participants by Position
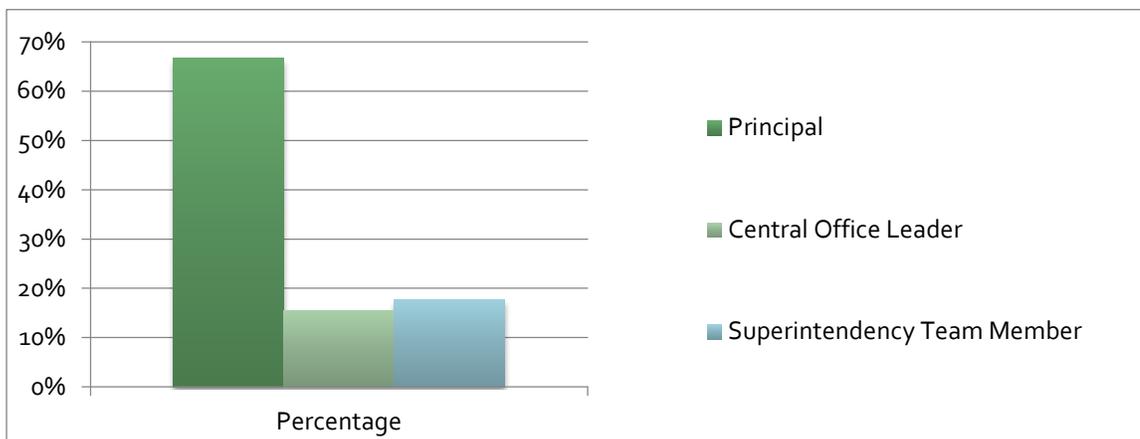
Table 3.4 compares the number and percentage of principals, central office leaders (middle level leaders), and superintendency team members who participated in both qualitative and quantitative forms of data collection.

Table 3.4. Interview and Survey Participant Comparison

Data Source	Principal Participants	Middle Level Leader Participants	Superintendency Team Members Participants	Total Participants	Participating Jurisdictions
Interviews - Number	53	33	28	114	6
Surveys – Number	31	9	8	48	4
Interviews - Percent	46%	30%	24%	100%	6
Surveys – Percent	67%	16%	17%	100%	4

Individual Case Analysis

By relying on our conceptual framework to guide data collection, analysis, and interpretation we followed the consistent advice of the key scholars who most influenced our methodological choices: Brinkman and Kvale (2015), Merriam (1998), Stake (1995, 2006), and Yin (2009) All interview and focus group data, field notes and documents provided during the field visits or acquired from the Internet were reviewed and analyzed through iterative processes of reading, re-reading, theme development, and review. Analysis of these qualitative 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).

From our very first case visit to Chinook's Edge School Division in March 2014, the interactive nature of data collection and preliminary analysis became an important part of our process (Merriam, 1998, p. 148). Throughout the fieldwork period we were engaged in simultaneous data collection and analysis. As a regular practice during our car or airplane travels at the end of each data collection day, two of the research team members reviewed interview notes and engaged in reflective dialogue that generated tentative themes at both the case and the cross-case levels.

As we proceeded into more detailed analysis at the individual case level, a third researcher read the interview and focus group summaries in their entirety to a get a sense of their content and context. Subsequent readings of the texts looked for emerging themes and descriptive details that would shortly thereafter be fashioned into early drafts of the case descriptions. 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 case descriptions. We followed Stake's (2006) advice by having a single research team member do the more complete analysis and report writing for each of the first five cases (p. 42).

The methods used to collect and analyze data, to generate emerging themes, and to write up the report in the considerably larger and more complex CBE case varied to some degree from the used in the five other cases. As Stake (2006) noted with reference to multiple case studies, "The methods actually used in cases may be quite similar from case to case, or may be quite different" (p. 30).

In all six cases, focus group and interview summaries were sent to selected participants for member checking verification. Drafts of the jurisdiction case descriptions, emerging themes, and summaries below were sent to members of each superintendency team for review and comment prior to being finalized.

Cross-Case Analysis

The primary purpose of this investigation was to enhance understanding of the phenomenon of *overall* instructional leadership as practiced by superintendency teams in highly successful and learning focused school jurisdictions. Building on the findings and emerging themes from each individual case, our cross-case analysis identified nine larger themes. In so doing, we were guided by processes outlined by Creswell (2012), Merriam (1998), and Stake (2006).

Through the cross-case analysis and in keeping with the principles and assumptions of mixed methods research, qualitative and quantitative data were combined to provide a better understanding of the research purpose and question than either method by itself (Creswell, 2012). Though this theme development process was ongoing and continuous over the entire course of the study, four distinct stages can be itemized. From the second data collection day onward, we began to identify and discuss commonalities among the cases and to generate a list of possible themes. In a second stage, following data collection from all six settings, one team member took the lead in formalizing and describing the themes. As Stake (2006) advised "it is best to have one author read across the cases to work out an understanding of the phenomenon as a whole after examining all of the reports carefully" (p. 42). In stage three a second researcher reviewed the surveys and began blending the two data sources. In keeping with what Creswell (2012) described as an *exploratory sequential mixed methods design,* the quantitative data helped to explain findings and themes from earlier collected and analyzed qualitative data (p. 543). In stage four, selected research literature was consulted to deepen our understanding of the mixed data and to aid our interpretations and assertions. Throughout the process all three of us were engaged in critically reviewing the analysis as it evolved into findings, themes, and assertions through ongoing discussions.

A final interpretive step in our investigation involved further consideration of the nine cross-case themes and the possibility of transferability to other contexts. Five major assertions about the ways in which successful superintendency teams lead educator and student learning emerged from this step. These five *analytical generalizations* are based on the research team's reasoned judgement and assertational logic about the extent to which the findings and themes of this study can be used to guide superintendency team practice in other settings. These assertions have been framed as five *lessons for superintendency teams* who seek to more effectively lead learning in their jurisdiction contexts.

Triangulation

By design, the research team undertook a number of deliberate strategies to provide assurance that accurate information had been obtained and that our interpretations were warranted. Stake (2006) indicated that triangulation "has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, but it is also verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (2006, p. 37).

We worked toward triangulation through four main approaches that are common in case studies. First, we utilized more than one research method and used several data sources – individual interviews, focus group interviews, field notes, observations, documents, and an online survey. Second, the three research team members frequently worked in pairs and less frequently as a triad to ensure that data sources were viewed, analyzed, and interpreted by multiple observers. Third, we were committed to repetitious data gathering and overlapping critical review. In addition to member checking interview summaries, selected participants from each school jurisdiction were asked to critically respond to draft case reports. The responses led to a number of improvements. Conference presentations of preliminary findings provided yet other opportunities to garner feedback and to make adjustment (Brandon, Hanna, & Negropontes, 2014a, 2014b). Fourth, we consulted a variety of informed participants – school principals, central office leaders, members of superintendency teams and chief superintendents – to illustrate and illuminate the phenomenon under investigation: school and jurisdiction leader perceptions of the ways superintendency teams in successful and learning focused school jurisdictions lead educator and student learning.

SUMMARY

Section Three has provided details of the collective case study plan we used to collect and analyze data from a variety of sources. Qualitative data were gathered from a total of 114 school principals, middle level jurisdiction leaders, and superintendency team participants through 23 focus group and 16 interviews. Field notes, artifacts, and documents also contributed to the findings generated for each of the six cases described in the next section. The quantitative data that we gathered from 48 participants in four of the jurisdictions has been utilized in the cross-case analysis presented in Section Five.

Six Highly Successful School Jurisdictions

The purpose of this study was to provide insights into various ways that superintendency teams lead educator and student learning in highly successful and learning focused school jurisdictions. Our focus was on *overall* instructional leadership – *leading learning* – as practiced by educational leaders at the school jurisdiction level. This section illustrates how superintendency teams lead learning through six detailed descriptions of such work in the following Alberta school jurisdictions: Chinook's Edge School Division, St. Albert Public Schools, Westwind School Division, Holy Family Catholic Regional Division, Fort McMurray Catholic Schools, and the Calgary Board of Education.

The case descriptions were based on the interview, documentary, and observational data we collected through the lens of our five dimension conceptual framework portrayed in Figure 2.2 on page 18.

Each of the six cases presented in this section provides a snapshot of one of Alberta's 62 school jurisdictions. The focus of each case is on the efforts of the superintendency team to create and sustain conditions that enhance educator and student learning in its specific geographic, social, economic, and educational setting. Before moving into the first case, a very brief overview of the provincial school system is provided.

THE ALBERTA EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The province of Alberta is recognized as one of the world's most successful education systems (Alberta Education, 2011; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Barber, Whelan, & Clark, 2010; Hargreaves, Crocker, Davis, McEwen, Sahlberg, Sumara, Shirley, & Hughes, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, 2012a; Levin, 2010). Students in Alberta consistently score well on international assessments such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS).

Alberta's school system serves the province's 606,627 students in 1,868 schools organized into 62 school jurisdictions. The system employs 41,000 full and part-time teachers, each of whom is professionally prepared and provincially certificated in accordance with the provincial *Teaching Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 1997). In addition to their university level teacher education, beginning teachers are only granted permanent certification on the recommendation of their school superintendents following two full years of successful teaching. Individuals wanting to become teachers need to have a Bachelor of Education or possess a recognized university degree supplemented by completion of a teacher preparation program leading to a provincially approved *Interim Certificate*.

Within Alberta's public school system, 135, 720 (22.3%) of the students attend one of the 372 Catholic schools, 5565 (1%) attend 34 Francophone schools, and another 7,547 (1.2%) are enrolled in one of the 18 public charter schools operated by the 13 public charter school authorities. Public schools in the province are operated by 41 public, 16 Catholic and five Francophone publically elected school boards. Of the choices available to parents in the province, only 4% opt for private education (Alberta Education, 2012).

Three foundational features characterize public education provision in Alberta. First, all 35, 000 full and part time teachers are professionally prepared and provincially certificated in accordance with the provincial *Teaching Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 1997). Second, all public school students in the province have benefitted from a centralized, but collaboratively developed and high quality curriculum. Though the framework for developing curriculum is undergoing revision, the general processes for establishing learning outcomes for provincial curricula have been in place for decades and are generally well supported by teachers. Third, Alberta has had an effective, but moderate provincial curriculum based testing program for most of its history as a province (Brandon, 2005). In the previous provincial examination scheme, all grade six and nine students were tested yearly in four core subjects and grade three students are examined in language arts and mathematics. During the time of our study, grade 12 students were awarded 50% of the final grade on the basis of provincial examinations in academic subject areas. A revised assessment system is presently being implemented.

SIX HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS

The six school jurisdictions we selected for this study can be described as *highly successful* and *focused on learning*. As we explained in Section Three of this report, many Alberta school jurisdictions could be described in these ways. From a longer list of jurisdictions, we made our final determinations to gain insights from the perspectives of jurisdiction and school leaders in a range of rural and urban settings, public and separate school boards, and a variety of geographic locations across the province. We further decided to focus on jurisdictions that had not previously been studied through research conducted through the support of the College of Alberta School Superintendents (Brandon, Hanna, & Rhyason, 2013; Friesen & Locke, 2010).

The data collected from the focus group and individual interviews, field notes, and documents were organized using the study's conceptual framework (Figure 2.2), which is based on the following five leadership dimensions from the *Alberta Framework*:

Dimension 1: Focus on Student Learning

Dimension 2: Curriculum and Instruction

Dimension 4: System Efficacy

Dimension 5: Leadership for Learning

Dimension 6: Professional Learning

We decided to frame our interview questions and to report our findings within these five dimensions on the basis of our analysis of the research on the more specific relationships among these five areas of jurisdictional leadership practices and outcomes related to student success. The five dimensions constitute the conceptual lens through which the study was conducted.

In each of the six case descriptions that follow, we open with a brief description of the jurisdiction primarily shaped by documentary evidence and the jurisdiction's website. Next, a short description of our data collection process in the jurisdiction is provided. Our research findings are then described in each of the five dimensions. We end each case with the key themes that emerged in the specific illustrative setting. In following this pattern, our work was informed by Merriam's (1998) advice to balance *particular description* (quotes from people and field notes), *general description* (tells readers whether the comments are typical or unique), and *interpretive commentary* (provides the framework for understanding) (p. 235).

The cases are presented in the order in which we gathered the data over the spring, summer, and fall of 2014: Chinook's Edge School Division, St. Albert Public Schools, Westwind School Division, Holy Family Catholic Regional Division, Fort McMurray Catholic Schools, and the Calgary Board of Education.

CHINOOK'S EDGE SCHOOL DIVISION

Chinook's Edge School Division spans a large rural area, encompassing Mountain View County and Red Deer County in Central Alberta on the economically vibrant Queen Elizabeth Highway corridor. With approximately 10,800 students Chinook's Edge is one of the largest rural jurisdictions in terms of population. However, with some towns approaching city status the jurisdiction is a combination of rural and urban sensibilities. The jurisdiction has 43 schools located in towns, villages and rural areas with a variety of configurations including pre-kindergarten to grade 12 schools, primary, middle, and high schools, Career High, a Christian school, three Hutterite Brethren Colony schools, two residential schools for students involved in the young offenders system and a school for medically fragile students.

Leading Learning in the Chinook's Edge School Division

Two members of our research team visited Chinook's Edge on March 3, 2014. We interviewed seven principals, four middle level leaders and six superintendency team members in 60-minute focus group interviews. One researcher also conducted a 30-minute interview with the superintendent in April 2014.

Focus on Student Learning

Three years before our visit, Chinook's Edge engaged in a lengthy collaborative and transparent visioning process under the guidance of new superintendent Kurt Sacher that resulted in the drafting of the current shared mission and vision statement. This renewal of the Chinook's Edge focus on student learning provided a platform for the jurisdiction to implement their focus on developing the Quality Learning Environment model (QLE). Participants identified the key question asked when making decisions has remained, "How does this impact the student?"

This laser focus on student learning was not new as it was built on a tradition of jurisdiction wide engagement in projects like the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). It was described by leaders as more of an "evolution, than a revolution" aligned with the Alberta Education Inspiring Education direction. This focus is actualized through monthly Instructional Leadership (IL) visits as the team of district leaders meet with the school leaders at their schools. QLE and vision and missions posters that were presented by the members of the Central Office Leader Team (COLT) to each classroom teacher are reminders of the focus on student learning.

Distractions are kept to a minimum as budget processes have been simplified. Support staffs are trained to deal with management issues, leaving leaders available to focus on instructional leadership.

Curriculum and Instruction

Chinook's Edge has developed a very structured approach to providing support to schools to ensure all students are benefiting from high quality instruction. A member of the superintendent team said that actions are guided by the question, "How will we know our work is making a difference?"

Through restructuring, one rung of management was eliminated bringing the senior leadership closer to the schools and aligning services such as technology closer to learning support. From the evidence based hiring processes to ensure the best fit of teacher and school administration; to support for beginning and experienced educators and support staff; to the Learning Support Team (LST), Chinook's Edge focuses on the QLE.

Besides the dedicated IL meetings to talk about teaching and learning once a month, a COLT team member works with each principal to develop leadership goals and a growth plan using a structured format that can be revisited. The LST model focuses on breaking down silos to have school teams support all students through inclusive education. This is modeled from the jurisdiction leadership team as the departments responsible for inclusive education and curriculum and instruction demonstrate alignment and collaboration through their work. Structures like these ensure there is increased awareness and understanding of what is occurring in each school and ongoing monitoring of teaching and learning.

All Chinook's Edge employees are engaged in developing and implementing growth plans with support from supervisors. They also participate in professional learning activities. Four school-based collaborative days, driven by the teachers and educational assistants, are well planned and supported by the principal in alignment with the QLE model. As one principal commented, "Teachers know that we know what they are working on and they like that we know."

System Efficacy

System efficacy in Chinook's Edge is built through sustained and intense focus on student learning, which extends to increasing adult expertise and understanding, and is enhanced through the creation of structures to provide support, and create opportunities for feedback and input. Plans are not merely completed for compliance purposes, but living documents that are revisited, discussed and supported. Principals note they are often asked, "Are you getting everything you need from our department? How can we help you?"

Chinook's Edge has created a transparent, collaborative, interdependent learning culture that is focused on results by providing a structure that invites input and dialogue. The development of "matters" groups for teachers, parents, students, and central office support staff; professional learning community meetings for grade level or specialist groups across the jurisdiction; monthly meetings with all school administration and jurisdiction office administration (ADCOS); bi-monthly School Administrator Team meetings with representative principals, and vice-principals (SAT), and monthly Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) member school visits provide venues to vet ideas, share concerns and resolve issues.

The COLT roadshow goes to each community once a year. All school staffs from the community gather in one venue to hear the superintendent share the jurisdiction goals and challenges and to ask questions. In addition, there are two district principals that provide support to schools to implement plans or deal with issues. To deal with the allocation of resources a new model was developed over the course of one year. The Resource Allocation Working Group (RAWG) worked collaboratively to ensure an equitable model of resource allocation for all schools.

Leadership for Learning

The instructional leadership focus has been a significant shift in Chinook's Edge. A principal noted that five years ago emails from jurisdiction office were mostly about compliance and management. Now principals are held accountable for teaching and learning and plans are formal, relevant and research based. Four words summarize the approach of the superintendent team that leads learning – focus, flexibility, expectations, and evidence.

The monthly school based meetings with the COLT members are perceived as crucial. Notes are taken, opportunity for reflection is provided and follow-up is expected. School visits provide an opportunity for all questions. Trust levels are high as principals note they are vulnerable and open as they share their challenges with colleagues and jurisdiction office at both school-based and jurisdiction meetings. Principals who are experiencing difficulty implementing the strategies in their plans are supported by the jurisdiction principals or other members of the COLT team. There have been times when the superintendent or other team members have had crucial conversation with school leaders, but it is "mostly, support, support, support".

Two University of Lethbridge researchers, Dr. David Townsend and Dr. Pamela Adams, have supported this learning environment through a four-year instructional leadership action research project. This project focuses on building the capacity of leaders so they can in turn build capacity of teachers. They have provided a structure for meetings and reflection questions and taught leaders questioning techniques to engage teachers in reflecting on their learning.

A series of principal comments reflect the success of the focus on instructional leadership for learning in Chinook's Edge:

- We are asked and ask, "What's the evidence that this is making a difference for kids?"

- The change in our culture has a momentum of its own. Learning and teaching have worked their ways in to conversations on a daily basis. It's the way we do things here. Our focus and conversations center on student learning.

- We are engaging in deep conversations with our "reluctant teachers". There is such a strong base of good teaching and so many teachers reflect on and change their practice. This pushes and pulls most teachers along. There are few places to hide.

- We are doing it. It is not being done to us.

- Success is based on relationships – relational trust – made a great difference.

Professional Learning

Professional learning is foundational to the work of Chinook's Edge. The focus of professional leaning is aligned to the QLE and supports changing practice to improve learning for students. There is less jurisdiction wide professional development and more focus site-based professional learning, as well as grade level and specialist cohort learning. Learning and collaboration permeates the culture of meetings and designated professional development opportunities. Out of jurisdiction professional development must be purposeful. International professional opportunities are vetted through COLT to ensure alignment with the QLE goals. There are no fads or prescriptions, but instead there is a focus on finding the approach that fits the school context.

Participants highlighted a few specific areas of professional learning. Literacy was cited   as an important focus. The research and experience that came out of AISI has been integrated, particularly in the Learning Support Team. The integration of technology is a struggle, but does not drive teaching and learning. Teachers are encouraged to pursue innovation in a supportive environment. Social media is utilized to connect colleagues and learn from one another.

Emerging Themes

Chinook's Edge is guided by a strong vision that is implemented purposefully by the superintendent and the leadership team through organizational structures that enable collaboration, leadership and alignment. The Quality Learning Environment model is a foundation that supports a laser like focus on the core work of the jurisdiction. External expertise is used to develop and support local expertise, particularly in the development of instructional leadership. The jurisdiction has built on past learning like those gained through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement to ensure scaffolding of professional learning.

ST. ALBERT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Situated northeast of Edmonton in the city of St. Albert, the St. Albert Public School District is one of two urban school jurisdictions serving the city of 60,000. This area of the province has thrived due to the oil and gas industry and economic activity brought by related support services. Beginning in 1958 with one school and 130 students, St. Albert Public School District has grown into an urban school jurisdiction with approximately 7,200 students in 14 schools, including seven kindergarten to grade six schools, a kindergarten to grade nine school, three junior high schools, two high schools, and an outreach school.

Leading Learning in St. Albert Public Schools

Two members of the research team visited the St. Albert Public School District central office on March 6, 2014. We interviewed ten principals, five middle level leaders and four superintendency team members in 60-minute focus group interviews. We then conducted a 30-minute interview with superintendent Barry Wowk to conclude the data collection day.

Focus on Student Learning

The evolution of the St. Albert Public's shared vision focus on student learning began several years ago. The jurisdiction has professional learning communities that have focused on learning over time. As was noted by one participant, "It is more than looking at teaching. The focus is on learning."

The vision was revisited again over the past year and was affirmed. It was described as a living vision that was refreshed through the Leading for Learning Initiative. The process also engaged participants in Effective Teaching in the New Tomorrow sessions and discussions about enhancing instruction in a rapidly changing world.

Although St. Albert Public is somewhat site-based, the Leading for Learning initiative encouraged jurisdiction wide dialogue and collaboration, reflecting the jurisdiction's centrally coordinated approach. The approach to enacting the vision is situational and contextual. Each school has a vision that aligns with the jurisdiction, but is personalized to suit the context of the school. There is no "cookie cutter model" as each school is slightly different, but as participants agreed, "The commonality among the schools is that well-being and student learning are at the heart of what we all do."

The school three-year plans align with the jurisdiction three-year plan and are focused on student centered learning. St. Albert Public is a blend of central and site-based approach with a shared focus and flexibility for each school to implement to benefit their students. The 14 principals are significantly involved in setting the district level priorities and making important direction setting decisions, but assistant principals and other stakeholders are involved as well.

Dialogue is guided by the belief that effective teaching comes from a conversation on the nature of effective teaching and will evolve over time. For example, the grassroots focus on enhancing instructional practice for literacy has become a jurisdiction-wide project. The implementation of new technology is another good example of collaboration to focus on student learning. When the jurisdiction leaders brought in interactive white boards for classrooms, everyone worked together to respond to the question, "How do we do this?"

Curriculum and Instruction

The small geographical size of the jurisdiction is considered as asset as all leaders, including the superintendent, work collaboratively to provide students with engaging forms of instruction. Principals have an opportunity to meet one to one with the superintendent, so he has insight into the schools. Trust, open communication, and responsiveness are evident in the culture. For the last five years, the jurisdiction has worked on developing a balance between centralized and site support. Special education, student services and staffing is centralized, but principals are engaged in transparent discussions at length to determine allocation of resources.

The Central Office Leaders Team (COLT) group provides support to all schools to enhance instruction. There are specialist areas, but COLT functions as a team. Some COLT members also teach part-time in schools, maintaining a strong link to the classroom. The approach is not territorial. Mentoring and relationships are foundational to providing support to school leaders and teachers. Jurisdiction coordinators in literacy, technology, and French Immersion are easily accessible to work with teachers. For example, work on literacy, collaboration on assessment, and the revision of the elementary report card have resulted in new approaches.

New positions, like the English Language Learning (ELL) support person are added to respond to emerging needs. A formal mentoring program for beginning teachers is provided over two years and has been guided by a steering committee since 2001. Ad hoc committees are formed when needed to address specific issues.

Principals and assistant principals analyze data at the school level with the support of senior leadership team members. If there is an area of need, it must be addressed. The allocation of resources is decided on at the school level. Principals can seek support, but the responsibility rests with them. The principal is viewed as the best person to know what to do to improve teaching and learning, but help is available from senior administrators and colleagues. The Administrators' Council monthly meetings with school administration and senior administration provide another layer for curriculum and instruction support.

Jurisdiction leaders felt the loss of the AISI support for curriculum and instruction. Although they were worried about maintaining an umbrella to frame capacity building, they have, nevertheless, continued to effectively work together. An important legacy of AISI was the establishment of a culture of collaboration. A concrete example of this collaboration was cited as the development of a common exit document for Kindergarten. The process of collaboration on the document was seen as valuable as the final product. As well, the St. Albert district continues to collaborate beyond the jurisdiction as an active member of the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium (ERLC) and the Alberta Assessment Consortium (AAC).

Through collaboration, the School Board, senior administration, and school principals found resources to continue the AISI focus on literacy. The focus on literacy is considered the biggest driver in the jurisdiction. The Enhancing Literacy Project was expanded from the primary grades to grades four to eight. School plans align with the jurisdiction focus. However, the focus is contextualized to meet the needs of students at each school.

System Efficacy

St. Albert Public has established structures to ensure system-wide collaboration to build capacity to improve teaching and learning. Although outside expertise is sometimes sought and the jurisdiction engages with educators across the province at gatherings such as CASS Leadership Learning Network, the jurisdiction focuses on using the expertise within the system. Developing a strong external and internal network was cited as critical to build relationships. AISI was viewed as an important catalyst to build expertise across the system. As a participants noted, "One of the biggest gifts that we received from AISI was the notion of continuous professional leaning and improvement."

The focus on system collaboration and building capacity extends to support aspects of the organization such as transportation which takes away the logistical burdens; facility services that encourage well-being and helps to create an environment that supports learning; and specialist therapist trained through the Student Heath Integrated Partnership (SHIP) to provide wrap around services for children.

Steering committees for initiatives; professional learning community groups; one on one meetings of principals with the superintendent; the administrators retreat with the Board every two years; jurisdiction organizational health committee; long service awards; professional development, including book studies and in-basket activities and administrators council are all examples of the variety of structures in place to engage and to

celebrate to build capacity. Although they can be viewed as examples of leadership and professional learning, they are also examples of how the jurisdiction builds efficacy.

Participants outlined a few structures represented by the following descriptions of stakeholder focus groups, education plans, professional growth plans, professional learning communities, and the mentorship program.

Stakeholder workshops are an important aspect of the system planning process to determine priorities and strategies. Teachers facilitate these sessions, which provides an opportunity to build teacher leadership and capacity while also engaging with stakeholders to gather input for the jurisdiction.

School education plans are aligned with the jurisdiction plan and are not just compliance documents. The school leaders present the plans to the School Board. Other school leaders, senior administrators, and COLT members are present, so there is awareness of what is happening around the jurisdiction. This is also a form of professional learning for leaders as they learn from each other.

Principals are given a lot of authority to implement their school and professional growth plans. They are trusted by senior administrators, allowed to take risks and are supported by both senior administration and COLT. In turn, the principals meet with teachers to review their professional growth plans. Just as senior administrators are aware of the varying levels of expertise of principals, principals are likewise aware that teachers have different levels of expertise. Just as COLT provides pressure and support, principals monitor and provide support for teachers.

Professional learning groups at the schools and across the jurisdiction are a key structure to implement jurisdiction and school plans. The focus is usually on curriculum as each core subject has a professional learning community. As well, professional learning communities are formed to explore particular topics, such as design a new elementary report card and study high school redesign.

The mentorship program provides support for both beginning teachers and new administrators. With about 70 participants, this program builds capacity for both beginning and experienced individuals. Both mentors and mentees experience growth, which builds system efficacy.

Leadership for Learning

There is a high level of expectation for school administration to be teaching principals and instructional leaders who are striving to improve. The Leadership for Learning Model points to a shared vision with administration at the core. To achieve this, there is support, pressure, caring, trust, and humour. There is a healthy level of competition and high levels of support amongst school leaders, so leaders do not undermine each other. The small size of the jurisdiction means that people know each other well, so strong relationships and caring are evident amongst leaders.

The senior leadership is very accessible and supportive. There is a sense that permeates the jurisdiction that, "you don't want to let the leaders down." In return, the philosophy of the senior leaders is servant leadership. The CASS Team Leadership Academy helped COLT answer the question, "How can we provide support to principals?"

There are many avenues for leadership learning for school administrators beginning with the CASS Start Right Program, to internal supports such as the mentorship program. The jurisdiction was purposeful in not establishing an exclusive "inspiring leadership" program, opting for less structure and more inclusive approach through offering mentorship for beginning administrators and opportunities for teachers to build leadership capacity.

The superintendent is sensitive to how much administrators are pulled out of their schools, so time away is carefully organized to ensure good use of time. At the administrators council meetings, administrative items are covered in the afternoon, leaving the morning component for professional development for leaders. The principal in-basket activity allows principals to present issues, ask for input, and provide solutions in a non-judgmental environment. One-to-one meetings are held on-site at schools to minimize disruption. Visits to other school districts to research such topics as inclusive education are carefully arrange to ensure an inclusive team approach and provide an opportunity to reflect on practice. Leadership activities are purposely designed as on-going conversations amongst school administrators and senior administration about effective teaching.

Professional Learning

There is an emphasis on learning together across the jurisdiction. Data is used to drive decisions, set priorities, and choose professional learning. Dialogue with all stakeholders in planning and during professional learning is considered a critical element of building capacity. For example, The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) local representatives work closely with the jurisdiction to ensure alignment of professional development activities. As well, the school board supports professional development and provides resources. This support was evident in the local allocation for professional development provided in the jurisdiction budget when AISI funding was eliminated in the provincial target funding allocation.

St. Albert Public takes a long view of professional learning. The focus on enhancing instructional capacity for literacy has evolved over several years. Since literacy is the main focus, it is integrated in multiple ways into the professional learning, including cross-curriculum activities. In addition to literacy, St. Albert Public has also focused on assessment and high school re-design.

There are multiple ways to access professional learning and self-reflection is encouraged. Much of the professional learning happens on site, but the jurisdiction does provide small and large group opportunities for professional learning. The jurisdiction brain-based learning day was an example of how the jurisdiction chose professional development activity that aligns with how people learn, brings the jurisdiction together, and provides a springboard for implementation of activities at the school level. The process was described as "cycles of learning, learning, practice, learning, practice".

Emerging Themes

St. Albert Public is a centrally coordinated school jurisdiction with a strong culture of collaboration and attention to the uniqueness of each school. The importance of trust, support, transparency, and openness permeate the jurisdiction. The focus is on improving teaching and learning and building on the gains made through AISI. Some external expertise is accessed through jurisdiction members participating in provincial events or by bringing carefully chosen experts to the jurisdiction. The goal is to grow internal expertise.

Through a variety of structures and supports the superintendent and leadership team take a purposeful leadership role in building and sustaining instruction leadership.

WESTWIND SCHOOL DIVISION

Westwind School Division is located in the southwest region of the province, encompassing an area that stretches 66 kilometers north from the Canada/US Border and 109 kilometers east to west, bounded in the west by Waterton Lakes National Park. This is a largely ranching and farming area with long distances between settlements. The jurisdiction serves approximately 4,400 students. In addition to schools situated in the towns, villages and hamlets, the jurisdiction has 19 Hutterian Brethren Colony schools. As well, there are approximately 600 aboriginal students attending school in Westwind, the majority of whom are from the Blood Reserve. Most of the student population is bussed and several schools are feeder schools for the two high schools and one grade seven to twelve school. One community hosts a small kindergarten to grade twelve school and there is one alternative grade one to twelve school with satellite campuses in two rural towns to serve the needs of the off campus students.

Leading Learning in Westwind School Division

On March 10, 2014 two researchers engaged with Westwind School Division school and jurisdiction leaders in the central office in Cardston. Ten principals, two middle level leaders, and five superintendency team members participated in 60-minute focus group interviews. The data collection day conducted a 30-minute interview with superintendent Ken Sommerfeldt.

Focus on Student Learning

Over the past four years there has been a heightened focus on student learning in Westwind through the implementation of a professional learning community approach clearly directed toward improving teaching and assessment using high effect size strategies.

The journey started with a meeting with all staff to address transformation and Alberta Education's Inspiring Education report findings. Over the course of several months the superintendent team had developed a guiding principles document, which was utilized to move the division in this direction. The document and vision were shared through professional development and administrative meetings. Bringing in external experts and professional development for teachers has supported the change initiative. Over time there has been a lot of dialogue on research informed approaches to improve student learning. The superintendent team estimates about 60 to 70 percent of the jurisdiction's educators have fully embraced collaboration to improve teaching and learning. Early resisters in the school leadership cohort are changing their views and engaging with their staffs to make changes. School leaders can see the jurisdiction administration is staying the course and remaining focused on making the shift to research based improvement.

Principals perceived there are "still bumps in the road" and some "backlash." The shift to professional learning communities and research based instructional practice is an on-going process that has met with some resistance, but some school leaders perceived that this is lessening. However, it was observed that in change

initiatives, superficial compliance and contrived collegiality are evident and one participant felt it, "seem[ed] to be increasing as expectations outpace adoption rates."

The development of trust is viewed as critical to ensure the success of the Westwind professional learning communities approach. As one participant noted, "As the initial strategic plans age, teachers are watching very carefully whether the instructional initiatives being carried out, will or will not model the instructional theories being espoused."

Curriculum and Instruction

The emphasis on instructional leadership for both principals and assistant principals is focused on engaging forms of instruction, assessment, collaboration, observation, and reflection. Westwind has worked with a variety of experts, including Rick Dufour, Dr. David Townsend and Dr. Pamela Adams. Dufour's area of expertise is the professional learning community. Townsend and Adams have worked with school and district leaders to facilitate the reflective growth of administrators and teachers. As well, concepts from the works of Robert Marzano and John Hattie on teaching strategies and Dylan Williams on assessment have been integrated into the expectations for teachers. The focus on instructional leadership and assessment had forced principals to get into classrooms.

Part of the pushback from Westwind educators in the initial stages was concern with the time away from the classroom, but with more clarity, the development of professional learning communities, a cohesive approach to teaching, and development of expertise, concerns have lessened somewhat. Jurisdiction leaders have met monthly with school leaders on instructional leadership. A coherent core of instructional practices has been developed.

System Efficacy

Under the umbrella of the professional learning community approach, Westwind senior leaders have been supportive of developing the expertise of school leaders and teachers in a number of ways. There is continual modeling, shared learning, and visibility from the senior leadership team. Administrative meetings focus on instructional leadership. Jurisdiction leaders ensure adequate resources for professional development and visits to other schools to share expertise.

To build expertise within the schools, the jurisdiction leaders have developed several approaches. Senior leaders visit schools each month with a focus the growth the principal's expertise. Townsend and Adams work with school leaders on a monthly basis and also visit teachers' classrooms. The Alberta Assessment Consortium is a resource that has been utilized to provide support to schools.

The Professional Development Committee was a local Alberta Teachers' Association Committee. Now it is a shared committee with the jurisdiction. The structure aligns with jurisdictional goals to increase system-wide efficacy. It is based on a partnership model.

Leadership for Learning

With the focus on instructional leadership, there is an expectation for Westwind principals to be in classes in a meaningful way, which has resulted in the need for targeted professional development of school leaders. A number of models for instructional leadership were examined, but the main criterion was the focus on principals' being in each teacher's classroom three to four times per year. As well meeting with teachers through engaging pre- and post-conferences and ensuring a reflective process for teacher growth were critical elements of the Westwind approach. As well, principals are expected to meet the needs of all students and use data effectively. Principals are trained in questioning techniques. Some principals indicate an increase in confidence in being instructional leaders, rather than managers as in the past, which has had positive results in their schools.

Jurisdiction leaders have clarified the expectation they have for principals to be instructional leaders. As one principal stated, "We are told that we signed up for this and we need to live up to it."

Support for instructional leadership is delivered both from jurisdiction leadership and colleagues. The jurisdiction leadership follow-up with principals shapes alignment and induces stress, but helps "keep eyes on the ball". The follow-through is more than has been previously seen and is viewed as critical to the successful implementation of instructional leadership. The support of colleagues is viewed as critical as principals talk with each other about real issues in their schools. As one principal noted, "Our [leadership] conversations have changed and we are working as a team."

Professional Learning

In the past professional development was more individual focused, but with the new partnership model it is now more aligned with school and jurisdiction goals. The change in the model resulted in a cultural change, increased system-focused accountability, and the development of a common language to describe teaching and learning. The connection of professional learning to high effect size strategies and assessment data is more aligned.

The revamping of the professional development committee included a new handbook and increased resources for aligned, collaborative proposals. Professional growth plans are now developed using a template and aligned with team, school, and jurisdiction priorities. School professional development committees develop the school professional development plans. There are more opportunities for administration and teachers to access international professional development. This is viewed as a double-edge sword as many people are eager to travel, but there must be alignment to learning and priorities.

Time has been an enabler as jurisdiction professional learning community teacher groups are given time to meet. These professional learning communities are subject discipline cohorts; notes are kept, but are not reported to anyone. Individual teacher representatives keep principals informed. As well, schools have been paired to sister schools in Rocky View School Division to share successes and challenges.

Principals perceive there is a strong link between the jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning and educational research. Teachers are acquiring a lot of tools and are refining their skills. Teacher leadership is emerging. There is growing connectivity between teachers and a spike in pedagogical passion and assessment

strategies. Some teachers are early adopters, but there is a larger conversation occurring about a team approach to students – "our kids, not just my class, my kids".

It is perceived by some that alignment has been pushed from the top, but there is a growth in the bottom-up push for alignment. It remains to be seen if this movement will be "quashed" if it does not fit with the jurisdiction support research perspectives on teaching and learning. The focus has been on high effect size strategies. As one participant commented, "Quashing may occur because bottom-up tendrils may not meet potentially narrow expectations of form or acceptable confines of narrow literature lenses."

Emerging Themes

Westwind School Division has a very research driven strategic direction. They have engaged external expertise to develop local expertise both by attending external events or developing long term relationships with a cadre of experts. There is a strong sense of team and a commitment to changing the focus of the jurisdiction to be more focused on instructional leadership to improve teaching and learning. Although there has been some resistance, the superintendent and leadership team are committed to staying the course. They have offered multiple ways for individuals to engage in professional learning. The development of professional learning communities has been key to deepen understanding, collaboration, and accountability.

HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC REGIONAL DIVISION

The area surrounding Holy Family Catholic Regional Division is known for agriculture, oil and gas extraction, and forestry. The jurisdiction serves the Roman Catholic citizens of a large geographic area that includes the towns of Peace River, Grimshaw, High Prairie, Manning, McLennan, and Valleyview. It also serves the surrounding rural communities of each of these towns. Holy Family's 2, 253 students are enrolled in nine schools. These are configured as four kindergarten to grade nine schools; one kindergarten to grade six school; one grade seven to 12 school; one kindergarten to grade 12 school; and a grade seven to 12 virtual school. As well, the division provides French Immersion programming and serves the student population within the High Prairie Youth Assessment Centre. The jurisdiction works to bridge the achievement gap for the significant population of aboriginal students.

Leading Learning in Holy Family Regional Catholic Division

April 17, 2014 was the date of our one-day data collection visit to the central office of Holy Family Regional Catholic Division in Peace River. We engaged with seven principals, five middle level leaders, and four superintendency team members in 60-minute focus group interviews. We ended the day by conducting a 30-minute interview with superintendent Betty Turpin.

Focus on Student learning

Holy Family's vision "Student success in a Catholic community guided by Christ," aims to meet the needs of all learners through a deliberate coordination of supports grounded in the Catholic faith and in alignment with Alberta Education goals and the direction of Alberta's Inspiring Education report. Each school has a unique

approach, but they are aligned with Holy Family's vision. Although administration and teachers have an understanding of the vision, only some parents and students would have a basic knowledge of the vision. The jurisdiction is proceeding slowly to re-culture the schools to ensure student learning and students come first. As a member of the superintendent's team commented, "We look at everything through the lens of what's good for kids."

The Response to Intervention (RTI) pyramid is an underlying foundation for the work of the jurisdiction. In Holy Family there is a widely held view by the professionals that engagement and quality instruction lead to quality learning for all students. Building personal connections and establishing positive relationships are perceived as important to a quality-learning environment. In an optimum learning environment, students will experience well-being. They must have choice, so they are able to find something they enjoy.

Success is viewed through the ways the schools are moving towards meeting the individual needs of students. Most principals would agree with the sentiment expressed by one participant, "We're here to serve."

The School Board plays a role in strategically setting direction and allocating resources for student learning, engagement, and well-being. There has been a movement away from site-based decision making to a jurisdiction decision-making model. However, principals' voices are still heard. For example, when school administrators asked for an additional Learning Coach to assist schools, the School Board agreed to fund the request.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Holy Family jurisdiction leaders see learning needs on a continuum and work with teachers and school administration on engaging forms of instruction to meet the range of teacher and student needs. One participant commented, "We are empowering teachers – shifting away from what's wrong with the student to empowering students."

In Holy Family carefully considered jurisdiction-wide systems and structures are being put in place to support schools as they provide all students with engaging forms of instruction. The goal of the jurisdiction is to be proactive and not reactive, making strategic decisions based on long-term data analysis and a cycle of assessment. The jurisdiction is taking time to consolidate professional learning about teaching and learning, rather than continually engaging in new initiatives. However, there is a feeling of momentum and tremendous areas of growth and openness to learning. In particular, learning coaches work with teachers to build ownership of programming and examine alternative ways of meeting student needs. The four full time equivalent learning coaches are the "go to" people in the jurisdiction for teachers. They pose no-threat, use a non-judgmental approach, and do not engage in band aide or bandwagon solutions. They play a significant role in professional development.

Learning coaches provide mentorship to assigned schools by supporting instructional leadership teams in each school. The learning coach works with the team to examine what is happening with regards to teaching and learning, adjust programs so they align, and guide professional development in the schools. The instructional leadership teams are champions of change and use data to drive decisions. The Alberta Education

Accountability Pillar reports and the Tell Them From Me Survey results provide important data that guide decisions about teaching and learning.

Another structure that is facilitated by jurisdiction leaders is the "family of schools" model. Each school's administrative team meets with jurisdiction leaders and enters into an ongoing conversation about student engagement, curriculum, instruction, and planning. Division leaders use structured agendas when they meet with their "family of schools" every two or three weeks. The "family of schools" agenda includes a review of time spent in the classroom, what happens when the administrator is in the classroom, faith area, and other programs in the school. One principal stated, "Family of schools allows for two way communication. Schools know what is happening at central office and on the provincial scene and central office knows what is happening at the schools."

The leadership of principals in improving teaching and learning is considered central to student success. There is an expectation that principals are in classrooms a minimum of 20% of their time. They must be knowledgeable about student learning, particularly learning described as 21st Century learning. To support principals, the jurisdiction leaders are removing managerial duties from school administrator roles and responsibilities. School administrators are not afraid to take risks and engage in open and helpful conversations with jurisdiction office leaders. Reciprocal exchanges lead to support across the jurisdiction.

Jurisdiction professional learning community groupings focus on curriculum change. In the past year the focus was on the religion curriculum. Teachers at each grade level across the jurisdiction met in professional learning communities to align the religion curriculum and develop common assessment.

System Efficacy

The focus of developing expertise to achieve priorities starts with jurisdiction leadership. By focusing strategically on jurisdiction priorities, there is an alignment between goals, resources and procedures, and the development of system efficacy. Administrative procedures have been revamped so that leaders are now responsible for "living procedures" in support of jurisdiction priorities. Trustees are also engaged in professional learning to ensure their governance expertise is developed.

To develop system-wide efficacy in Holy Family, the jurisdiction leaders have focused on developing centralized expertise and adhering to priority goals. Centralized expertise has been developed under the umbrella of the RTI pyramid. As one leader commented, "We are not going to move off the core goals of the pyramid. This was a turnaround time...solved financial problems...major aligning of resources to needs."

Although outside expertise has been invited to the jurisdiction, jurisdiction leaders, including the learning coaches bridge the expert's knowledge to the work in schools. The integration of experts has been done purposefully and as part of a larger strategic plan, not as a one-time event. Outside expertise have provided leverage for change. Over time, there has been less reliance on outside expertise as the focus has shifted to instructional leadership. The jurisdiction ensures the learning coaches and school administrators receive specialized training to work with teachers. To facilitate the development of expertise, the leaders focus on four key priorities in the jurisdiction: instruction, planning, student engagement, and assessment.

Holy Family has created organizational structures and settings that support and enhance teacher, school and jurisdiction leaders to attain system-wide efficacy. Professional learning communities and professional growth plans are two key structures that support and enhance teacher and administrator learning. Working with school leaders has been a focus as they are viewed in the jurisdiction as the most powerful change agents in consensus building and capacity building.

Because of the great geographical distances in the Holy Family, it is critical to have a strong technology backbone to support learning and collaboration, not just for students, but also for adults in the jurisdiction. As well, a common calendar is being developed to aid in collaboration.

Leadership for Learning

Holy Family expects principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of instruction in their schools. There has been a movement from management to instructional leadership. As one learning coach stated, "Principals know their teachers deeply."

Beginning administrators and seasoned administrators both receive jurisdiction training. Training is provided for new administrators during four daylong sessions per year. There is an emphasis on professional learning in the administration meetings. Outside experts are brought in to work on leadership skills. These experts are purposefully chosen and work on a continual basis with the administrators' group. Administrators receive training on specific programs like the Response to Intervention, which focuses on a pyramid of interventions to improve student engagement and learning and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), which provides a model to collect baseline data to alter instruction to address student learning needs.

To support instructional leadership, the division uses a continuum of growth as a self-reflection instrument for teachers and administrators. Data are collected to improve instruction, not just for the sake of data collection. The instrument is used to gather data on quality of instruction and then teachers can choose to work on one or two areas of growth. The continuum of growth sets an expectation aligned with the Teacher Quality Standard. Teachers know what is expected of them. Growth plans are key to the growth model of development. The **t**eacher and principal evaluation process is laid out clearly in an Administrative Procedure. Vice principals can supervise but only principals can evaluate teachers.

The jurisdiction leadership team supports school administrators and teachers. The centralizing of many roles and responsibilities ensures that school administrators can focus on instructional leadership. By working with learning coaches in jurisdiction professional learning communities schools are moving from silos to working collaboratively. Teachers and administrators are taking on leadership roles for learning with a focus on students. Support is given to help them make the shift from a focus on teachers to a focus on students. As one principal described the support of jurisdiction office and their work with teachers, "Open, trusting, collaborative. We are not worried about saying, "We need help.' And help is given."

Professional Learning

Professional Learning in Holy Family is strategically aligned with jurisdiction and school improvement initiatives in a number of ways. Professional growth plans are linked to the Teacher Quality Standard (TQS). School

administrators work with teachers to align professional learning to jurisdiction and school goals. Schools work together to share professional learning opportunities. Collaboration and innovation are encouraged. As well, teachers are encouraged to engage in professional development through the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA).

Jurisdiction leaders must approve professional learning outside the jurisdiction and bringing experts into the jurisdiction. Schools cannot hire outside consultants. This ensures alignment of resources, prevents duplication, and encourages collaboration.

To ensure that professional learning reflects the best evidence about how people learn, the division office leadership team takes on a leadership role. Division leaders ensure professional learning reflects research informed practice. Professional learning, faith days and professional learning community meetings are embedded in the calendar, rather than adding time to the end of the teaching day. Collaboration on common interests or with similar groups is encouraged. Mentorship of beginning teachers and administrators is formalized.

Learning coaches work in clusters of schools to provide classroom support, including model teaching, team teaching and mentoring. They also ensure follow-up to professional learning opportunities that occur outside the classroom. They understand how to work with change and encourage teachers to reflect on their learning. They have participated in a coaching clinic with other school jurisdictions and have their own professional learning community.

Participants perceive there are a number of specific jurisdiction professional learning initiatives that have influenced the improvement of teaching and learning overtime. The re-culturing of Holy Family has resulted in attracting and retaining teachers to the jurisdiction because of the focus on professional learning. Experts such as Shirley Stiles and Cara Shores were identified for their contribution to professional learning in the jurisdiction, as was the lasting impact of the AISI. The use of data from the Tell Them From Me Survey Results and DIBELS were both identified as key to choosing research based actions. Instructional leadership, assessment for learning, professional learning communities and Response to Intervention were cited as foundational to improving teaching and learning. Restructuring of administrative meetings to include professional learning supported the move to instructional leadership.

Leaders at all levels, and particularly learning coaches, were cited as critical to supporting teaching and learning. Learning coaches and school administration planning site based professional learning for staff together was viewed as critical. As one principal noted, "Teachers are learning in the area they need to learn...*zone of proximal development*."

Emerging Themes

Holy Family has been re-culturing the jurisdiction to ensure the focus is on student learning. Developing relationships and modeling by the superintendent and leadership team has resulted in a focus on support for all students, quality core instruction for all students and instructional leadership capacity building for school and jurisdiction leaders. Holy Family jurisdiction leaders have put in place several structures, including jurisdiction based learning coaches, school based instructional leadership teams, and school and jurisdiction professional

learning communities. They have engaged external expertise over sustained periods of time and provided an opportunity to consolidate understanding and expertise before moving on to developing new skills. The jurisdiction leadership has been purposeful in breaking down silos by focusing on shared priorities and goals and using a "family of schools" approach to make connections at all levels. The jurisdiction recognizes that AISI energized the system and they are now building, bridging, consolidating learning to bring coherence to ongoing professional learning.

FORT MCMURRAY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The Fort McMurray Catholic School District serves the urban service area of Fort McMurray and sparsely populated rural area of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Located 435 kilometers northeast of Edmonton, the area is accessible by air and Highway 63. The area has been significant in the Alberta petroleum industry due to the development of the oil sands. International attention has been drawn to the community as it addresses the needs of the rapidly growing urban population, along with aboriginal and environmental concerns. With 5,900 students, Fort McMurray Catholic serves approximately 48% of school age children in the region in eleven schools, including two high schools (grades seven to 12) and nine elementary schools. The student population includes approximately 565 English as second language students and 800 aboriginal students.

Leading Learning in Fort McMurray Catholic Schools

Two researchers visited Fort McMurray on April 28, 2014. We met with ten principals, ten middle level leaders, and five superintendency team members in 60-minute focus group interviews. The day concluded with a 30-minute summary interview with superintendent George McGuigan.

Focus on Student Learning

Fort McMurray Catholic's concerted focus on student learning has continued with the appointment of its former deputy superintendent, George McGuigan as the district's new superintendent in the spring of 2013. Principals expressed appreciation for the smoothness of the transition and noted that it had enabled them to continue the focus on student learning through a variety of initiatives, including healthy eating and active living, learning coaches and professional learning Fridays. The structure of the division schools as elementary schools and grade seven to 12 high schools has been an organizational structure that works well for professional learning to support student learning. A member of the superintendent's team noted, "Most decisions are based on what is good for students. Most resources are in the classroom. How does this help kids? This is a recurring question we ask ourselves."

The jurisdiction goals and priorities are focused and aligned with Inspiring Education, Alberta's curriculum redesign, and the principles of quality assessment. There is a focus on research-based approaches to student learning that are practical at the school level. Principals noted this focus has been narrowed over the years to: balanced literacy, numeracy, and spirituality and Catholicity, and early learning. A member of the superintendent team commented, "We re-focused on fewer and clearer priorities this year."

There is a belief in a direct relationship between qualified professionals and student learning. The superintendent team believes that hiring the best teachers is the single most important thing they do. The low teacher turnover is the result of the new teacher orientation program, mentoring, induction, and the creation of a community of new teachers who feel welcome because of the many avenues of support.

Thirteen learning coaches support the emphasis on student learning across the jurisdiction. The learning coach group meets once a month and also meets with school administration teams and in administration family groups. In discussion, learning coaches captured the focus on student learning with the following phases: "We are not a school system for Catholics. We are a Catholic school system. We can accept everyone. We guide them through their learning. All are welcome."

Fort McMurray Catholic is perceived as having a solid technology backbone and digital support that supports student learning and are strong at addressing students' special needs. There is an inclusive approach to student learning as teachers and principals strive to keep students in schools with special program supports for all students.

Curriculum and Instruction

Fort McMurray Catholic leaders work with schools and teachers to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction through a number of strategies. Beginning with the superintendent, leaders model effective teaching. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are viewed as core work. Ninety-eight percent of funding goes to the classroom to support instruction. Because of demographic challenges, some schools are deemed more at-risk, so additional resources are directed to them. School Improvement Teams are made up of groups of schools that work together as a family of schools with a focus on providing programming for all students.

There are a number of curriculum and instruction supports in place, including learning coaches, classroom support teachers, and behavior specialists to help teachers learn how to meet the needs of all students. The learning coaches are in the classrooms working with teachers and in the schools with principals. Learning coaches provide more universal support while classroom support teachers focus on more specific needs. School counselors provide social and emotional supports for all students so they are able to learn.

External supports to improve learning are also sought through partnerships with other professionals to address mental health issues and inclusion or special education. Assistive technologies are employed to support the learning of special needs students. To ensure student success, on Professional Learning Fridays when teachers are engaged in professional learning, students can participate in full day Tutorial Fridays to catch up on missed assignments. There is no charge to students for the Tutorial Fridays support. In Fort McMurray Catholic educators do not give up on students. Students are required to demonstrate higher levels of learning.

In general student achievement results are good and improving for all students. In particular, the First Nation Métis Inuit (FMNI) students are supported at many levels to improve their learning and achievement. Approximately 80% of FNMI students graduate from school. However, the superintendent continues to ask what can be done for the other 20%. As a learning coach noted, "We do actually care about survey and test

results. What are we going to do about it? How can we make improvement? More than high ideas - we act on them."

Fort McMurray Catholic ensures alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teaching resources through a number of strategies. Principals are instructional leaders focused on alignment of research-focused curriculum and instruction approaches, such as balanced literacy. Each school has developed three goals on which to work throughout the year with site-specific programing to ensure students are taught at their level. At the jurisdiction level the learning coaches and classroom support teachers and the director of curriculum and instruction support each school's goals. The superintendent is visible in the schools supporting the focus on curriculum and instruction and ensuring alignment. In addition, the jurisdiction has worked with Alberta Education on a number of specialized pilots to implement curriculum and instruction in a manner that aligns with the goals of the jurisdiction.

The classroom support teachers use a train the trainer model to ensure all teachers are educated in shared practices of instruction and assessment. Learning coaches engage in data analysis and create resources with the teachers and principals. For example, data from a math review with Alberta Education has been used to address areas of concern. As one learning coach stated, "Everything we take on is to be tied to the curriculum. How does this support the curriculum?"

There is also alignment with the needs of the community in a number of ways. An aboriginal entrepreneurial program in partnership with the Paul Martin Foundation and aboriginal businesses ensures the learning needs of the *First Nation Métis* and *Inuit* students are aligned with the community. There are academy programs for students to encourage success in high school arts and technology, which is important to the community. There are early learning programs and in all regular classrooms until the end of grade three. Understanding the needs in the community, the jurisdiction has worked with other agencies to develop wrap around supports for parents and children which has resulted in an increase in the number of program unit funded (PUF) students enrolling with the jurisdiction.

System Efficacy

Fort McMurray Catholic has clear values and vision rooted in the Catholic faith. Their four core values include: persons, community, responsibility, and learning. The main approach to developing expertise relevant to achieving the jurisdiction's priority goals is through teamwork. As one participant commented, "We are a small district. We see ourselves as part of a team – like a family. We support each other."

There is little ego-driven behavior as individuals focus on "we, instead of me". Layperson views are considered along with educator's views with a commonsense approach that meets with success. The culture has been established over a long time period of mutual support and building on success.

Expertise is developed locally with little time spent away from the jurisdiction. Experts are brought to address core goals and strategies, but the priority is to build internal expertise or "home grown capacity". High level of trust and opportunities to engage and learn from each other are evident. Principals are seen as instructional leaders. The expertise of principals is described as collaborative, innovative, efficient and consistent. Principals perceived their expertise is developed through the example set by the jurisdiction team, clear and achievable

expectations, and 'face time' with the jurisdiction team. The open-door policy to jurisdiction office ensures help can be accessed quickly. As one member of the superintendent team commented, "If you want to be one of the best, we will help you."

The Fort McMurray Catholic jurisdiction has been very deliberate in creating organizational structures and settings that support and enhance teacher and school leader work and learning. The organizational structure is very lean at the top of the administrative hierarchy with a focus on student learning and outcomes which sets the tone for the schools. There is a balanced approach between whole district implementation and school based planning to meet priorities. The jurisdiction has moved away from the site based decision-making model, mainly because 80% of resources are spent on staffing. Principals have input, but the jurisdiction provides resources. The jurisdiction has chosen to reallocate resources based on needs rather than formula. The principals are instructional leaders, not managers.

Resources are carefully managed to provide opportunities to increase efficacy. For example, teachers are encouraged to pursue graduate studies through partially funding graduate degree programs. A third party has been contracted to provide technology support. The technology focus is on need, rather than wants. The use of Google applications and the move to cloud computing supports professional collaboration. The jurisdiction has automated tasks as much as possible to allow more focus on the core business of learning, instead of spending time on activities like manually reporting absences.

In the past jurisdiction office leaders spent a lot of time writing the education plan in isolation. Now the plan is built from the school plans to promote alignment and coherence. The Three-Year Education Plan template has been streamlined and each school had only three goals. Organizational planning is perceived as less "top down", more reciprocal. Schools meet with the jurisdiction office and other school administrators each spring in preparation for developing their plans, so there is awareness and support in the development of the school plan.

A modified calendar has enabled the development of a comprehensive professional development plan and opportunities to meet regularly. As well, opportunities to partner have been pursued. Professional development days and monthly meetings are viewed as essential days and the guiding question is: "How do we become more coherent?"

Many participants noted the importance of the organizational structure of "school families". In school families, like schools are grouped together. They meet with each other, the superintendent, and other senior admin team members on a regular basis. This has resulted in less of a hierarchy and more trust and sense of family. School families build on existing teams, share best practices and take a distributed leadership approach. People work in teams to follow students throughout their time in buildings. There is a lot of movement of staff between schools, so people are familiar with other schools. People know each other across the jurisdiction. Teachers meet as teams both at the school and jurisdiction level. As one principal stated, "Family type relationships builds our sense of 'can do'."

Leadership for Learning

Principals work in instructional leadership teams within their schools. Vice principals share the responsibility for instructional leadership. The tradition of Fort McMurray Catholic school administrators as instructional leaders is grounded in years of professional practice. School administrators are expected to have a graduate degree or working on acquiring one.

As instructional leaders, principals are responsible to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction and for teacher evaluation. Principals also are expected to be knowledgeable about the student achievement results and analysis processes. All principals have an extensive literacy background, which is perceived as contributing to the good jurisdiction student achievement results.

There is an expectation that administrators are in every classroom, every week. The jurisdiction office team also models this behavior by visiting classrooms regularly. The superintendent holds the principals accountable and is highly visible in the schools. One principal shared, "The question asked at the school family meeting is, 'How effective are your teacher teams?' This question causes us to get into the classrooms so admin can answer this question."

The jurisdiction supports principals by assuming responsibility for developing and supporting instructional leadership in schools. There is support for principals and teachers to improve teaching and learning through professional development opportunities, including books studies, workshops and support for graduate study. For example, the school administrators have received training in teacher evaluation. At the yearly administrators retreat, the key topic is instructional leadership.

There are many routes to becoming a school administrator in Fort McMurray Catholic Schools. The *Catholic Administrators Professional Program* was reinstated in September 2014 with the goal to inspire and build administrative and instructional leadership from within the division. The program currently has 23 participants. The isolation of the jurisdiction in the northeast area of the province is seen as strength, because the jurisdiction has learned to be self-reliant and grow its own leaders. As evidence of the opportunity to move into formal school administration leadership roles, participants noted that three former classroom support teachers have recently become principals.

Principals are encouraged to support innovation and participate in opportunities to improve teaching and learning. The jurisdiction has a strong relationship with Alberta Education, as evident in the number of pilot programs in the jurisdiction. In contrast, there is a concern by some that there have been a few too many initiatives.

Jurisdiction leaders are perceived as being at the forefront of leadership and learning. Leaders engage in professional learning at monthly administrative meetings and there are family school meetings three times a year with senior administration. There is an evaluation process for principals.

Professional Learning

Professional learning is foundational to the work of Fort McMurray Catholic. The jurisdiction leadership has voiced expectations repeatedly regarding the direction of professional development. The professional

development framework supports job embedded professional learning and the development of local expertise in the jurisdiction. As well, spirituality and faith underpin teaching and professional learning and student learning. As one learning coach stated, "We do not do PD that is not connected to our vision."

Although there are many ways that teachers and administrators can access professional development, including workshops, webinars, book studies, jurisdiction professional development day and support from learning coaches and classroom support teachers, the focus of the jurisdiction is to ensure there is alignment with the jurisdiction and school goals and resulting initiatives. Professional growth plans are focused on the Teacher Quality Standard and district priorities. The director of curriculum ensures professional development is aligned and works with schools to move the jurisdiction forward.

There are 23 days dedicated to professional development, including school based, jurisdiction and Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) professional development days or institutes. During the week of the ATA Convention, teachers are engaged in a full week of learning. Institute days are co-planned with the learning coaches. Some participants perceive that learning coaches could be more fully integrated into schools, but most feel the system is working well and improving.

School based Professional Learning Fridays (PLF) are a significant commitment by the jurisdiction. The use of the PLF days are at the principal's discretion, but the program must have some focus on literacy, numeracy, spirituality or early learning.

Partnerships are important in the delivery of high quality professional learning. Fort McMurray Catholic works in partnership with Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium, Keyano College, Apple and Fort McMurray Public School Jurisdiction. These partnerships extend beyond teachers to support staff. For example, the jurisdiction partners with Keyano College to support an Educational Assistant Certificate and a Child Support Diploma. As well, teacher growth, supervision and evaluation training has been provided through the ATA.

Fort McMurray Catholic has developed a professional learning framework that focuses on job embedded professional learning supported by professionals with specialized knowledge and expertise, particularly through the learning coaches and classroom support teachers. Teachers are consulted and their craft knowledge is respected. There is time built into the yearly calendar that allows for professional learning during the workday. There has been a deliberate effort to move away from individual professional learning events to a coherent plan that includes teachers, school and jurisdiction goals. Particular groups that need support are identified. For example, there is a first year teacher mentorship program, continuing into their second year with support through a collaborative ATA Local and school board program. In support of responsible allocation of resources and in support of local programs, there has been limited travel for conferences for several years.

There are a number of initiatives that have been previously mentioned that are improving teaching and learning in the jurisdiction, but the overarching theme in all initiatives is the support and leadership of the jurisdiction office leaders. In particular, the associate superintendent's commitment to inclusive education for all students is reflected in the direction of the professional learning. As well, each year some principals accompany the superintendent to a Team Leadership Academy.

Emerging Themes

The strengths of Fort McMurray Catholic include a strong sense of family, relationships, and connections between the schools and jurisdiction office and amongst schools. Collaboration and trust are cornerstones that enable educators to work on the priorities set by the jurisdiction and the goals chosen by each school. While the jurisdiction is engaged in a number of initiatives to support teaching and learning, the superintendent and jurisdiction leadership team provide support for instructional leadership development and clear, achievable expectations. They model staying the course, shared leadership, and accountability. While internal expertise and job embedded professional learning are the district's focus, carefully chosen external experts are sometimes called upon as supplementary supports.

CALGARY BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) provides educational services to the approximately 110,000 public school students in Alberta's largest city. The CBE is administratively divided into six service units, which operate out of the Education Centre in central Calgary. The service units include the Chief Superintendent's Office, Finance and Business Services, Facilities and Environmental Services, Human Resources, Learning Innovation, and Learning Services. These service units provide functional and operational support to assist teachers and students in creating successful learning experiences.

For the purposes of direct service, program coordination, leadership, and monitoring, the 227 CBE schools are organized into five Areas of approximately 40 to 50 schools each. Each Area director provides leadership to staff, coordinates the delivery of services to schools and students, and supports principals in the daily operation of schools. A team of specialists supports the area director in the provision of direct support to school communities and the families they serve. Canada's third largest school system offers more than 50 programs specially tailored to meet the diverse learning styles, interests, and abilities of students. Such programs include: special needs and/or at-risk students, immersion and bilingual French and international languages, creative and fine arts, learning and instructional alternatives, sports-focused, culture, and location (work place school).

Leading Learning in the Calgary Board of Education

The data collection process for the CBE portion of this study began in June 2014 and continued through the summer and fall, concluding in February 2015. In total 19 educational leaders participated in individual or focus group interviews over this period. Three one-hour focus group sessions were undertaken: one with area directors, a second with specialist directors and a third with two members of the superintendency team. The other 13 CBE participants provided their perspectives through individual interviews of varying lengths in variety of locations during the summer and fall of 2014.

Our visits to the CBE coincided with the retirement of Chief Superintendent Naomi Johnson and the appointment a short time later of David Stevenson as the new Chief Superintendent. As we point out in the final section of this CBE case, continuity of the district's focus on student and educator learning is one of the prevalent themes that emerged from the data we collected. Almost every participant expressed appreciation for the smoothness of this transition. As one principal noted, "David has continued that consolidation of system

effort even more by stating that we need to focus on implementation rather than innovation to make sure we move forward in a purposeful manner that puts the student first."

Focus on Student Learning

The CBE website indicates that the "Board of Trustees has approved clear direction for student success," and that "we are all committed to achieving these Results and offering learning as unique as every student." Each of the 19 school and jurisdiction leaders we interviewed was able to verify the importance of the five results that comprise the school jurisdiction's widely shared vision and beliefs about student learning, engagement and well-being in the 21st Century? To those at the superintendent level, the shift from striving to meet board approved *ends* to pursuing student success through five board approved *results* coincides with a heighted and more persistent focus on learning over the past five years. As one superintendent commented, "Teachers are held accountable for these results and student learning is reported in relation to them. The learning agenda is widely held. At the district level, a business orientation has been surpassed by learning."

All of the educational leaders interviewed expressed enthusiasm for the sharpened focus on teaching and learning and several spoke more specifically about of the salience of five *results*. While there is a clear and well-understood focus on academics, the *results* also stress citizenship, personal development, and character. Participants spoke about how well the detailed outcome descriptions in each results area align with Alberta Education's *Ministerial Order on Learning* (Alberta Education, 2013), the tenets of *Inspiring Education* (Alberta Education, 2010), and other general notions of 21st century learning. In the words of an experienced principal:

> I would have to say that five years ago CBE was lacking a true direction (we had 108 initiatives going at one time) and Naomi did a great job aligning CBE, pulling all the different pieces together and supporting our direction with *Inspiring Education* – using this as a guide to achieve our *results*.

All participants expressed appreciation for the sustained, more coherent, and more widely shared focus on student and educator learning. While leaders at all levels attested to the increased attention to learning over the five-year term of the recently retired chief superintendent, many were buoyed by consistent messages from her successor that these emphases will continue to serve as key priorities going forward. As another principal noted, "The new superintendent seems to be staying the course by continuing to focus on the learning agenda directed toward achieving student success."

The use of carefully selected research to shape practice has been a significant contributor to the successful implementation of this widely shared focus on teaching and learning. Core research informed constructs have helped to shape the work. Among these are Richard Elmore's (2008) construct of the instructional core, John Hattie's (2009, 2012) insights into making learning visible, Sharon Friesen's (2009) *Teaching Effectiveness Framework*, Vivianne Robinson's (2011) five dimensions and three capabilities of *Student-Centered Leadership*, and Michael Fullan's (2014) work on the principal as learning leader. What has worked well in the introduction and application of these evidence based approaches is that school and jurisdiction leaders have been provided with a variety of structured and informal opportunities to engage with the ideas in the company of their peers before trying them out in practice, bringing back evidence of their impact to subsequent meetings with their peers in an action-oriented community of leadership learning.

As one of the directors observed,

> Never in our history have we worked so thoughtfully to develop a vision of teaching and learning that is so widely shared. Directors, superintendents, and principals are systematically working on personalized learning, the instructional core, and the *Teaching Effectiveness Framework* on an ongoing and coherent basis.

Curriculum and Instruction

Since the fall of 2009, the CBE has extended its use of Richard Elmore's construct of the *instructional core* as one basis for its work with schools to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction. Several participants described the focus on the instructional core as the first in a series of "research based" efforts that have continuously addressed the desire to ensure that "every student learns, every day, with no exceptions." The system has worked extensively with schools to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment in an ongoing manner.

The development and gradual implementation of the system's custom-built web-based learning application known as *Iris* was described by one superintendent as the "the sweet spot that brings it all together." It is seen as

> an enabling resource that helps students to better know themselves as learners, helps them to set learning goals that are good for them, and helps teachers to think about students as individual learners. It is also a means that schools can use to more effectively engage parents in supporting learning.

The CBE has emphasized formative assessment for several years. While this work continues, the jurisdiction has recently developed a new system wide reporting system that is seen to more clearly communicate student progress in relation to outcomes. As one superintendent noted, "We put together teams of the systems best teachers to support colleagues in learning about assessment that really fosters student learning."

CBE took a leading provincial role in the Ministry's curriculum re-design process. This step was seen as an opportunity to focus central system resources on leading edge work that had the capacity to deepen learning for all Alberta students. As a secondary benefit, involvement in this initiative fostered a more cohesive and focused approach from central services in the view of one superintendent. In fact, a number of efforts have reflected the intention to foster a more coherent support network for schools. One of the first steps was to merge the IT department into Learning Services. The ongoing process of re-negotiating school, area, and central services connections so as to create an even stronger and more coherent system of support of teaching and learning continues.

Efforts to become a more inclusive system also continue. Learning support teams in the area offices help teachers to support the wide range of learning needs in schools. As one superintendent noted, "Of the 30 CBE special programs, 17 are in specialized settings and 13 are now in regular classrooms in area schools."

System Efficacy

The jurisdiction has made effective use of professional learning communities as key organizational structures to support and enhance school leader work and learning. Principal and assistant principal meetings have become

primary means through which the CBE develops expertise to enhance student success. As one principal noted, "Both the Area and the District principal meetings have become PLCs to support our learning." Another had this to say:

> We learn from other principals at our tables as they give us feedback on the artifacts brought from our schools as evidence of important progress on our school improvement plans. We've moved from stand and deliver meetings to much more regular engagement with our peers around research and evidence of progress in our schools. School and system leader conversations about teacher and student learning have replaced many of what used to be mainly administrative meetings.

A third principal described the process as follows:

> We meet monthly as principals to work with system leaders and with peers around our shared vision and beliefs. This work is also mirrored at the system level with system based AP's to ensure there is collaboration on the goals for the system and how they play out in individual schools. Principals and assistant principals also meet monthly at area meetings where the information and work together is similar ways to ensure everyone is moving together in the same direction. Specialists in the different areas are also available to support schools individually or through other specific groups where there are common questions or concerns (elementary, middle school or high school meetings are held monthly as well).

Common understanding is developed through access to, and knowledge building around, core frameworks. For example, school leaders may bring back evidence of their leadership team's work in their schools on lead teacher learning and development (Robinson, 2011) about learning task design (Friesen, 2009) or assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Cooper, 2011) as part of their efforts to make learning visible (Hattie, 2009).

The budget process now places more emphasis on the desired *results* rather than inputs. Through the influence of Levin (2008) and Fullan and Hargreaves (2012), system and school plans have been reduced in size and number of goals. School plans are based on a theory of action, with both instructional goals and learning goals. One superintendent indicated that the overall system's theory of action could be simple expressed in the following way: "If the focus of everyone in the system is on learning, then each of our children will benefit."

Leadership for Learning

The CBE has placed an ongoing emphasis on instructional leadership over the past several years. What is emerging appears to be an increasingly coherent, shared approach to leadership learning spearheaded by area and service unit directors. Nested layers of professional learning communities are underway. In the words of one area director, "We are developing a network of individuals who are all doing the same work in very similar ways. As a result, principals and assistant principals are doing very similar work across the whole system in ways that are stronger and more coherent than ever before."

The pathway to the principalship has also changed through this heightened attention to teaching and learning. Directors indicate that those moving into school leadership positions are now more frequently those who have embraced and accelerated their personal professional learning agendas in tandem with the system's focus on teaching and learning. Efforts are underway by jurisdiction leaders to develop system wide learning leader

position descriptions. This reflects the increasing importance of these roles, which are increasingly focused on the provision of ongoing school based support to teaching and learning. Further, movement in this direction reflects an increasing recognition of the importance of distributed and share leadership at both the school and jurisdiction level.

Each of the interviewed principals indicated appreciation for the district's support of their instructional leadership development. Within their schools, they indicate that they are expected to be knowledgeable of the quality of their teachers' instruction. In addition, each principal viewed "leading teacher learning" as an important part of the role.

The principals we interviewed well understood the benefits of the new linked system and area meetings. They understood the advantages of this systematic focus for themselves, for their assistant principals, and – during the 2014-2015 school year – for their school based learning leaders. The advantages of working in coherent in-school leadership teams were evident to all participants. Several suggested that area meetings are especially useful PLCs. As one principal said, "We constantly bring evidence, we get support from each other and the readings, and the work moves forward at the school."

Professional Learning

Professional learning in the CBE is closely aligned with system priorities as well as with the best evidence about how people learn. A principal described the process used in her school. "We take the system goals and adjust these to develop our school goals, with small tweaks to firm up the fit with where we are as learners in the feedback cycle. The message from the superintendent (in the form of power points) is often used in school based professional learning activities. Similar schools are encouraged to bring staff together on PD days to explore, experiment, and build collegial relationships that enhance student learning.

Over the past several years, the CBE has worked with experts from the Galileo Educational Network. One superintendent observed that,

> stand alone experts do not work. Outside expertise is key if you have already decided where you are going. Experts with strong and well-understood credentials with whom you can build ongoing relationships can be very helpful. We went with Sharon Friesen and the Galileo team, because we respect their work and were comfortable with what they could bring to the table.

Principals indicate that support is given to attend conferences or seminars and the system specialists are available to support individual schools in moving forward. Working on the work and having time to "get messy" with the new learning at a school level is the most important.

Emerging Themes

The CBE's efforts to ensure alignment, coherence, and a practical knowledge-building approach to leadership learning are paying dividends. While the outgoing chief superintendent is credited with having a very profound effect, there is wide spread support for the incoming leader. Hiring the new chief superintendent from within the system sent a really powerful signal to school leaders. Four themes emerge from our analysis of the CBE data collected. First, the system is focused on teaching and learning in a persistent, highly intentional, and

ongoing manner. Second, strategies and actions employed to develop capacity related to teaching and learning are research informed. These efforts are coherently organized around the work of key respected scholars and are implemented with the support of credible internal and external experts. Third, the focus on professional leadership learning and educator engagement through overlapping professional learning communities resonates with school leaders. Fourth, efforts to bring greater continuity and cohesion across the system are ongoing. Though the challenges of trying design and implement a coherent system of support to teachers and students are significant in this large, diverse, and complex school jurisdiction, much has been achieved over the past five years. Moreover, there appears to be a strong will to continue this momentum.

SUMMARY

The focus of this study was on *overall* instructional leadership – *leading learning* – as practiced by educational leaders at the school jurisdiction level in six varied settings in the province of Alberta in 2014. The case descriptions in this section were based on the interview, documentary, and observational data we collected through the five dimension conceptual framework portrayed in Figure 2.2 on page 18. Each case summary illustrates and illuminates one contextualized set of approaches used by a superintendency team in its specific geographic, social, economic, and educational setting.

During the qualitative data analysis process and the writing of each nuanced case description, several key themes that ran across the cases were beginning to take shape. Each superintendency team had established a strong focus on student success and learning was clearly the core work of each jurisdiction. Related to this focus on student success was the intentional development of instructional leadership and attention to clear goals and priorities. Despite the fact that levels of achievement were high in all six systems, none of the leadership teams were content to settle for the status quo. In each case, there was evidence of concerted and research informed efforts to help teachers deepen the engagement and the learning of all students. In addition, structures to develop instructional leadership and to build collective efficacy were apparent in each setting. Moreover, it was evident that leaders were very action oriented. Educational leaders were not just reading research, but also systematically and persistently putting their shared learning into action. Experts were accessed purposefully; the goal was always to build internal capacity. The importance of a culture of respect, trust and collaboration was evident. Although each jurisdiction had different structures in place, it was obvious they were all on purposeful journeys to improve teaching and learning. In Section Five, these themes will be more fully described and discussed on the basis of our more detailed cross-case analysis.

Cross-Case Themes

Though the insights provided in each of the six cases described in the preceding section are important and will be of interest to both practitioners and policy makers, the primary purpose of this investigation was to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of *overall* instructional leadership as practiced by superintendency teams in highly successful and learning focused school jurisdictions. Individual cases were studied to gain understanding of the complex meanings of this phenomenon in some of its situations (Stake, 2006, p. 41). Each case summary illuminates one contextualized set of approaches used by a superintendency team in its specific geographic, social, economic, and educational setting. Building on the findings and emerging themes from these individual illustrations, our cross-case analysis identified the nine larger themes that are the subject of this report section. Assertions and transferable insights arising from these themes will be presented in the next and concluding section.

In accordance with the principles and assumptions of mixed methods research the qualitative and quantitative data were combined to provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method alone (Creswell, 2012). The nine major themes discussed below are based primarily on our further analysis of the qualitative data. To augment cross-case findings derived primarily from the interview data, we have included 16 graphic representations of responses to the *Jurisdiction and School Leader Survey* completed by 48 of the 77 possible participants in four of the six school jurisdictions. We do not claim that the results from this non-probalistic (purposive and convenient, but not random) sample are statistically generalizable. However, the survey results presented here do serve the purpose of helping to explain and to illustrate findings and themes from earlier collected and analyzed qualitative data.

Though this cross-case theme development process was ongoing and continuous over the entire course of the study, through four stages itemized in Section Three. Early in our investigation, in stage one, we began to identify and discuss commonalities among the cases and to generate a list of possible themes. In a second stage, one team member took the lead in formalizing and describing the cross-case themes following data collection from all six settings. In stage three, a second researcher reviewed the surveys and began blending the two data sources. In stage four, selected research literature was consulted to deepen our understanding of the mixed data and to aid our interpretations and assertions. All three of us were engaged in critically reviewing the analysis as it evolved into findings, themes, and assertions.

Further evidence of the utility of the five dimensions of the *Alberta Framework* that served as our conceptual framework (Figure 2.2 on p. 19) is provided in the first five of the cross-case themes. Our research benefitted from the use of this conceptual lens from the design of interview and survey questions, through the collection of both sets of data, and into the analysis and interpretation phases. The ways we utilized our conceptual framework acknowledges Merriam's (1998) observation: "In multicase or cross-case analysis, the use of predetermined questions and specific procedures for coding and analysis enhances the generalizability of findings in the traditional sense" (p. 208).

During the individual and focus group interviews we took note of how well versed principals, middle level leaders, and superintendency team members were in current research literature. Almost every educational leader we encountered was able to speak passionately and eloquently about a wide range of credible evidence informed leadership practices. What was even more impressive was their orientation to action. It is one thing to know what should be done; it is quite another challenge to move evidence informed ideas into sustained action. Most of the school and jurisdiction leaders we encountered were striving to practice in ways that were framed by what they judged to be contextually appropriate *best available evidence*.

As we engaged with the participants and analyzed the data, it became apparent that the role of the *Alberta Framework* was significant, if not always consciously so. Many aspects of this document were reflected in the language and actions of jurisdiction leaders. This alignment may be related to the engagement of some members of the superintendency teams in the development of the framework and related professional learning opportunities over the previous seven years, the availability of the CASS publication of the framework to all superintendency team members or other related research based professional learning opportunities.

Cross-case themes six through nine are based on findings that do not fit neatly within the *Alberta Framework.* These final four themes illuminate jurisdiction leadership practices that are not specifically delineated in our conceptual framework. Themes six through nine speak to the overwhelmingly positive impact of learning-oriented relationships and collaborative leadership at the jurisdiction level.

The following nine cross-case themes will now be described.

Theme One*: Focusing on Student Success*

Theme Two: *Enabling Engaging Instruction*

Theme Three: *Fostering Collective Efficacy*

Theme Four: *Scaffolding Overall Instructional Leadership*

Theme Five: *Strengthening Professional Learning*

Theme Six: *Leading Learning Through Superintendency Teams*

Theme Seven: *Building Purposeful Professional Relationships*

Theme Eight*: Accessing External and Internal Expertise*

Theme Nine: *Travelling the Pathways of Collaborative Leadership Learning*

For each of the nine descriptions the theme itself is simply stated and linked to the evidence used to develop it. Examples from the cases, including graphic representations from the online survey in six instances, are provided. Linkages to existing research conclude each theme sub-section. For each of the first five themes addressed in this section, the qualitative data we gathered were based on specific open-ended questions or discussion prompts from our *Individual and Focus Group Interview Protocol.* This protocol constitutes Appendix C and was designed to help generate, analyze, and interpret data through five lenses of this study's conceptual framework.

THEME ONE: FOCUSING ON STUDENT SUCCESS

Discussion prompt one generated principal, middle level leader, and superintendency team member comments, perspectives, and insights related to Theme One*: Focus on Student Success*:

1. *Please comment on the degree to which your school jurisdiction has a widely shared vision and beliefs about student learning, engagement, and well-being in the 21st Century?*

Participants in all six settings articulated that their jurisdictions were highly focused on student success: learning, engagement, and well-being. Educators at every level indicated that their work was guided and in many cases, inspired, by a clear learning vision that was understandable, attainable, and forward looking. The learning direction encouraged educators to help improve life chances for all students.

The survey results presented in Figure 5.1 reflect and support this qualitative cross-case finding.

Figure 5.1. Equity of Student Learning Reflected in the Vision
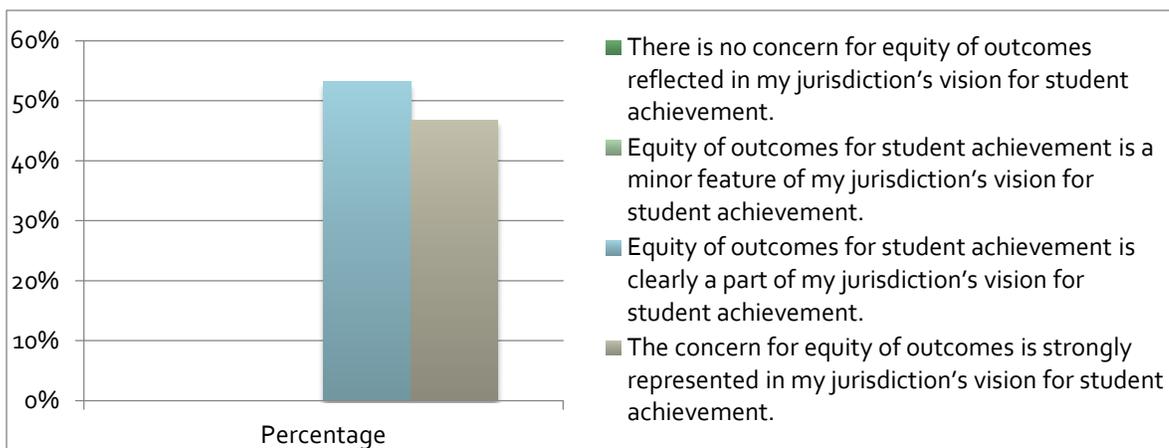
In all six cases, the jurisdiction focus was directly linked to Alberta Education's (2010) *Inspiring Education* vision of twenty-first century learning. In most instances, their focus was connected to the more detailed *Ministerial Order on Student Learning* (Alberta Education, 2013). Figure 5.2 shows additional evidence of efforts to focus on improving student learning.

Though the degree to which the jurisdiction vision was widely shared varied, as illustrated in Figure 5.3, there was a strong consensus among the participants across the cases that their core leadership work was creating and sustaining structures, conditions, and processes that support the learning and well-being of all students. Although the intensity of the focus on student learning was not articulated in the same way in each setting, one participant's description of their focus on student learning and commitment to action was *laser like*. None of jurisdictions considered their work done, but a *work in progress*.

Participants from some jurisdictions indicated that past expectations for administrators were on management, rather than leadership. As well, several participants noted that improving teaching and learning was previously more teacher-centered, than student centered. Across the cases, superintendency teams were facilitating shifts to research-based quality core instruction and assessment, support for all students and building teacher and leadership capacity to support student learning. These shifts were evolutionary going back years for some

members of the superintendency teams to initiatives, such as AISI or the implementation of the Response to Intervention Pyramid, and refined through successive superintendency teams.

Figure 5.2. Vision's Focus on Improving Student Learning
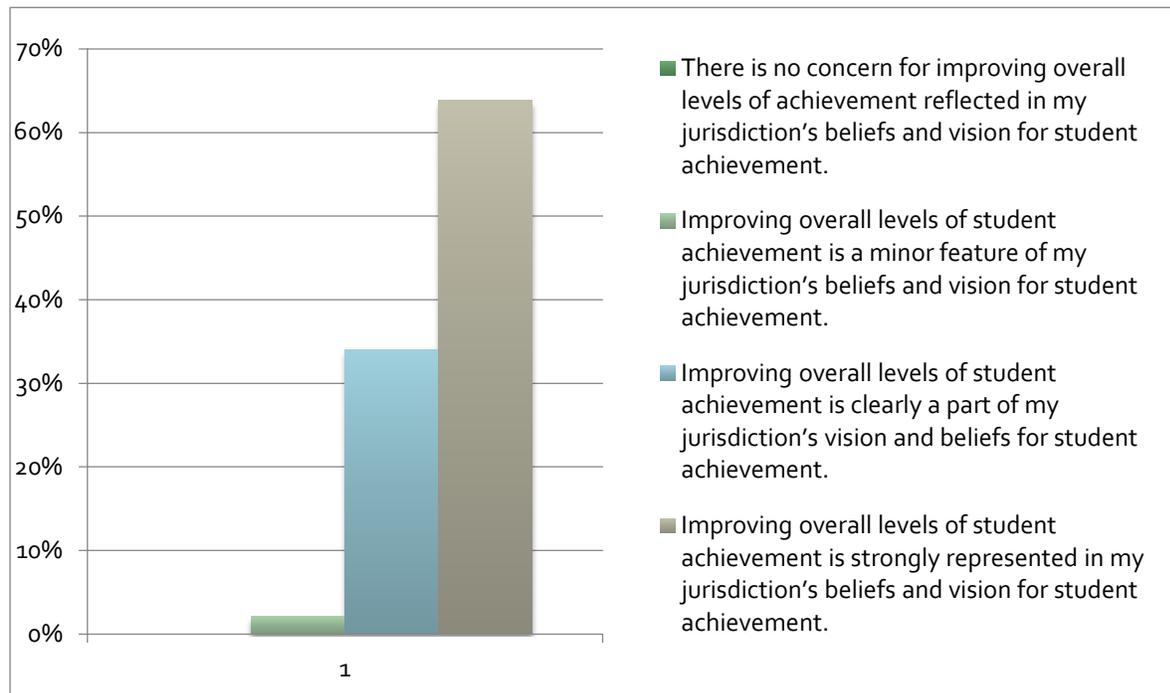
Figure 5.3. Degree to Which the Vision is Understood and Shared
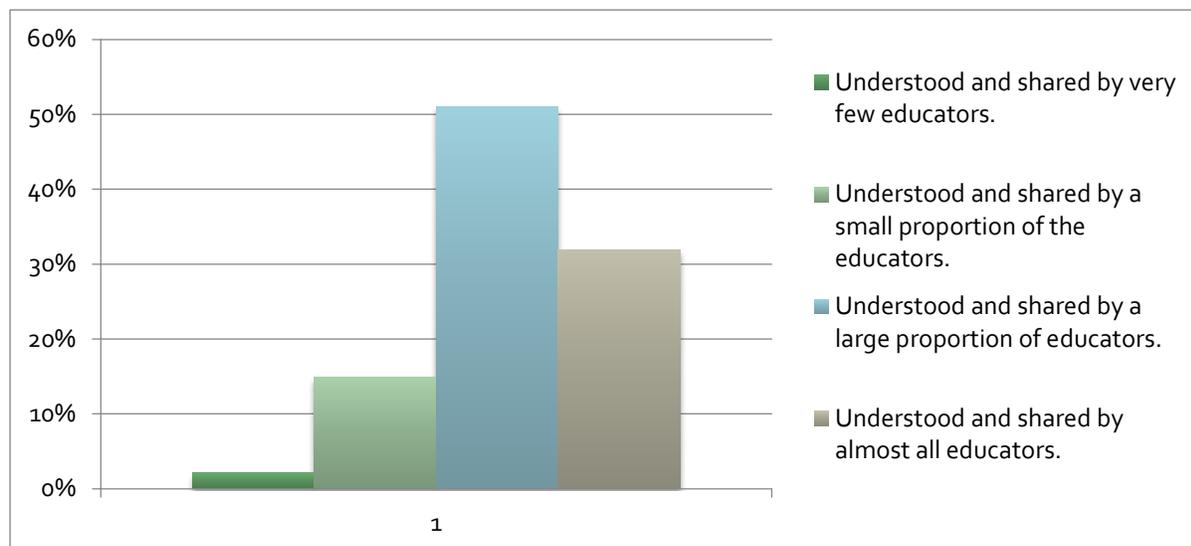
To realize their new or renewed focus on student learning, jurisdictions developed a number of purposeful strategies and structures to improve learning for all students. The formation of family groups of schools, the

addition of specific roles such as learning leaders or learning coaches to support teachers and school leaders are examples. Building and sustaining instructional leadership was a central strategy. Although some jurisdictions felt some initial resistance to moving from management to leadership, other jurisdictions had long since passed that hurdle and were well along the pathway to moving school leaders from a focus on managing the photocopiers to focus on what was happening in each classroom in their schools. Experts and an array of professional learning opportunities were provided to support the development of instructional leadership and teaching expertise.

Several participants mentioned the role of the superintendency team in *staying the course* as the move to instructional leadership and new instructional and assessment strategies were implemented. Participants viewed the role of the superintendency team in modeling the shift to focus on student learning as critical.

Our first cross-case theme – *focusing on student success* – underlines the benefits of intentionally focusing jurisdiction energy and efforts on teaching and learning. The senior leaders in this study were committed to developing and acting on a widely shared vision and focus on student learning and well-being in the 21st Century. In this respect, the work of the six superintendency teams aligned with and added to research claims that leadership practices aimed at creating a such a widely shared sense of purpose can have a significantly positive impact (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2003; Friesen & Lock, 2010; Hightower, 2002; Leithwood; 2008, 2010a, 2011, & 2012; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Togneri &Anderson's, 2003; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, &Anderson, 2010a, 2010b). The theme also supports the need for attention to be placed on engaging students intellectually, academically, and socially to more fully support student learning and welfare for the immediate and longer terms (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009).

THEME TWO: ENABLING ENGAGING INSTRUCTION

The discussion prompt and interview question that generated participant comments related to Theme Two*: Enabling Engaging Instruction,* were as follows:

2. *Please describe a few of the ways in which jurisdiction leaders work with schools to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.*

3. *In what ways do jurisdiction leaders work with schools to align curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teaching resources in an extensive and ongoing manner?*

Many of the senior teams called upon principals, learning coaches, learning leaders, and central office leaders to invest heavily in teaching strategies designed to more deeply engage all students. Holy Family is consolidating professional learning about teaching and learning, rather than continually engaging in new initiatives. The intent is to sustain support to schools in their efforts to increasingly provide highly engaging forms of instruction to all students. The five principles of Friesen's (2009) *Teaching Effectiveness Framework* are being extensively utilized across the Calgary Board of Education to support collaborative teacher efforts to design learning tasks that more consistently engage students in worthwhile and engaging work. Figure 5.4 indicates that movement in this direction is evident and increasingly well implemented.

Figure 5.4. Support of School Efforts to Foster Deep Understanding and Basic Skills

Legend:
- ■ Not very well developed.
- ■ Clearly articulated, but not well implemented
- ■ Clearly articulated and increasingly well implemented
- ■ Very well articulated and effectively implemented.
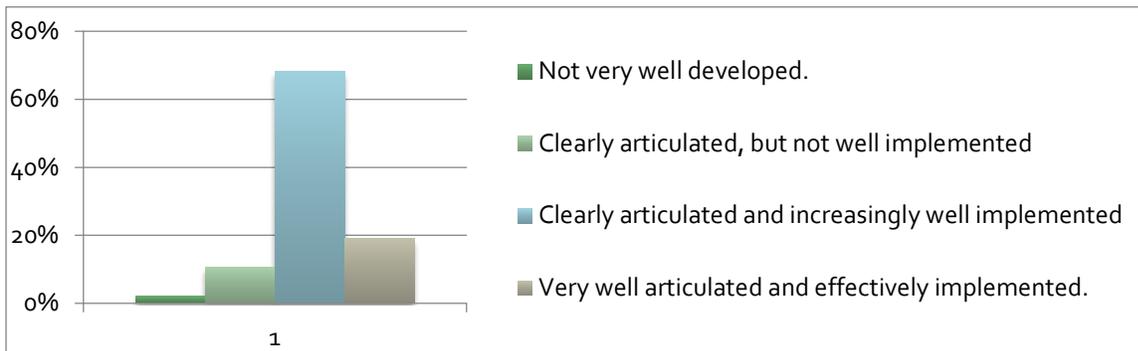
Considerable efforts are underway in all six cases towards the better alignment of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teaching resources. For instance, Ft. McMurray Catholic is involved in working with Alberta Education on a number of specialized pilots to implement curriculum and instruction in a manner that aligns provincial initiatives with the goals of the jurisdiction. In another example, Calgary Board of Education undertook a significant leadership role in province's curriculum re-design initiative and worked in partnership with a number of other jurisdictions, including Westwind, to move this novel curriculum project forward. Figure 5.5 provides further illustration of school, central office leader, and superintendency views on the alignment efforts in four of the jurisdictions.

Figure 5. 5. Alignment of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, Inclusive Education, Technology Integration, and Teaching Resources

Legend:
- ■ So far, little effort has been made to align curriculum, instruction, assessment, inclusive education, technology integration and teaching resources in my jurisdiction.
- ■ So far, alignment efforts in my jurisdiction have been restricted to one or two areas of the curriculum and usually have involved only small groups of staff members.
- ■ Alignment efforts in my jurisdiction are now expanding to include many more areas of the curriculum and greater participation by stakeholders.
- ■ Alignment efforts in my jurisdiction are extensive, ongoing and involve most stakeholders.

This second cross-case theme highlights the need to work with educators at all levels to implement instructional approaches that are intellectually, academically, and socially engaging (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Cross-case theme two – *enabling engaging instruction* – indicates that the highly successful and learning focused school jurisdictions we visited were working intensively with schools to provide all students with engaging forms of instruction. Most superintendency teams included a large number of their teachers in the jurisdiction's instructional improvement work aimed at assisting teachers towards sophisticated

understandings of powerful pedagogical approaches. Such significant investments in ongoing instructional improvement are supported by considerable research that consistently shows that the quality of teaching is the most important factor in supporting student learning and engagement (Friesen, 2009: Friesen & Lock, 2010; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2012; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009).

THEME THREE: FOSTERING COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

Many of the participant ideas and insights we used to formulate our conception of the *Fostering Collective Efficacy* theme emerged in responses to the discussion prompt one, which was designed to garner views related to *focusing on student success.* The two following interview questions generated additional qualitative data:

4. *What can you tell us about the opportunities your jurisdiction provides to help develop expertise relevant to achieving its priority goals?*

5. *Are there any specific ways that your jurisdiction creates organizational structures and settings that support and enhance teacher and school leader work and learning?*

Consistent with the direction charted by existing research, each of the senior leadership teams provides quite extensive opportunities for staff to develop expertise relevant to achieving the district's goals. Steering committees for initiatives; professional learning community groups; one on one meetings of principals with the superintendent; the administrators retreat with the Board every two years; jurisdiction organizational health committee; long service awards; professional development, including book studies and in-basket activities and administrators council are all examples of the variety of structures in place in St. Albert Public to engage and to build capacity and collective capacity.

As Section Four of this report illustrated, the six jurisdictions have put into place a variety of organizational structures that support and enhance staff's work and learning. The six superintendency teams and other study participants enthusiastically described quite a wide variety of structures and ways of regularly working together within the system to ensure regular, collaborative, and extended opportunities to attend to school and system improvement. St. Albert Public has established a number of effective structures that routinize system-wide collaboration to build capacity to improve teaching and learning. It focuses on using the expertise within the system whenever possible and is committed to building strong external and internal networks.

As noted in the previous section, Chinook's Edge has created a transparent, collaborative, interdependent learning culture that is focused on results by providing a structure that invites input and dialogue. The development of *matters* groups for teachers, parents, students, and central office support staff; professional learning community meetings for grades level or specialist groups across the jurisdiction; monthly meetings with all school administration and jurisdiction office administration; bi-monthly School Administrator Team meetings with representative principals, and vice-principals and monthly Central Office Leadership Team (COLT) member school visits provide avenues to vet ideas, share concerns and resolve issues.

Participant responses portrayed in Figure 5.6 indicate that opportunities for school leaders lag those provided for teachers.

Figure 5.6. Developing Expertise that Educators Need to Achieve Jurisdiction Goals
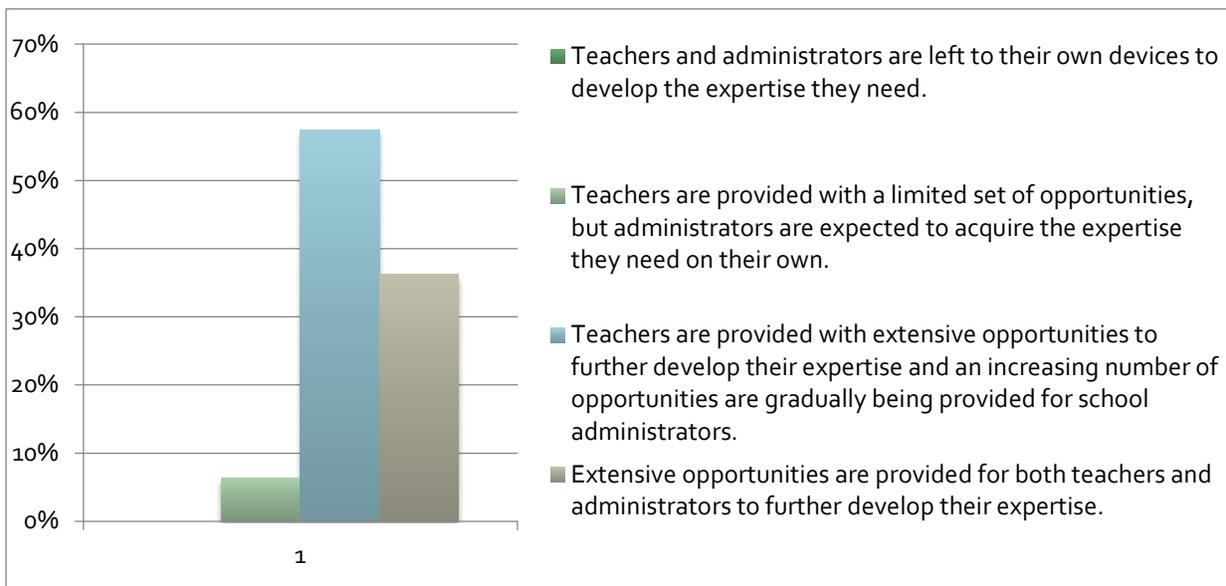
Figure 5.7 presents a positive portrait of jurisdiction and school leader efforts to ensure that collaboration time is made available for teacher to regularly work together with their peers on instructional development and school planning initiatives.

Figure 5.7. Organizational Structures that Enhance Teachers' Work and Learning
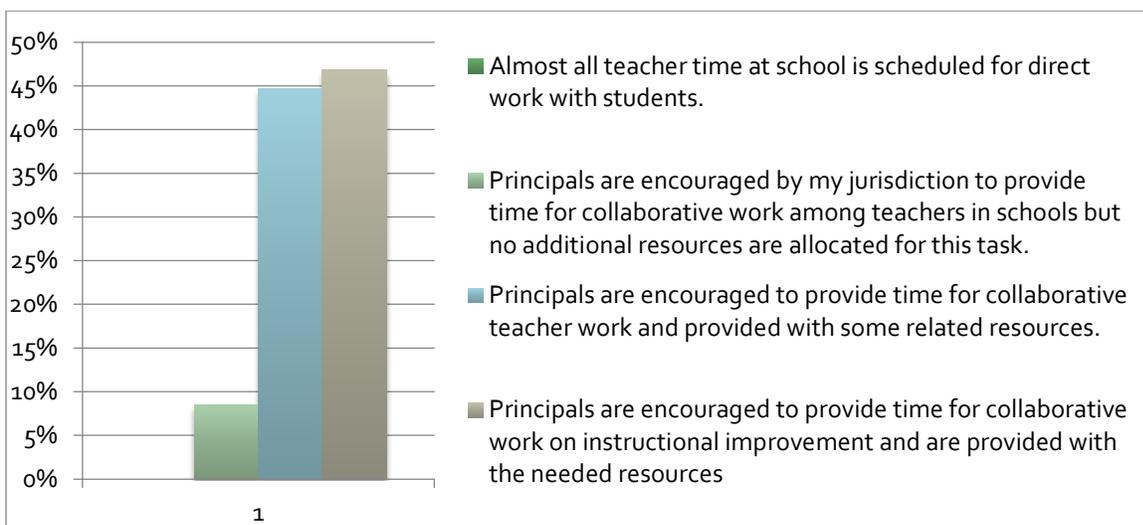
The data that generated cross-case theme three – *fostering collective efficacy* – were extensive and varied. The structures and norms deliberately established in the jurisdictions have produced a continuum of interconnected school and system leader networks wherein educators work together toward achievement of the system's goals. Bandura (1977, 1986, 1989, 1997) provided the research foundations that explain the persistence in solving problems and effortful responses to challenges that we heard about through our focus groups and are characteristic of individuals and staffs with high levels of efficacy. Leithwood's (2008, 2010a) and his colleagues

(2010, 2012) found that a sense of collective efficacy on the part of a district's principals was a significant factor in accounting for district effects on student achievement. The way that the jurisdictions in our study built collective efficacy run parallel to what Leithwood, Anderson and Louis (2012) found. Districts contribute most to school leaders' sense of efficacy through five strategies: (a) unambiguously assigning priority to the improvement of student achievement and instruction; (b) investing in the development of instructional leadership; (c) ensuring that personnel policies support the selection and maintenance of the best people for each school; (d) emphasizing teamwork and professional community; and (e) providing worthwhile programs of professional development, aimed at strengthening their capacities to achieve shared purposes (p. 119).

THEME FOUR: SCAFFOLDING OVERALL INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

The topic of instructional leadership poured through our focus group and individual interviews from the onset of each. Quite a volume of data related to theme four – *scaffolding overall instructional leadership* – came forward through their early entries into the conversations. Participants from all levels were eager to describe school and jurisdiction approaches to this work. Participants at every level viewed this as the core work of the jurisdiction leadership team.

More specific data flowed in response to the three more targeted discussion prompts 6, 7, and 8 from our interview protocol. Educational leaders in the six jurisdictions were asked to convey their thoughts about the ways in which their jurisdiction

6. *requires principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction.*

7. *assumes responsibility for developing and supporting instructional leadership in schools.*

8. *supports principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure high levels of learning for all students.*

In addition to the qualitative evidence we gathered that showed that the senior leaders in this study were persistently focused on student engagement, learning, and well-being, the survey results displayed in Figure 5.8 are a further indication of the instructional leadership focus of the superintendency teams.

Our discussion of the ways in which this emphasis on instructional leadership was played across the cases follows the three specific interview protocol questions. In each instance survey and qualitative data are combined.

When examined together, Figures 5.8 and 5.9 provide additional and quite compelling evidence about the strength of superintendency team commitment of *overall instructional leadership* in the cases. On both measures, ninety-five percent of participants indicated that senior leaders were both focused on instructional leadership and have similar expectations for school leaders. That is, principals and assistant principals are expected to be familiar with and supportive of the classroom work of their teachers.

Figure 5.8 Superintendency Team's Focus on Instructional Leadership

- Most members of the superintendency team do not view themselves as having the knowledge about, or significant responsibilities for, the quality of instruction in schools. Principal selection and evaluation policies do not reflect an instructional leadersh

- Most members of the superintendency team encourage an instructional focus on the part of school leaders and assume that it is the responsibility of school leaders to acquire the capacities needed to pursue this instructional focus. Instructional leadershi

- Members of the superintendency team encourage an instructional focus on the part of school leaders, provide opportunities and resources for improving the instructional leadership skills of school leaders and make this the main focus of their school visits

- Members of the superintendency team keep both the community and the jurisdiction staff focused on learning and they support principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure high levels of learning for all students. The jurisdicti

Figure 5.9. Holding Principals Directly Accountable for Instructional Quality

- Instructional quality is viewed by jurisdiction leaders as teachers' responsibility. Teachers' are held directly accountable for the quality of their instruction. Neither jurisdiction nor school leaders are expected to contribute significantly to instruct

- Instructional quality is viewed by jurisdiction leaders as teachers' responsibility. Teachers' are held directly accountable for the quality of their instruction. School leaders are expected to provide general support to teachers in their instructional im

- Jurisdiction leaders expect principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction. This is among the many criteria used for selecting school leaders and for their performance appraisal.

- Jurisdiction leaders expect principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction. This is a central criterion for selecting school leaders and for their performance appraisal.

The expectation that principals will be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction was universally understood and applied in all six jurisdictions. These expectations played out in nuanced ways in each system. Holy Family and Fort McMurray Catholic, for instance, expect principals to spend a specified percentage of their time in classrooms. Westwind, St. Albert, and Chinook's Edge have similar expectations, but take a more general approach. In all these cases, the intention is to create relationships of expectation and support within schools. Interactions with teachers are often structured around questions such as "How is this making a difference for student learning? What can we do to help?" CBE they indicate that they are expected to be knowledgeable of the quality of their teachers' instruction. In addition, each principal viewed "leading teacher learning" as an important part of the role.

Figure 5.10. Supplementing Instructional Leadership as Needed
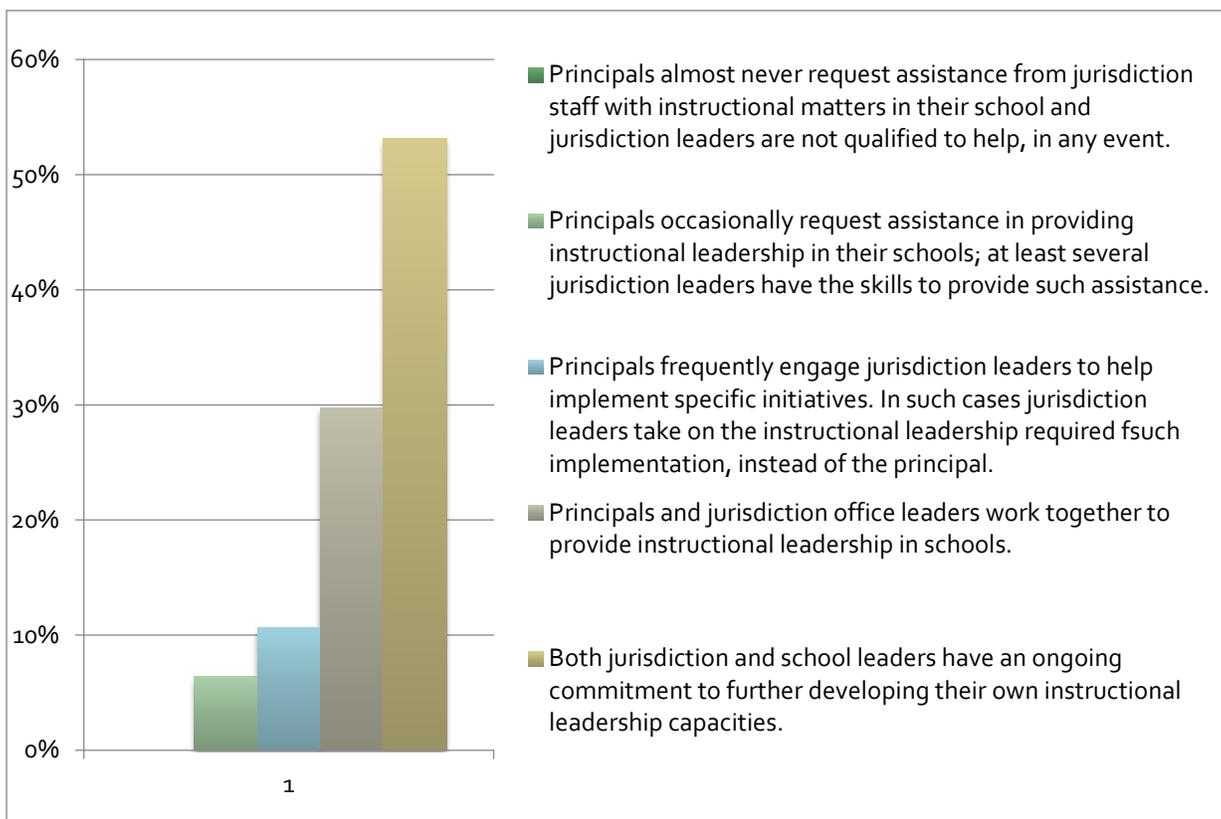
A shared approach to instructional leadership was also evident in several instances. Many principals increasingly see their work as part of instructional leadership teams within and beyond their schools. Vice-principals, learning coaches, and learning leaders are working together in distributed and shared forms of leadership in many of the systems. The case-by-case qualitative data suggested that ongoing support of jurisdiction based instructional leaders adds to this sense of team leadership, which is evident to some degree in the survey results displayed in Figure 5.10.

Figure 5.11. Provision of Opportunities to Further Develop Instructional Leadership
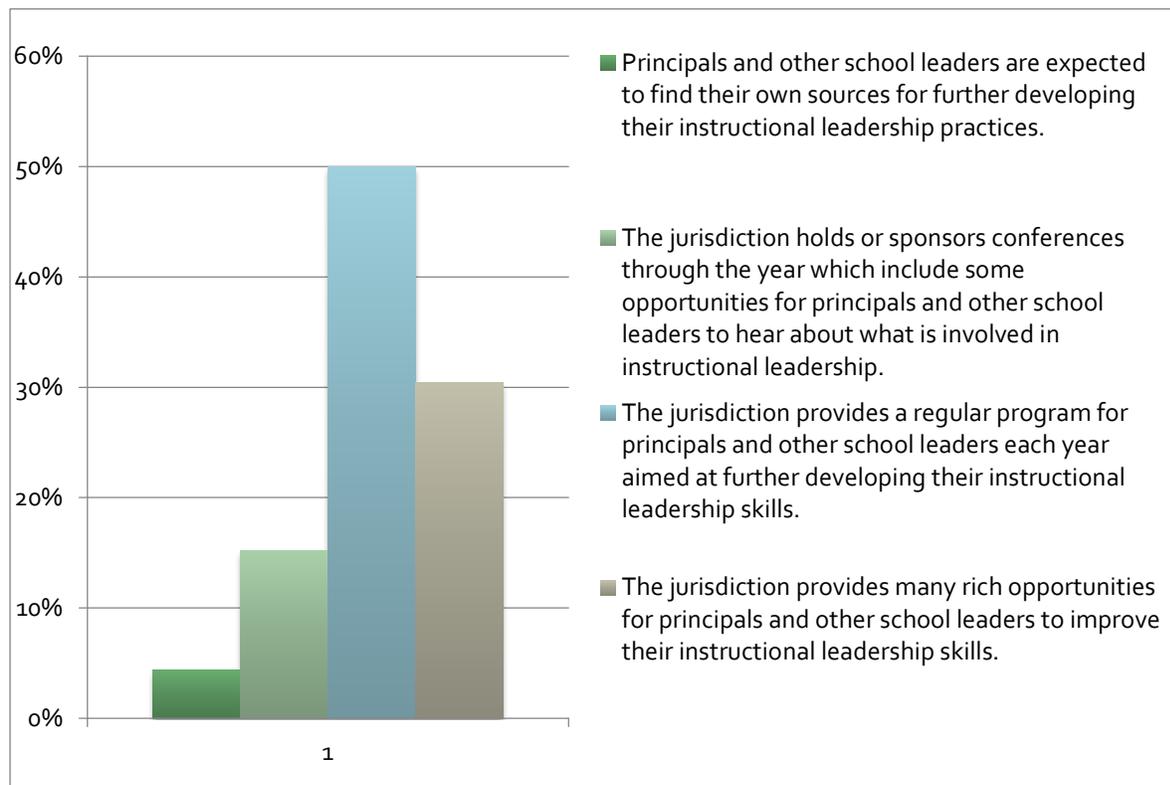
The survey data displayed in Figure 5.11 suggests that many principals and jurisdiction leaders are looking for more ongoing and connected ways to develop instructional leadership capacity. This data in tandem with evidence from focus group interviews provides support for need for developing instructional leadership through sustained, job embedded, and evidence based approaches. While attendance at conferences and one-shot presentations by headline speakers can be stimulating; ongoing, collaborative, and context based approaches are seen to have greater impact. For instance, principals, area director, and superintendents report that the CBE's ongoing emphasis on instructional leadership over the past several years has created an increasingly coherent, and shared approach through nested layers of professional leadership learning communities.

Cross-case theme four – *scaffolding overall instructional leadership* – illustrates how persistent senior leader commitment to the development of instructional leadership is progressing in the six jurisdiction settings. To a considerable degree, the efforts of jurisdiction leaders in our study aligns with the growing research base of how school districts can do this important work well (Anderson & Louis, 2012; Barber, Whelan, & Clark, 2010; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008, Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Wahlstrom, 2012). Increasingly, these leaders are working to improve instructional leadership practices in what Wahlstrom (2012) found to be two complementary categories: *Instructional Ethos* and *Instructional Actions*. These leaders are working broadly to build professional community to generate benefit through the establishment of school and jurisdiction cultures that support continual professional learning. At the same time, they are working to enhance school leader capacity to supportively engage with individual teachers to promote professional growth in classroom settings.

THEME FIVE: STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The following three interview protocol questions were used to generate data that led to our fifth theme – *strengthening professional learning*:

9. *In what ways is professional learning carefully aligned with jurisdiction and school improvement initiatives in your system?*

10. *To what degree is jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning closely aligned with the best evidence about how people learn?*

11. *What professional learning initiatives do you believe are improving teaching and learning in your jurisdiction?*

The qualitative evidence collected in the six jurisdictions underlines the high value placed on professional learning. At both the jurisdiction and school levels, most of the time spent on professional learning was clearly aimed at enhancing and supporting teaching and learning. These senior leaders were acting on Firestone and Riehl's (2005) conclusion that: "districts play a key role in supporting instructional reform by being the primary designers and deliverers of learning opportunities for teachers, and if they do so in a focused, coherent fashion they can influence teaching practice" (p. 316).

Figure 5.12. Time and Money Allocated to Professional Learning

- The jurisdiction has an ambitious set of goals for improving student learning but has allocated very little time or money for preparing educators to accomplish those goals.

- While some time and money have been allocated for the professional learning of leaders and teachers, these resources badly underestimate what will be required if educators are to accomplish the goals established by the jurisdiction.

- Although still underestimated, there have been recent and significant increases in the time and money allocated to professional learning.

- Adequate amounts of both the time and money have been allocated for the professional learning of leaders and teachers.

Figure 5.13. Refocusing Routine Institutional Practice to Serve Professional Learning

■ Routine administrative meetings continue to consume most of the out-of-classroom time of teachers and most of the out-of-school time of principals and other school leaders. Very little time remains for professional learning.

■ Time normally spent on routine administrative matters by teachers, principals and other school leaders in meetings is now occasionally used for professional learning purposes.

■ Much less time is now devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings. A significant fraction of the meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted to professional learning.

■ Very little time is devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional learning.

Figure 5.14. Differentiated Approaches to Professional Learning

■ One approach to jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning is assumed to be adequate for all teachers, school leaders, and schools in this jurisdiction.

■ Just recently, jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning has begun to be more sensitive to teachers and school leaders and school differences.

■ The jurisdiction sponsors a wide array of professional learning opportunities but contributes little to individual school improvement initiatives jurisdiction and school improvement efforts and the different challenges facing schools.

Both the qualitative and quantitative data provide insight into school and system leader perspectives on the impact of these efforts in four areas as displayed in Figures 5.12 through 5.15, which have been presented in sequence above. First, Figure 5.12 indicates that while more than 80% of participants believe funding of professional learning to be adequate or recently making important strides in that direction, almost 20% believe it necessary to increase resources to achieve the desired outcomes. Interview data provided similar results.

Figure 5.15. Professional Learning Based on Adult Learning Theory

Legend:
- PD still seems to be driven by an outmoded "behavioristic" understanding of how people learn. It is often a "one-shot" presentation
- PD is based on an unpredictable mixture of outmoded "behavioristic" approaches and more contemporary, constructivist assumptions.
- The majority of PD is now informed by contemporary learning theory. It is largely job-embedded, builds on participants' tacit knowledge and engages them actively in the construction of new knowledge and skills.
- All jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning is now closely aligned with the best evidence of how people learn.

Second, participants were appreciative of efforts to find ways to more fully integrate professional learning into jurisdiction routines. Less time devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and principals was reported. Similarly, numerous participants indicated that an increasing portion of meeting time was being utilized for professional learning. These trends are also revealed in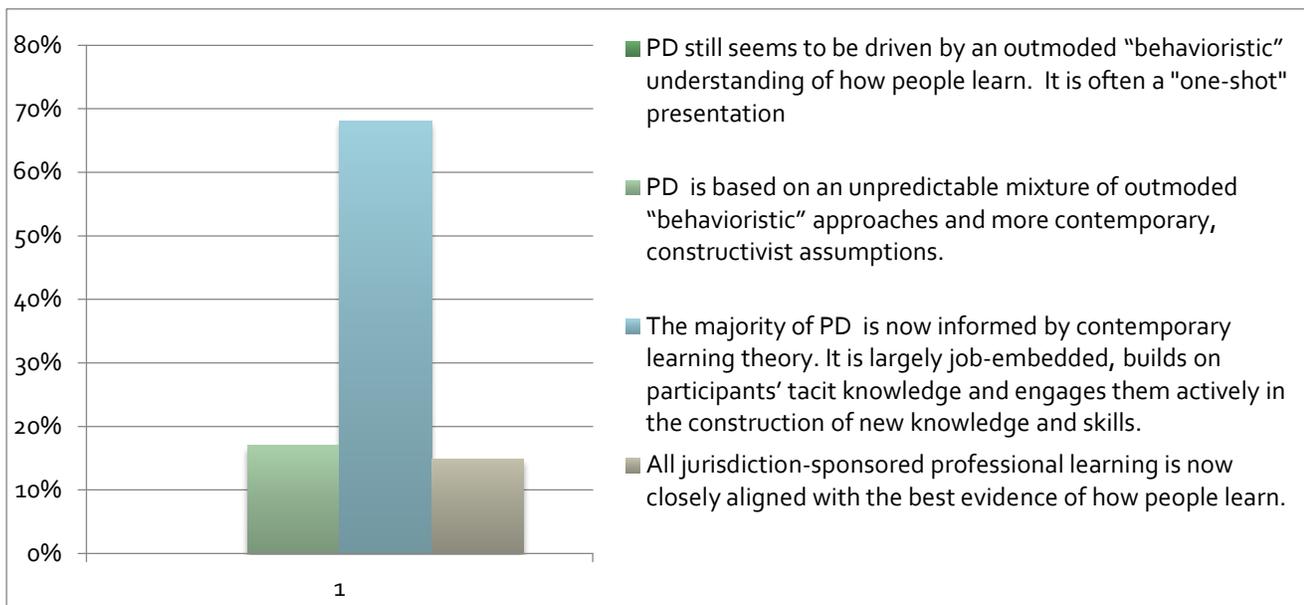 Figure 5.13. Figure 5.14 reflects much of what we heard during focus group conversations about increasing flexibility and adaptability in jurisdiction professional learning offerings.

Figure 5.15 is indicative of the shift from *professional development* to *professional learning* that several participants described in the focus group sessions. In a number of jurisdictions, the value of ongoing professional learning is being translated into sustained and often innovative approaches tied to local needs and nuances. Deployment of local and external expertise is increasingly based on both teacher and leader capacities and needs. Learning coaches, learning leaders, and other positions are working closely with teachers and school leaders on a regular basis. Similar efforts are noted at the jurisdiction level, where a variety of ongoing approaches are being utilized to better equip both school and jurisdiction leaders move forward in their instructional leadership work.

Cross-case theme five – *professional learning* – underlines the benefits of intentionally focusing jurisdiction resources on building teaching and learning capacity through effective professional learning. Jurisdiction leaders in this study were committed to ongoing and sustained educator learning. In several instances, their efforts reflected current research how to effectively improve leading and teaching practice through focused and responsive professional learning. In other cases, intentions were good, but approaches were less tightly connected to the research. Evidence supporting the importance of professional learning was claimed in 21 of the 33 studies reported in Leithwood's (2008, 2010a) review. This was the largest number of studies reporting evidence about any of the 12 dimensions of high-performing districts. We expect to a continuing evolution toward the more evidence driven professional learning, as identified in an increasing number of studies

(Bredeson and Johansson, 2000; Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Leithwood 2008, 2010a; Opfer, Pedder, & Lavicza, 2007; Pritchard & Marshall, 2002; Timperley, 2011; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).

THEME SIX: LEADING LEARNING THROUGH SUPERINTENDENCY TEAMS

Theme Six – *Leading Learning Through Superintendency Teams* – is one of the fundamental ideas that has run through our study from conception to execution. From our past experiences working as members of senior leadership teams in five Alberta jurisdictions, we had a strong, shared faith in the importance of team leadership and team learning grounded in the literature by Senge (1990). The significance of the jurisdiction leadership group working as a team in their collective efforts to lead educator and student learning became increasingly prominent during each successive data collection visit.

Figure 5.16 Relationships and Sense of Community Among Central Office Leaders
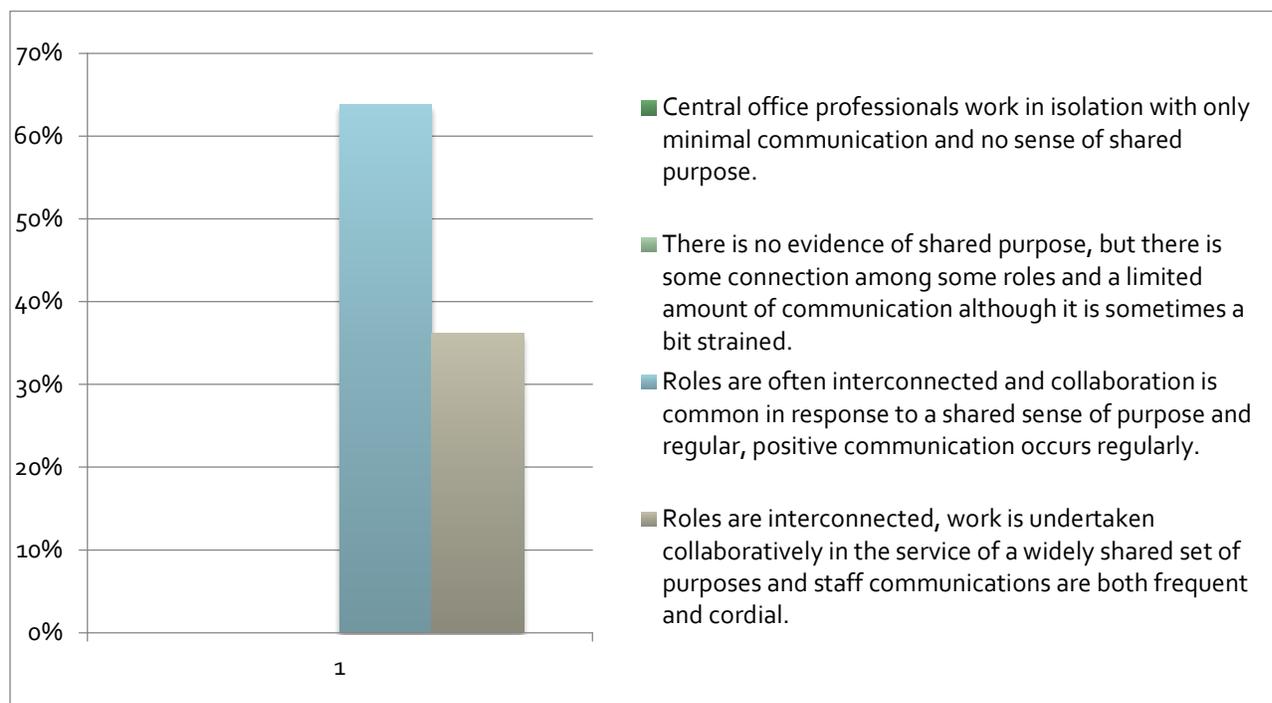
Superintendency teamwork was seen by participants to contribute to student success in a number of ways. Under the overall leadership of the superintendent, central leadership teams in these jurisdictions were working together to establish and support clear expectations for school leadership practice. They coordinated organized opportunities for teachers and principals to engage in relevant and targeted professional learning that connected to the strategic focus of the jurisdiction. Participants repeatedly noted that the most significant focus of the superintendency teams was on student learning and achievement. All participants viewed this as the core work of the jurisdiction leadership team. The survey results portrayed in Figure 5.16 are indicative of this perspective.

Leading Learning Through Superintendency Teams – is the sixth cross-case theme. The unique role of the Chief Executive and Chief Educational Officer in each jurisdiction was quite well understood and very much appreciated as a distinct and challenging position by all participants. What was even more greatly appreciated was the way in which the superintendents in this study were working with their senior leadership colleagues to provide coherent, coordinated, and focused leadership of the learning agenda in the jurisdictions. Their work in this regard is linked with evidence in a number of recent studies (Louis &Wahlstrom, 2012; Wahlstrom, 2012; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, &Anderson, 2010a, 2010b). Leithwood's (2010) second CASS sponsored research study of district improvement processes concluded that the district leadership team is the single most important influence on district turnaround processes and that the superintendency team should be held directly accountable for tasks it is uniquely positioned to accomplish (p. 28).

THEME SEVEN: BUILDING PURPOSEFUL PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Evidence to support the development of theme Seven – *Building Purposeful Professional Relationships* – emerged from two sources throughout our data collection processes. One data strand was generated through focus group and individual interview conversations related to the following prompt:

12. *Please feel free to share any additional thoughts about the general ways in which your superintendency team leads teacher and leadership learning in your jurisdiction.*

In addition to what participants said about the nature of educator relationships within the jurisdiction using such terms as – open, supportive, trusting, and reciprocal – we also formed our own thoughts in this direction through reflection on and dialogue about each of our data collection visits. With very few exceptions, participants were cordial, relaxed, and proud to be engaged with each other in conversation about the ways in which they were working together with their colleagues at various levels to support teacher and student learning. It was clearly and consistently evident to us that professional working relationships and relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) were strong across the cases.

An element that was clear in the responses from almost all participants was the opportunity for individuals to have a voice, regardless of their position in the hierarchy. It was apparent that the superintendency teams provide s conduits for input and influence in the direction of the jurisdiction. Building strong, trusting relationships was foundational to the success of each jurisdiction. Collaboration and trust were cited as cornerstones that enabled participants to do their work effectively. This was important on a variety of levels, between the members of the superintendency team, between the schools, and of course between school personnel and the superintendency team. Certainly, there were differing views, but an overwhelming sense that was noted was that individual opinions were respected and relationships were healthy.

Each jurisdiction was very purposeful in developing structures to ensure individual and groups were meeting on a consistent basis to allow for the development of authentic relationships. For example, both Holy Family and Fort McMurray Catholic used the term *family of schools* to describe how like schools were grouped and time was provided to meet with members of the superintendency team to share ideas, concerns and processes. As well, most of the jurisdictions had implemented some form of classroom support teachers, learning coaches, instructional leadership teams or professional learning communities as ways to provide on-site and jurisdiction wide support for school administration and teachers. Chinook's Edge central leaders team work with schools

through relationships of challenge and support. Leaders and teachers know they will be held accountable for their working hard to enable student success, but they also know that they are doing so in a highly supportive environment.

The structures and roles that were put in place by the superintendency team were purposeful in that they were deliberate efforts to break down silos by focusing on shared priorities and making connections at all levels. Ensuring high levels of interaction within professional communities.

Building Purposeful Professional Relationships – is our seventh cross-case theme. We observed and heard descriptions of professional relationships characterized by high levels of relational trust, reciprocity, and collaboration. Moreover, these professional relationships were built with a shared focus on enabling student success. Establishing purposeful relationships was an ongoing intentional high priority for the superintendency teams in this study. Efforts in this direction are supported by evidence from several recent studies (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Louis &Wahlstrom, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Timperley, 2011; Wahlstrom et al., 2010a, 2010b).

Two claims from this existing research were particularly well linked to the evidence we gathered. First, Louis and Wahlstrom (2012) found that "leadership practices targeted directly at improving instruction have significant effects on teachers' working relationships and indirectly on student achievement" and that "when principals and teachers share leadership, teachers' working relationships are stronger and student achievement is higher" (p. 25). The effect occurs "largely because effective leadership strengthens professional community, a special environment within which teachers work together to improve their practice and improve student learning" (p. 25). Similarly, Timperly (2011) underlined the importance professional learning community, which she described as a group of professionals committed to working together to learn about their practice for the purpose of improving student learning. Significantly, it is important for educators in this arrangement to focus on student learning through respectful, trusting relationships and collaborative inquiry for deep learning based on evidence.

THEME EIGHT: ACCESSING EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EXPERTISE

Theme eight – *accessing external and internal expertise* – emerged primarily from focus group and individual interview data generated from the following prompt:

> 12. *Please feel free to share any additional thoughts about the general ways in which your superintendency team leads teacher and leadership learning in your jurisdiction.*

All six of the jurisdictions in this study utilized external expertise to grow capacity and to develop local expertise, particularly the areas of research based instruction, assessment, and instructional leadership. Access to experts was a critical component of ongoing professional learning.

External experts were often asked to support jurisdiction efforts in areas of specific needs. For the most part this expertise was very targeted and purposeful while still allowing for some individuality at the school level. Particularly, in rural jurisdictions where access to a cadre of internally trained facilitators or researchers is limited, external experts provided support to the superintendency team. Many jurisdictions had begun these relationships through their AISI projects and then continued the partnerships forward into the present.

University of Lethbridge researchers David Townsend and Pamela Adams have continued their AISI initiated work to build inquiry oriented instructional leadership in Chinook's Edge and Westwind. In attempt to accelerate the pace of pedagogical and leadership change in their schools, Westwind has supplemented this work by contracting a number of other leading consultants for shorter periods over the last few year. Holy Family has established purposeful relationships with experts such as Shirley Stiles and Cara Shores in targeted priority areas for defined periods of time.

Both Fort McMurray Catholic and St. Albert Public add to their internal expertise through connections and formal partnerships with a variety Alberta based educational organizations such as Alberta Education and the Edmonton Regional Consortium.

Though many professional learning opportunities were facilitated internally in the CBE, Alberta's largest jurisdiction has also benefited from a continuing partnership with the Galileo Educational Network (GENA) at the University of Calgary. Sharon Friesen, Candace Saar, and others on the GENA team have worked extensively to foster pedagogical leadership and they are now helping to strengthen shared instructional leadership across the system through their monthly work with 700 learning leaders from across the system.

When experts were integrated into professional learning, the jurisdictions worked to ensure there was continuity and alignment with the priorities of the jurisdiction, especially with the focus on student learning and building instructional leadership capacity. In keeping with a philosophy of professional learning grounded in work, follow-up with the experts or members of the superintendency team or school leaders was part of the planning and implementation process.

The jurisdictions also provided time to consolidate learning and did not move from one expert to another, rather preferring to work with one or two individuals for a considerable length of time. The long-term goal was to grow capacity internally, gradually removing the need for external expertise. The foundation was thus laid to move to the next area of challenge with a new cadre of experts if needed or work on continued implementation and refinement of practice.

Our eighth cross-case theme highlights the benefits of working with experts to develop internal capacity. Cross-case theme eight – *accessing external and internal expert*ise – illustrates several ways that highly successful and learning focused school jurisdictions were working with trusted experts to help build leadership, pedagogy, and assessment. These efforts are supported by recent research by a number of scholars (for instance, Friesen, 2009: Friesen & Lock, 2010; Hatano & Oura, 2003; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Robinson, 2011; Timperley, 2011, Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). In our view, the larger intent of these jurisdiction efforts to build internal capacity is to develop what Timperley (2011) describes as *adaptive expertise*, which is characterized by deep pedagogic or leadership knowledgeable that can be retrieved, organized, and applied to address shifting challenges and needs.

THEME NINE: TRAVELLING THE PATHWAYS OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP LEARNING

Evidence to support the development of our final theme – *travelling the pathways of collaborative leadership learning* – emerged primarily through focus group and individual interview conversations related to the following prompt:

> 12. *Please feel free to share any additional thoughts about the general ways in which your superintendency team leads teacher and leadership learning in your jurisdiction.*

In addition to what participants said about their work to build collaborative leadership learning structures and communities within their settings, we also mined data from other interview segments. In particular, responses related to the focus on learning, system-wide efficacy, leadership for learning, and professional learning portions of the interview protocol yielded rich insights to inform theme nine.

The variety of approaches to leadership learning observed in our study support the view that there is no one best way to become a more competent school or jurisdiction leader. No standardized template dictates a one size fits all mandate for leadership development. Rather, our study suggests that jurisdictions enable and benefit from multiple forms of leadership learning.

These highly successful and learning focused jurisdictions were committed to development of instructional leaders in every school and at the central office. Each jurisdiction was on its own journey of collaborative leadership learning. It could be said they were on a continuum of development. Some were fully engaged in instructional leadership while others were not as far along the path, but all were committed to focusing on student learning. Some were very tightly coupled with a model guiding their actions, while other were more loosely coupled bound together by a shared vision but more flexible in how individual schools approached implementing a strong focus on student learning and providing instructional leadership.

Although there were multiple pathways, there were common strategies employed to move in the direction of collaborative leadership community building. Each jurisdiction had organizational structures that enabled collaboration, leadership and alignment, such as: classroom support teachers, learning coaches, instructional leadership teams, professional learning communities, administrative meetings, beginning administrator or teacher programs. Collaboration, mentorship and adequate resources, including time, were evident in each opportunity. Processes were in place that also built capacity like engagement in research or implementation of specific programs or models. Each jurisdiction recognized prior learning and created a scaffold to new learning. Jurisdictions recognized that having only a few priorities all focused on student learning was a leverage point that energizes people to work together.

Our final cross-case theme – *travelling the pathways of collaborative leadership learning* – draws attention to the multiplicity of ways that the superintendents in this study capitalized on the benefits of collective, shared, and distributed leadership to foster enhanced leadership capacity and to support aspiring and novice leaders in their systems. Their collaborative orientation leverages collective efforts to support overall instructional leadership that scaffolds teaching directed toward student success. This work is supported by a number of studies (for instance, Anderson & Louis, 2012; Barber, Whelan, & Clark, 2010; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Leithwood; 2008, 2010a, 2011, & 2012; Louis, Leithwood, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2010a, 2010b; Louis and Wahlstrom, 2012;

McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Timperley, 2011; Togneri &Anderson's, 2003; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010a, 2010b). The theme also supports the Togneri and Anderson (2003) finding that most high performing districts provide intensive long-term opportunities for principals to further develop their capacities as instructional leaders.

SUMMARY

This section described and provided evidence for nine themes developed from our cross-case analysis, which was based primarily on the qualitative data collected through our visits to each of the six school jurisdiction settings. Quantitative data gathered through the *Jurisdiction Leadership Survey* were used to augment the understandings arrived at through detailed examination of the qualitative evidence. We integrated the quantitative and qualitative data guided by processes outlined by Andres (2012), Creswell (2012), Merriam (1998), and Stake (2006). Selected research literature was then consulted to deepen our understanding of the mixed data and to aid our interpretations and recommendations presented in this section as five lessons for leading learning at the jurisdiction level.

The first five of the nine cross-case themes provide evidence of the power of the five dimensions of the *Alberta Framework* that served as our conceptual lens – these dimensions do, in fact, enable jurisdiction leaders to *frame leadership research in action*. Cross-case themes six through nine speak to the overwhelmingly positive impact of learning-oriented relationships and collaborative leadership at the jurisdiction level.

Insights from further analysis of and reflection on the nine cross-case themes are presented in our report's final section. Five major assertions about the ways in which successful superintendency teams lead educator and student learning are explained. These five *analytical generalizations* are based on the research team's reasoned judgement and assertional logic about the extent to which the findings and themes of this study can be used to support superintendency team practice in other settings. These assertions have been framed as five *lessons for superintendency teams* who seek to more effectively lead learning in their jurisdiction contexts.

Leading Learning at the Jurisdiction Level – Five Lessons

The primary purpose of this investigation was to better understand the phenomenon of *overall* instructional leadership as practiced by superintendency teams in highly successful and learning focused school jurisdictions. Each of the six jurisdiction cases was studied to gain insights into the complex meanings of this phenomenon and to illustrate such leadership practice in a variety of its contexts. Building on the findings and emerging themes from each individual setting, our cross-case analysis identified nine larger themes. Assertions and transferable insights arising from these themes are presented in this concluding section.

Five major assertions about the ways in which successful superintendency teams lead educator and student learning are postulated. These *analytical generalizations* are based on the research team's reasoned judgement and assertational logic about the extent to which the findings and themes presented in the preceding two sections are transferable and can be used to shape superintendency team practice in other settings. Our assertions are framed as five *lessons for superintendency teams* who seek to more effectively lead learning in their jurisdictions.

Evidence from our study suggests that these lessons may help to inform school jurisdiction leadership practice more generally. Building on previous research linking district leadership to improved student learning (Leithwood 2008, 2010, 2010a; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Louis et al., 2010; Wahlstrom et al., 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009), our study illustrates and illuminates jurisdiction-wide practices, actions, and policies viewed by educational leaders in highly successful and learning focused jurisdictions as significant contributors to student success. Stake (2006) observed that multicase studies such as this one are frequently used as a step toward theory:

> It is true that social scientists seeking generalization attend to both the particular and the general. They often justify the study of the particular as serving grand explanation not so much in a statistical sense but in a conceptual sense. (p. 8)

This report extends the body of knowledge gained through previous studies and offers research informed guidance to superintendency team practice through five lessons for jurisdiction leaders listed below and portrayed in Figure 6.1.

Leadership Lesson One*: Framing Leadership Research in Action*

Leadership Lesson Two*: Leading Learning Through Superintendency Teams*

Leadership Lesson Three*: Building Purposeful Professional Relationships*

Leadership Lesson Four*: Accessing External and Internal Expertise*

Leadership Lesson Five: *Travelling the Pathways of Collaborative Leadership Learning*

Figure 6.1: Leading Learning at the Jurisdiction Level – Five Lessons
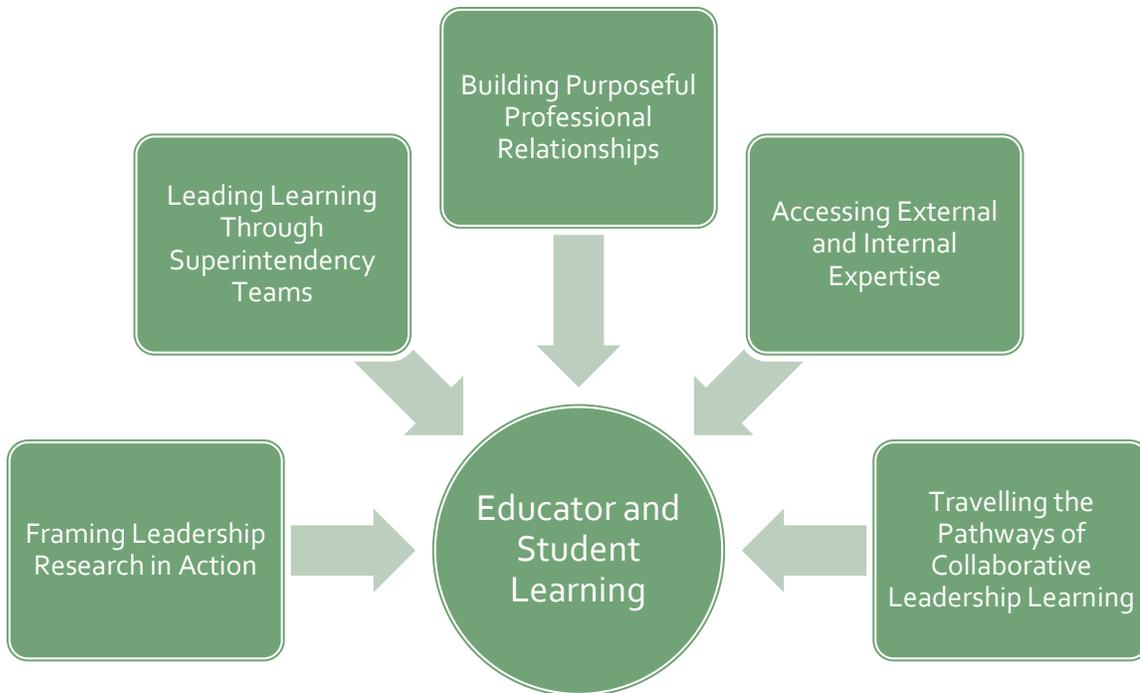
The lessons for superintendency teams are now presented. The more detailed evidence supporting each assertion is located in the preceding section. Table 5.2 cross references each lesson to the specific theme(s) in Section Five so that readers are better able to judge the soundness of each of our analytical generalizations (Brinkman and Kvale, 2012, p. 297). As (Stake, 2006) cautioned: "The evidence that persuaded the researchers needs to accompany each Assertion. It is not evidence for a court of law or geometric proof. It is persuasion, logical persuasion, the Assertion is credible" (p. 41).

Since Lesson One was derived from what we learned about the value of practicing leadership through a research informed conceptual lens, the evidence that supports the first of our assertions can be found in Themes One through Five in the preceding section. The language we researchers used to structure the interview questions came directly from the *Alberta Framework*. It was clearly and regularly evident that participants were familiar with the concepts, ideas, and practices if not deeply familiar with the actual framework as they responded. The ways we utilized our conceptual framework acknowledges Merriam's (1998) observation: "In multicase or cross-case analysis, the use of predetermined questions and specific procedures for coding and analysis enhances the generalizability of findings in the traditional sense" (p. 208).

Table 6.2 Leadership Lessons in Relation to Cross-Case Themes

Five Leadership Lessons (Assertions)	Supporting Evidence From Nine Cross-Case Themes
Leadership Lesson One*: Framing Leadership Research in Action*	Theme One*: Focusing on Student Success* Theme Two: *Enabling Engaging Instruction* Theme Three: *Fostering Collective Efficacy* Theme Four: *Scaffolding Overall Instructional Leadership* Theme Five: *Strengthening Professional Learning*
Leadership Lesson Two*: Leading Learning Through Superintendency Teams*	Theme Six: *Leading Learning Through Superintendency Teams*
Leadership Lesson Three*: Building Purposeful Professional Relationships*	Theme Seven: *Building Purposeful Professional Relationships*
Leadership Lesson Four*: Accessing External and Internal Expertise*	Theme Eight*: Accessing External and Internal Expertise*
Leadership Lesson Five: *Travelling the Pathways of Collaborative Leadership Learning*	Theme Nine: *Travelling the Pathways of Collaborative Leadership Learning*

LESSON ONE: FRAMING LEADERSHIP RESEARCH IN ACTION

Leadership Lesson One – *Framing Leadership Research in Action* – is based on our study's first major assertion:

The practices of superintendency teams who lead learning are action-oriented and research informed.

For superintendency teams, the availability of an easily accessible and understandable *Alberta Framework* (Brandon et al., 2013) grounded in research and steeped in practical wisdom, offers a way to scaffold learning and develop common language to speak with jurisdiction colleagues. Whether directly informed by the *Alberta Framework* or by other tools or models, the jurisdiction leaders in our study did more than just read and conceptualize research – they thoughtfully utilized what they were learning to implement change and to lead learning. It was apparent in the jurisdiction level focus groups and the superintendent interviews that several of the *Alberta Framework* dimensions were integrated into the language, conversations, and work of the six jurisdictions. Lesson One was derived from what we learned about the value of practicing leadership through a research informed conceptual lens.

LESSON TWO: LEADING THROUGH SUPERINTENDENCY TEAMS

Leadership Lesson Two – *Leading Through Superintendency Teams* – is based on our study's second major assertion:

> *Superintendents who lead learning share leadership with strong, collaborative, and learning focused senior leadership teams.*

Superintendents in highly successful and learning focused jurisdictions fully understand the complexities, challenges, and dynamics of their unique leadership positions. Contrary to media popularized notions of *heroic* leadership, the superintendents in this study capitalize on the benefits of collective, shared, and distributed leadership. Their collaborative orientation leverages collective efforts to support student success at every level – starting with their senior leadership team.

LESSON THREE: BUILDING PURPOSEFUL PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Leadership Lesson Three – *Building Purposeful Professional Relationships* – is based on our study's third major assertion:

> *Superintendency teams that lead learning influence educators at all levels through purposeful professional relationships.*

The relational orientations and interpersonal skills of superintendency team members in this study were foundational contributors to student success in their jurisdictions. Relational trust emanating from senior leadership encouraged participants at all levels to work effectively together to support learning, engagement, and well-being of all students and all staff members in jurisdiction. Professional conversations were most often characterized by respect and challenge, summoning the best available pedagogical, content, and assessment knowledge to keep the best interests of student learning, engagement, and well-being of students at the center.

LESSON FOUR: ACCESSING EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EXPERTISE

Leadership Lesson Four – *Accessing External and Internal Expertise* – is based on our study's fourth major assertion:

> *Superintendency teams that lead learning access external and internal expertise to build adaptive professional capacity through all layers of the system.*

Learning focused superintendency teams thoughtfully integrate internal and external expertise to grow professional capacity. Four of the six jurisdictions profited from their ongoing connections with external experts who undertook targeted professional learning in such strategically significant areas as instructional leadership, engaging pedagogy, and student assessment. The larger purpose of these partnering relationships was to build adaptive professional expertise in teachers, school leaders, and central office leaders.

LESSON FIVE: TRAVELLING THE PATHWAYS OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP LEARNING

Leadership Lesson Five – *Travelling the Pathways of Collaborative Leadership Learning* – is based on our study's fifth major assertion:

> *Superintendency teams that lead learning employ multiple capacity building approaches to leadership learning in their jurisdictions.*

The evidence is clear – educational leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student learning. The research is also definitive about the benefits of *collective, shared,* and *distributed* leadership. At a time of significant social turbulence and rapid generational turnover in the principalship, it is vitally important that these *collaborative* orientations guide leadership learning and development. Superintendency teams in all six cases are supporting a variety of leadership development pathways to better serve the professional learning needs of aspiring and current leaders. Leadership learning in these jurisdictions is increasingly based on research derived frameworks in authentically engaging professional leadership learning communities that are informed by evidence of impact on teaching and learning.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Superintendents Who Lead Learning: Lessons from Six Highly Successful School Jurisdictions was designed to contribute to the small, but growing research field of district level instructional leadership. Our study illustrates how superintendency teams lead learning in three ways. First, it provides six detailed descriptions of the work of superintendency teams in six Alberta school jurisdictions. Each case summary stands as one contextualized set of approaches used by a superintendency team in its specific geographic, social, economic, and educational setting. Second, the first five of the nine cross-case themes presented in Section Five provide evidence of the power of the five dimensions of the *Alberta Framework* that served as our conceptual lens – these dimensions do, in fact, enable jurisdiction leaders to *frame leadership research in action*. Cross-case themes six through nine speak to the overwhelmingly positive impact of evidence informed practice, judicious use of expertise, and collaborative leadership learning at the jurisdiction level.

The focus of this study was on a broad conception of *overall* instructional leadership – *leading learning* – as practiced by educational leaders at the school jurisdiction level. The five major *analytical generalizations* framed as *lessons for superintendency teams* are based on our reasoned judgements and assertional logic about the extent to which the findings and themes of this study can be used to guide practice in other settings. Case studies such as this one aim to generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes as in statistical generalization (Yin, 2009, p. 15). We offer the five *lessons for superintendency teams* from the perspective that "most fields informed by the social sciences have imperfect evidence available to inform their practices" and, as such, "judgments are rightly based on the best available evidence, along with the practical wisdom of those actually working in the field (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 9).

References

Alberta Education. (2010). *Inspiring education.* Edmonton, AB: Alberta Government.

Alberta Education. (2013). *Ministerial order on student learning*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Government.

Andres, L. (2012). *Designing and doing survey research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Anderson, S. & Louis, K. S. (2012). The district difference: A new perspective on the local challenges for improvement. In K. Leithwood & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Linking Leadership to student learning* (pp. 181-202). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barber, M. Whelan, F. & Clark. M. (2010). *Capturing the leadership premium: How the world's top school systems are building capacity for the future.* Retrieved from

http://www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/social_sector/our_practices/education/knowledge_highlights/~/media/Reports/SSO/schoolleadership_final.ashx

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*, 191–215.

Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action. A social cognitive theory. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist, 44*(9), 1175–1184.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control.* New York, NY: W. H. Freeman.

Bredeson, P. & Johansson, O. (2000). The school principals' role in teacher professional development. *Journal of In-Service Education*, *26*(2), 385-401.

Brandon, J. Hanna, P. Morrow, R. Rhyason, K. & Schmold, S. (2013). *The Alberta framework for school system success.* Edmonton, AB: Henday Publishing.

Brandon, J. Hanna, P. & Negropontes, D. (2014a). *Superintendents who lead learning.* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA.

Brandon, J. Hanna, P. & Negropontes, D. (2014b). *Superintendents who lead learning.* Paper presented at the College of Alberta School Superintendents Fall Conference, Calgary, AB.

Bransford, J. Brown, A. & Cocking, R. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience and school.* Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Brinkman, S. & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage

Bryk, A. & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in Schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage.

Cawelti, G. (2001). Six districts, one goal of excellence. *Journal of Staff Development*, *22*(4), 31-35.

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Darlington-Hammond, L. Hightower, A. Husbands, J. L. LaFors, J. R. Young, V. M. & Christopher, C. (2003). *Building instructional quality and coherence in San Diego city schools: System struggle, professional change.* Retrieved July 2008 from http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/Brief_nine.pdf

Elmore, R. & Burney, D. (l998). *Continuous improvement in Community District #2, New York City.* Retrieved July 2008 from www.lrdc.pitt.edu/hplc/hplc.html

Gordon, M. & Louis, K. S. (2012). Linking parent and community involvement with student achievement. In K. Leithwood & K.S. Louis. *Linking leadership to student learning.* San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Guskey, T. (1998). The age of our accountability. *Journal of Staff Development*, *19*(4), 36-44.

Firestone, W. & Riehl, C. (2005). *A new agenda for research in educational leadership*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Friesen, S. & Lock, J. (2010). *High performing school systems in the application of 21st century learning technologies: Review of the research*. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in A Culture of Change.* San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. (2011). *The moral imperative realized.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *33*(3), 329-352.

Hargreaves, A. & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school.* New York: Teachers College Press

Hargreaves, A. & Shirley, D. (2012). *The global fourth way: The quest for educational excellence.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Hargreaves, A. & Shirley, D. (2012). The international quest for educational excellence: Understanding Canada's high performance. *Education Canada*, 52, 10-13.

Hargreaves, A. Crocker, R. Davis, B. McEwen, L. Sahlberg, P. Sumara, D. Shirley, D. & Hughes, M. (2009). *The learning mosaic: A multiple perspectives review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement.* Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education.

Hatano, G. & Oura, Y. (2003). Commentary: reconceptualising school learning, using insight from expertise research. *Educational Researcher 32*, 26-29.

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement.* New York, N.Y: Routledge.

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning.* New York, N.Y: Routledge.

Hightower, A.M. (2002). *San Diego's big boom: District bureaucracy supports culture of learning.* Retrieved July 2008 from http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/SanDiego-AH-01-2002.pdf

Leithwood, K. (2008). *Evidence-based characteristics of high performing school districts.* Paper presented at the Moving and Improving Symposium, College of Alberta School Superintendents, Edmonton, AB.

Leithwood, K. (2010). *Turning around underperforming school systems: Guidelines for district leaders.* Paper prepared for the College of Alberta School Superintendents, Edmonton, AB.

Leithwood, K. (2010a). Characteristics of school districts that are exceptionally effective in Closing the Achievement Gap. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *9*(3), 245–291.

Leithwood, K. (2011). *District Effectiveness Framework*. Paper presented at the Annual Pre-Conference of the College of Alberta School Superintendents. Edmonton, AB: College of Alberta School Superintendents.

Leithwood, K. (2012). Core practices: The four essential components of the leader's repertoire. In K. Leithwood & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Linking Leadership to student learning* (pp. 57-67). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Leithwood, K. Anderson, S. & Louis, K.S. (2012). Principal efficacy: District-led professional development. In K. Leithwood & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Linking Leadership to student learning* (pp. 119-141). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Leithwood, K. Aitken& Jantzi, D. (2006). A review of transformational school leadership research. Paper presented at American Educational Research Association, Montreal, PQ.

Leithwood, K. Louis, K.S. Anderson, S. & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning.* New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Leithwood, K. Louis, K.S. Anderson, S. & Wahlstrom, K. (2010). *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning.* New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Leithwood, K. & Louis, K.S. (2012). *Linking leadership to student learning.* San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Levin, B. (2001). Reforming education: From origins to outcomes*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.*

Levin, B. (2008). How to change 5,000 schools: A practical and positive approach for leading change at every level*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.*

Levin, B. (2010). Global voices in Canada: Education improvement in Alberta, Phi Delta Kappan, *91 (7), 81-82 (online only).*

Louis, K.S. Leithwood, K. Anderson, S. & Wahlstrom, K. (2010a). *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning:* New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Louis, K.S. Leithwood, K. Anderson, S. & Wahlstrom, K. (2010b). Key findings: *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning:* New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Louis, K.S. & Wahlstrom, K. (2012). Shared and instructional leadership: When principals and teachers successful lead together. In K. Leithwood & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Linking Leadership to student learning* (pp. 25-41). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Maguire, P. (2003). *District practices and Student Achievement: Lessons from Alberta.* Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education.

Marzano, R. & Waters, T. (2006). *School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement.* A working paper for McRel Publishing.

Marzano, R. & Waters, T. (2009). *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press / McRel Publishing.

McCormick, M. J. (2001). Self-efficacy and leadership effectiveness: Applying social cognitive theory to leadership. *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, *8*(1), 22–33.

McLaughlin, M. & Talbert, J. (2003). *Reforming districts: How districts support school reform.* Retrieved July 2008 from http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/Reports.html#Reforming

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Miles, M. Huberman, A. & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis. A methods sourcebook.* Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Opfer, D. Pedder, D. & Lavicza, Z. (2011). The influence of school orientation to learning on teachers' professional learning change. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, *22*(2), 193-214.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2001). Schooling for tomorrow: *What schools for the future?* Retrieved May 9, 2009 from http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/56/39/38967594.pdf

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2007). *Understanding the brain: The birth of a learning science.* Paris, FR: The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2008). *Innovating to learn: Learning to innovate.* Paris, FR: The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development.

Pritchard, R. & Marshall, J. (2002). Professional development in "healthy" vs. "'unhealthy" districts: Top 10 characteristics based on research. *School Leadership and Management, 22*(2), 113-41.

Resnick, L. B. & Harwell, M. (2000). *Instructional variation and student achievement in a standards-based education district.* Retrieved July 2008 from http://www.cse.ucla.edu/products/Reports/TECH522.pdf

Robinson, V. (2011). *Student-centered leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Robinson, V. Lloyd, C., & Rowe, K. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5), 635-674.

Ryan, J. (2006). *Inclusive leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sawyer, K. (2006). *The Cambridge handbook of the learning sciences.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Sawyer, R.K. (2008). Optimizing learning: Implications of learning sciences research. In OECD (Ed) *Innovating to learn: Learning to innovate.* Centre for Research and Innovation: OECD. pp. 45-62.

Schmold, S. & Morrow, R. (2009). *A framework for school system success.* Edmonton, AB: The College of Alberta School Superintendents.

Schmold, S. & Morrow, R. (2009). (2009b). *Moving and improving: Building leadership capacity project report and evaluation.* Edmonton, AB: The College of Alberta School Superintendents.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Stake, R. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis.* New York: The Guilford Press.

Steele, L. (2010). *Boundary crossing in rural districts: Reconceptualizing the roles of rural midlevel leaders.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Calgary.

Timperley, H. (2011). *Realizing the power of professional learning.* London: Open University Press.

Timperley, H. Wilson, A. Barrar, H. & Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher professional learning and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration (BES)*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Togneri, W. & Anderson, S.E. (2003). *Beyond islands of excellence: What districts can do to improve instruction and achievement in all schools.* Retrieved July 2008 from http://www.learningfirst.org/publications/districts

Townsend, D. & Adams, P. (2009). *The essential equation: A handbook for school improvement.* Calgary: Detselig Press.

Wahlstrom, K. (2012). An up-close view of instructional leadership: A grounded analysis. In K. Leithwood & K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Linking Leadership to student learning* (pp. 68-86). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wahlstrom, K. Louis, K.S. Leithwood, K. & Anderson, S. (2010). Executive summary of the research findings. *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning:* New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Wahlstrom, K. Louis, K.S. Leithwood, K. & Anderson, S. (2010b). A synthesis of implications for policy and practice from *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning:* New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Wallace Foundation. (2010). Key findings: *Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning:* New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Willms, D. Friesen, S. & Milton, P. (2009). *What did you do in school today? Transforming classrooms through social, academic and intellectual engagement.* Toronto, ON: Canadian Education Association.

Whelan, F. (2009). *Lessons learned: How good policies produce better schools.* London: MPG Books.

Wood, R. E. & Bandura, A. (1989). Impact of conceptions of ability on self-regulatory mechanisms and complex decision making. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56*(3), 407–415.

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research. Design and methods.* Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications

APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate

Your school jurisdiction has agreed to be part of a research study *Superintendents Who Lead Learning* that will be conducted by Dr. Jim Brandon, Dr. Paulette Hanna, and Dr. Dot Negropontes

The study is designed to contribute to the field of system based instructional leadership. It aims to provide insights into various ways that superintendency teams lead learning in high performing school systems. It addresses the following research question: *In what ways do successful superintendency teams lead educator and student learning?*

As a school principal, central office leader or member of the superintendency team, you have been randomly invited to participate in this research study. Please read the attached **Informed Consent Form** and **Focus Group Interview Questions** and let me know by return email if you are interested in participating in a one hour focus group interview with 4 to 5 other participants in your same personnel category (principal, central office leader or member of the superintendency team) on **date and time** at a central location in your jurisdiction, which will be communicated to those who choose to participate.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this study.

The attached **Informed Consent Form** explains the intended research and the role that you might play in participating in the study. Please read the consent form carefully. It will be further explained to you at the time of the focus group interview, if you decide to proceed to that stage.

If you give your consent to participate in the study, please sign the Informed Consent form and return it to the researchers. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will have no effect on your continuing relationship with school jurisdiction or the University of Calgary.

Please do not hesitate to contact me by return email if you questions about this research initiative.

Sincerely,

Jim Brandon, PhD
Director of Professional Programs
Werklund School of Education
University of Calgary
EDT 532, 2500 University Drive, NW
Calgary, Alberta CANADA T2N 1N4
T 403.220.3048 | F 403.220.0606
jbrandon@ucalgary.ca
werklund.ucalgary.ca

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Dr. Jim Brandon, University of Calgary, Werklund School of Education, 403.862.3090 jbrandon@ucalgary.ca

Dr. Paulette Hanna

Dr. Dot Negropontes

Title of Project: *Superintendents Who Lead Learning*

Sponsor: College of Alberta School Superintendents

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study

Our study is designed to contribute to the field of system based instructional leadership. It aims to provide insights into various ways that superintendency teams lead learning in high performing school systems.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

In your capacity as superintendent, member of the superintendency team, central office leader, or school principal you are invited to participate in this research study.

As a participant in this study you will be asked to engage in the activities detailed below:

Research Timeline	Activity	Approximate Time Required
March 2014	Informed Consent Process	15 minutes
March 2014	Audio Recorded Focus Group Interview	1 hour
April 2014	Verification of Focus Group Summary	20 minutes

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate altogether, may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any and all questions and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Your participation in this study or lack thereof, will have no consequences on your employment with your school jurisdiction or relationship with the University of Calgary.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate in this study, the following personal information will be collected to provide a demographic profile of participants but will not be associated with any participant's name:

Name – Your real name will be collected for use by the researchers only.

You will be asked to select a pseudonym that will be used in all references to your involvement in this study. Should you not select a pseudonym, the researchers will select a pseudonym for you.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some, or none of them. Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No

I grant permission to be audio taped: Yes: ___ No: ___
I grant permission to use any artifacts or materials, I choose to provide during the focus group interview. Yes: ___ No:
I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: ___ No: ___
The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____
You may quote me and use my name: Yes: ___ No: ___

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits related to participation in this study, other than the professional learning opportunities inherent in the research design.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Personal information collected will only be accessible only by the researchers. Interview responses will be attributed to the pseudonym you choose for this project. Findings emerging from this data will be synthesized and sent to you for verification of their accuracy and interpretation.   The researchers request that you review the data, findings and interpretation within 14 days of

receiving the information with recommended changes. Researchers will interpret your acceptance of the data, findings, and interpretation should you not respond within the 14 days upon receiving the information.

The findings will be shared with the larger educational community through presentations, peer reviewed journals, or in book format. A final research report will be provided to the funder, the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

Anonymity cannot be assured if you share your pseudonym with others or reveal the content of your interview responses to anyone other than the researchers. The researchers will not use any identifying information you provide as an artifact. Should you decide to withdraw from the research study at any time, all data, including interview responses, transcripts, and audio tapes collected to the date of withdrawal will be destroyed unless this is not feasible. In any case, all data collected in relation to this study will be kept in a locked cabinet, accessible only by the researchers, for a period of five years from completion of the data collection, and will then be destroyed in its entirety on June 30, 2019. It must be understood that the data and findings remain the property of the researchers.

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Individual and Focus Group Interview Protocol

Participant(s): _____

Date: _____ Location: _____

Start time: _____ End time: _____ Researcher(s): _____

Superintendent ___Superintendency Team ___Central Office Leader____Principal ____

Research Purpose

Our study is designed to contribute to the field of system based instructional leadership. It aims to provide insights into various ways that superintendency teams lead learning in high performing, knowledge building school systems.

Research Question

In what ways do successful superintendency teams lead educator and student learning?

Focus Group Interview Procedure

The following open-ended questions and discussion prompts have been designed to guide our scheduled one-hour conversation. The interview will be audio-recorded. You may ask for the recording to be stopped at any time or replayed for clarification and to ensure accuracy. I will also be taking notes during the interview; you may have a copy of these notes at the conclusion of the interview if you wish.

Please note that anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus groups. However, the researcher requests that participants in the focus groups keep comments confidential.

Focus on Student learning

1. Please comment on the degree to which your school jurisdiction has a widely shared vision and beliefs about student learning, engagement and well-being in the 21st Century?

Curriculum and Instruction

2. Please describe a few of the ways in which jurisdiction leaders work with schools to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.

3. In what ways do jurisdiction leaders work with schools to align curriculum, instruction, assessment and teaching resources in an extensive and ongoing manner

System-Wide Efficacy

4. What can you tell us about the opportunities your jurisdiction provides to help develop expertise relevant to achieving its priority goals?

5. Are there any specific ways that your jurisdiction creates organizational structures and settings that support and enhance teacher and school leader work and learning?

Leadership for Learning

Please share your thoughts about the ways in which your jurisdiction

6. requires principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction.

7. assumes responsibility for developing and supporting instructional leadership in schools.

8. supports principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure high levels of learning for all students.

Professional Learning

9. In what ways is professional learning carefully aligned with jurisdiction and school improvement initiatives in your system?

10. To what degree is jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning closely aligned with the best evidence about how people learn?

11. What professional learning initiatives do you believe are improving teaching and learning in your jurisdiction?

Further Comments

12. Please feel free to share any additional thoughts about the general ways in which your superintendency team leads teacher and leadership learning in your jurisdiction?

APPENDIX D

School Jurisdiction Survey

Jurisdiction and School Leader Survey – February 26, 2014

This consent section is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the study

This study is designed to contribute to the field of system based instructional leadership. It aims to provide insights into various ways that superintendency teams lead learning in high performing, school jurisdictions.

What Will I Be Asked to Do

In your capacity as superintendent, member of the superintendency team, central office leader, or school principal you are invited to participate in this research study.

*As a participant in this study you will be asked to complete this **Jurisdiction and School Leader Survey***

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate altogether, may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any and all questions and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Your participation in this study or lack thereof, will have no consequences on your employment with your school jurisdiction or relationship with the University of Calgary.

What type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate in this survey, no personal information will be retained.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits related to participation in this study, other than the professional learning opportunities inherent in the research design. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

The findings will be shared with the larger educational community through presentations, peer reviewed journals, or in book format. A final research report will be provided to the funder, the College of Alberta School Superintendents.

This online survey is being administered by QuestionPro©, an American software company. As such, your responses are subject to U.S. laws, including the USA Patriot Act. The risks associated with participation are minimal, however, similar to those associated with many email programs, such as Hotmail© and social utilities spaces such as Facebook© and MySpace©.

All data collected in relation to this study will be kept in a locked cabinet, accessible only by the researchers, for a period of five years from completion of the data collection, and will then be destroyed in its entirety on June 30, 2019. It must be understood that the data and findings remain the property of the researchers.

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact: Dr. Jim Brandon. Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary at (403)862-3090; email jbrandon@ucalgary.ca .

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact an Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca.

By marking "I agree", you are consenting to participate in the survey.

1. **I have read the above information and agree to participate in the survey**.

       I agree   ☐

2. **What is your position in the school jurisdiction?**

       Principal   ☐

       Central Office Leader   ☐

       Superintendency Team Member   ☐

VISION AND DIRECTION SETTING

DIMENSION 1: *Focus on Student Learning*

3. **Which of the following statements best captures the degree to which equity of student achievement outcomes (closing the gap) is reflected in your jurisdiction's beliefs and vision?**

    ☐ There is no concern for equity of outcomes reflected in my jurisdiction's vision for student achievement.

    ☐ Equity of outcomes for student achievement is a minor feature of my jurisdiction's vision for student achievement.

    ☐ Equity of outcomes for student achievement is clearly a part of my jurisdiction's vision for student achievement.

    ☐ The concern for equity of outcomes is strongly represented in my jurisdiction's vision for student achievement.

4. **Which of the following statements best captures the degree to which improving the overall achievement of students (raising the bar) is included in your jurisdiction's beliefs and vision?**

    ☐ There is no concern for improving overall levels of achievement reflected in my jurisdiction's beliefs and vision for student achievement.

☐ Improving overall levels of student achievement is a minor feature of my jurisdiction's beliefs and vision for student achievement.

☐ Improving overall levels of student achievement is clearly a part of my jurisdiction's vision and beliefs for student achievement.

☐ Improving overall levels of student achievement is strongly represented in my jurisdiction's beliefs and vision for student achievement.

5. **Which of the following statements best describes the extent to which your jurisdiction's beliefs and vision for student engagement, learning, and well-being in the 21st Century are understood and shared by educators in the jurisdiction?**

☐ Understood and shared by very few educators.
☐ Understood and shared by a small proportion of the educators.
☐ Understood and shared by a large proportion of educators.
☐ Understood and shared by almost all educators.

DIMENSION 2: *Curriculum and Instruction*

6. **Which of the following statements best captures the degree to which your jurisdiction supports the efforts of schools to implement curricula that foster deep understandings of "big ideas" and to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings:**

☐ Not very well developed.
☐ Clearly articulated, but not well implemented
☐ Clearly articulated and increasingly well implemented
☐ Very well articulated and effectively implemented.

7. **The degree to which my jurisdiction works effectively with schools to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction can best be described as:**

☐ Limited to a very small proportion of teachers and a narrow array of instructional practices.

☐ Includes teachers in a large minority of schools and is focused on a narrow array of instructional practices.

☐ Includes teachers in a large minority of schools and helps them to significantly expand the size of their instructional repertoires.

☐ Includes teachers in a majority of schools and assists them in developing sophisticated understandings of engaging instruction for students.

8. **Which of the following statements best describes your jurisdiction's work with schools to align curriculum, instruction, assessment, inclusive education, technology integration and teaching resources?**

☐ So far, little effort has been made to align curriculum, instruction, assessment, inclusive education, technology integration and teaching resources in my jurisdiction.

☐ So far, alignment efforts in my jurisdiction have been restricted to one or two areas of the curriculum and usually have involved only small groups of staff members.

☐ Alignment efforts in my jurisdiction are now expanding to include many more areas of the curriculum and greater participation by stakeholders.

☐ Alignment efforts in my jurisdiction are extensive, ongoing and involve most stakeholders.

DIMENSION 3: *Uses of Evidence*

To what extent (1 = not at all, 4 = to a great extent) does your jurisdiction

	Not at all			To a great extent
9. Have an effective jurisdiction information management system?	1	2	3	4
10. Provide schools with relevant data to improve performance?	1	2	3	4
11. Create collaborative structures and opportunities for the interpretation of data in schools?	1	2	3	4
12. Use appropriate data for accounting to stakeholders?	1	2	3	4
13. Make effective use of existing research to guide policy making and planning?	1	2	3	4

CAPACITY BUILDING

DIMENSION 4: *System-wide Efficacy*

15. **Identify the statement that best describes your jurisdiction's efforts to develop the expertise that teachers and administrators need to achieve the jurisdiction's goals.**

☐ Teachers and administrators are left to their own devices to develop the expertise they need.

☐ Teachers are provided with a limited set of opportunities, but administrators are expected to acquire the expertise they need on their own.

☐ Teachers are-provided with extensive opportunities to further develop their expertise and an increasing number of opportunities are gradually being provided for school administrators.

☐ Extensive opportunities are provided for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.

16. **Select the statement which best captures what your jurisdiction has done to create organizational structures and settings which support and enhance teachers' work and learning.**

☐ Almost all teacher time at school is scheduled for direct work with students.

☐ Principals are encouraged by my jurisdiction to provide time for collaborative work among teachers in schools but no additional resources are allocated for this task.

☐ Principals are encouraged to provide time for collaborative teacher work and provided with some minimal resources to facilitate such work.

☐ Principals are encouraged to provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiative and are provided with the resources they need to provide this time. Principals and other school leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.

DIMENSION 5: *Leadership for Learning*

17. **Your jurisdiction's efforts to have the superintendency team focus on instructional leadership are best described by which of the following statements?**

☐ Most members of the superintendency team do not view themselves as having the knowledge about, or significant responsibilities for, the quality of instruction in schools. Principal selection and evaluation policies do not reflect an instructional leadership focus for school leaders.

☐ Most members of the superintendency team encourage an instructional focus on the part of school leaders and assume that it is the responsibility of school leaders to acquire the capacities needed to pursue this instructional focus. Instructional leadership occasionally appears in principal selection processes and sometimes becomes a topic during their supervisory processes with principals.

☐ Members of the superintendency team encourage an instructional focus on the part of school leaders, provide opportunities and resources for improving the instructional leadership skills of school leaders and make this the main focus of their school visits. Instructional leadership is an explicit focus in selection and appraisal practices.

☐ Members of the superintendency team keep both the community and the jurisdiction staff focused on learning and they support principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure high levels of learning for all students. The jurisdiction assumes responsibility for significantly improving instructional leadership in schools.

18. **Efforts to hold principals directly accountable for the quality of instruction in their schools are best described by which of the following statements?**

☐ Instructional quality is viewed by jurisdiction leaders as teachers' responsibility. Teachers' are held directly accountable for the quality of their instruction. Neither jurisdiction nor school leaders are expected to contribute significantly to instructional improvement.

☐ Instructional quality is viewed by jurisdiction leaders as teachers' responsibility. Teachers' are held directly accountable for the quality of their instruction. School leaders are expected to provide general support to teachers in their instructional improvement efforts.

☐ Jurisdiction leaders expect principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction. This is among the many criteria used for selecting school leaders and for their performance appraisal.

☐ Jurisdiction leaders expect principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction. This is a central criterion for selecting school leaders and for their performance appraisal.

19. **Which of the following statements best describe your jurisdiction's efforts to supplement the instructional leadership in schools with the support of central office expertise as needed?**

☐ Principals almost never request assistance from jurisdiction staff with instructional matters in their school and jurisdiction leaders are not qualified to help, in any event.

☐ Principals occasionally request assistance in providing instructional leadership in their schools; at least several jurisdiction leaders have the skills to provide such assistance.

☐ Principals frequently engage jurisdiction office leaders to help implement specific jurisdiction initiatives in their schools. In such cases, jurisdiction leaders take on the instructional leadership required for such implementation, instead of the principal. Many jurisdiction leaders are capable of doing this well. Principals and jurisdiction office leaders work together to provide instructional leadership in schools.

☐ Both jurisdiction and school leaders have an ongoing commitment to further developing their own instructional leadership capacities.

20. **The provision of opportunities in your jurisdiction for principals to further develop their instructional leadership capacities is best captured by which of the statements below?**

☐ Principals and other school leaders are expected to find their own sources for further developing their instructional leadership practices.

☐ The jurisdiction holds or sponsors conferences through the year which include some opportunities for principals and other school leaders to hear about what is involved in instructional leadership.

☐ The jurisdiction provides a regular program for principals and other school leaders each year aimed at further developing their instructional leadership skills.

☐ The jurisdiction provides many rich opportunities for principals and other school leaders to improve their instructional leadership skills.

DIMENSION 6: *Professional Learning*

21. **Which of the following descriptions captures your jurisdictions efforts to align the time and money allocated to professional learning with its value to the jurisdiction?**

☐ The jurisdiction has an ambitious set of goals for improving student learning but has allocated very little time or money for preparing educators to accomplish those goals.

☐ While some time and money have been allocated for the professional learning of leaders and teachers, these resources badly underestimate what will be required if educators are to accomplish the goals established by the jurisdiction.

☐ Although still underestimated, there have been recent and significant increases in the time and money allocated to professional learning.

☐ Adequate amounts of both the time and money have been allocated for the professional learning of leaders and teachers.

22. **Which of these statements best reflects the status of your jurisdiction's efforts to refocus routine institutional practices in the service of professional learning?**

☐ Routine administrative meetings continue to consume most of the out-of-classroom time of teachers and most of the out-of-school time of principals and other school leaders. Very little time remains for professional learning.

☐ Time normally spent on routine administrative matters by teachers, principals and other school leaders in meetings is now occasionally used for professional learning purposes.

☐ Much less time is now devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings. A significant fraction of the meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted to professional learning.

☐ Very little time is devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional learning.

23. **How would you describe your jurisdiction's efforts to align the focus of professional** learning **with jurisdiction and school improvement initiatives? (select one)**

☐ There is no planned alignment between jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning for staff and either the jurisdiction's or the schools' improvement efforts.

☐ There is alignment between some jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning and a few jurisdiction and school improvement efforts.

☐ A large proportion of jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning is carefully aligned with jurisdiction improvement initiatives.

☐ All jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning is carefully aligned with jurisdiction improvement initiatives.

24. Which of the following best describes your jurisdiction's efforts to differentiate professional learning opportunities to reflect the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers?

☐ One approach to jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning is assumed to be adequate for all teachers, school leaders, and schools in this jurisdiction.

☐ Just recently, jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning has begun to be more sensitive to teachers and school leaders and school differences.

☐ The jurisdiction sponsors a wide array of professional learning opportunities to assist teachers and school leaders with jurisdiction initiative but contributes little to individual school improvement initiatives in response to the different capacities teachers and school leaders bring to their jurisdiction and school improvement efforts and the different challenges facing schools.

☐ The jurisdiction sponsors a wide array of professional learning opportunities in response to the different capacities teachers and school leaders bring to their jurisdiction and school improvement efforts and the different challenges facing schools.   .

25. Which of the following statements outline stages of jurisdiction's growth in its uses of contemporary learning theory as a foundation for designing professional development methods. Which stage is your jurisdiction at?

☐ Jurisdiction-sponsored professional development still seems to be driven by an outmoded "behavioristic" understanding of how people learn. It typically occurs outside of classrooms and schools, is usually "one-shot" in nature, and treats participants as passive consumers of new information.

☐ Jurisdiction-sponsored professional development is based on an unpredictable mixture of outmoded "behavioristic" understanding of how people learn and more contemporary, constructivist assumptions about professional learning. A substantial portion of the jurisdiction-sponsored PD still treats participants as passive consumers of new information but more active and close-to-the-school models of professional development are beginning to be used.

☐ The majority of jurisdiction sponsored professional learning is now informed by a sophisticated understanding of contemporary learning theory. It is largely job-embedded, builds on participants' tacit knowledge and engages them actively in the construction of new knowledge and skills.

☐ All jurisdiction-sponsored professional learning is now closely aligned with the best evidence of how people learn.

RELATIONSHIPS

DIMENSION 7: *System Connections*

26. Indicate how well developed are the relationships and sense of community among leaders in your central office by choosing one of the following statements:

☐ Central office professionals work in isolation with only minimal communication and no sense of shared purpose.

☐ There is no evidence of shared purpose, but there is some connection among some roles and a limited amount of communication although it is sometimes a bit strained.

☐ Roles are often interconnected and collaboration is common in response to a shared sense of purpose and regular, positive communication occurs regularly.

☐ Roles are interconnected, work is undertaken collaboratively in the service of a widely shared set of purposes and staff communications are both frequent and cordial.

27. Indicate how collaborative and congenial are the working relations with school leaders and teachers by selecting one of the following statements:

☐ School and jurisdiction educators have very little contact and school educators rarely participate in jurisdiction decisions.

☐ There is some contact between jurisdiction and school educators but participation by school educators in jurisdiction decisions is rare, as is the presence of jurisdiction educators in schools.

☐ School educators sometimes participate in jurisdiction decisions, are sometimes in contact jurisdiction educators for support and assistance; jurisdiction educators are in schools regularly and know some educators by name.

☐ School educators often participate in jurisdiction decisions, are in frequent contact with jurisdiction educators for support and assistance; jurisdiction educators are in schools frequently and know most school educators by name.

28. Which of the following descriptions best captures the nature of your jurisdiction's ties with external community groups?

☐ Potential contributions of community groups are unrecognized and these groups have no involvement in the jurisdiction.

☐ Potential contributions of community groups are sporadically recognized, as are consultations with these groups and their involvement in jurisdiction decisions.

☐ Community groups are often recognized for their contribution and support and consulted on many decisions affecting the community; jurisdiction professionals are often members of these groups themselves.

☐ Community groups are routinely recognized for their contribution and support and consulted on almost all decisions affecting the community; jurisdiction professionals are regularly members of these groups themselves.

29. Which of the following statements best describes the status of your jurisdiction's efforts to nurture teacher to teacher or school leader to school leader relations through support for professional learning communities (PLCs)?

☐ There is little awareness of the need for, or value of, professional learning communities for either jurisdiction or school educators.

☐ PLCs are evident in some schools and jurisdiction professional personnel may participate occasionally in their own PLCs but they are rarely viewed as established structures for professional learning or decision-making.

☐ PLCs are established at both school, between schools and at the jurisdiction level and while jurisdiction professionals have come to value participation in their own PLCs, they do not insist on such participation by teachers or school leaders in schools or between schools.

☐ PLCs are well established at both school and jurisdiction levels and have become the established way of solving problems and taking care of other business.

DIMENSION 8: *Parent and Community Engagement*

30. Which statement best captures your jurisdiction's efforts to help teachers and school leaders develop the capacities they need to foster productive parent engagement in the school?

☐ Teachers and school leaders are expected to figure out parent engagement for themselves.

☐ My jurisdiction has provided some help to foster parent engagement to teachers and school leaders in the past but no such help has been provided in the past year.

☐ Jurisdiction leaders often talk about the importance of parent engagement in schools but they have provided very limited opportunities for teachers and school leaders to develop the knowledge and skills required to do that part of their jobs better.   .

☐ Jurisdiction leaders provide teachers and school leaders with very helpful opportunities to acquire the insights and skills they need to productively engage parents.

31. Which statement best captures your jurisdiction's efforts to help teachers and school leaders develop the capacities they need to assist parents in creating conditions in the home which support the success of their children at school?

☐ Teachers and school leaders are expected to develop their own capacities to help parents create supportive conditions at home.

☐ My jurisdiction has provided some help to develop teacher and school leaders' capacities to help parents create supportive conditions at home in the past but no such help has been provided in the past year.   .

☐ Jurisdiction leaders often talk about the importance of helping parents create supportive conditions in the home but they have provided very limited opportunities for teachers and school leaders to develop the knowledge and skills required.

☐ Jurisdiction leaders provide teachers and school leaders with very helpful opportunities to acquire the

insights and skills they need to develop teacher and school leaders' capacities to help parents create supportive conditions at home.

32. **Which of the following options best captures the extent to which your jurisdiction itself, independent of school efforts, provides programs and other opportunities aimed at helping parents ensure the success of their children at school?**

- [ ] Not at all
- [ ] Only in response to vocal concerns from parents
- [ ] Occasional initiatives linked to new curriculum priorities
- [ ] Regularly and frequently

33. **Your jurisdiction holds schools accountable for productively engaging parents in the school in which of the following ways?**

- [ ] My jurisdiction makes no effort to hold schools accountable for parent engagement.

- [ ] My jurisdiction's efforts are limited to occasional encouragement and informal questions from some jurisdiction staff about what we are doing in my school.

- [ ] The performance appraisal of principals in my jurisdiction includes assessment of the nature and success of their parent engagement strategies.

- [ ] In addition to being part of our principal appraisal system, our jurisdiction has a formal policy on parent engagement and conducts periodic audits across the jurisdiction about the extent to which that policy is being implemented. Teachers, school leaders and parents are asked for evidence as part of these audits.

DIMENSION 9: *School Board Leadership*

34. **The trustees participate in assessing community values and interests and incorporating them into the school jurisdiction's beliefs and vision for student learning and well-being.**
- [ ] Not at all
- [ ] To a limited degree
- [ ] On an increasing basis
- [ ] In an ongoing and systematic manner

35. **To what degree to trustees help mobilize parents and the wider community in developing and supporting the vision for student learning and well-being?**
- [ ] Not at all
- [ ] To a limited degree
- [ ] On an increasing basis
- [ ] In an ongoing and systematic manner

36. **To what degree do trustees help create a climate of excellence that makes achieving the vision for student learning and well-being possible?**
- [ ] Not at all

☐ To a limited degree
☐ On an increasing basis
☐ In an ongoing and systematic manner

37. **To what degree does the school jurisdiction's beliefs and vision for student learning and well-being serve as the foundation for board planning and policy making?**
☐ Not at all
☐ To a limited degree
☐ On an increasing basis
☐ In an ongoing and systematic manner

38. **To what degree do the trustees maintain productive relationships with senior leaders, school professionals, community stakeholders and provincial education officials?**
☐ Not at all
☐ To a limited degree
☐ On an increasing basis
☐ In an ongoing and systematic manner

39. **Trustees avoid becoming involved in day-to-day operations.**
☐ Not at all
☐ Seldom
☐ On an increasing basis
☐ In an ongoing and systematic manner

40. **To what extent does school board practice foster generative governance in addition to fiduciary and strategic governance?**
☐ Not at all
☐ To a limited degree
☐ On an increasing basis
☐ In an ongoing and systematic manner

SYSTEM DESIGN

DIMENSION 10: *System Alignment*

41. **Which of the statements below best captures your jurisdiction's alignment of the allocation of money with the support of jurisdiction goals for student learning?**
☐ No effort has yet been made toward such alignment.

☐ Unsystematic attempts are being made toward such alignment.

☐ Such alignment occurs on a project by project basis but does not extend across the jurisdiction's efforts as a whole.

☐ My jurisdiction has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align our budget with the goals we are pursuing for students.

42. Which of the statements below best captures your jurisdiction's alignment of personnel policies and procedures with the instructional expectations for jurisdiction and school educators?

☐ No effort has yet been made toward such alignment.

☐ Unsystematic attempts are being made toward such alignment.

☐ Such alignment occurs on a project by project basis but does not extend across the jurisdiction's efforts as a whole.

☐ My jurisdiction has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align our personnel policies and procedures with the goals we are pursuing for students.

43. Which of the statements below best captures your jurisdiction's alignment of structures with the instructional improvement work required of jurisdiction and school educators?

☐ No effort has yet been made toward such alignment.

☐ Unsystematic attempts are being made toward such alignment.

☐ Such alignment occurs on a project-by-project basis but does not extend across the jurisdiction's efforts as a whole.

☐ My jurisdiction has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align our organizational structures with our instructional improvement work.

DIMENSION 11: *System Improvement*

44. Please select one of the following descriptions that best reflects how your jurisdiction's pursues its improvement initiatives:

☐ The jurisdiction makes no attempt to systematically support school improvement efforts and does not see a need for simplifying the process through manageable stages.

☐ The jurisdiction makes no attempt to systematically support school improvement efforts but does provide support to some schools on as needs basis or in response to a "crisis".

☐ The complexity of the jurisdiction's job in supporting school improvement efforts is reduced by focusing on one portion of the system at a time (e.g., elementary schools then secondary schools; literacy improvement then numeracy improvement).

☐ The complexity of the jurisdiction's job in supporting school improvement efforts is reduced by focusing on one portion of the system at a time (e.g., elementary schools then secondary schools; literacy improvement then numeracy improvement) and by creating a schedule to ensure improvement in all parts of the school system over the long term.

45. Which statement best captures your jurisdiction's efforts to build a coherent approach to school improvement?

☐ Improvement efforts of school are guided almost entirely by the capacities of individual schools; there is no guiding framework provided by the jurisdiction for the processes to be used to increase the chances of school improvement success. No effort is made to integrate the school improvement goals or processes across schools in the jurisdiction.

☐ Improvement efforts of school are guided almost entirely by the capacities of individual schools; there is no guiding framework provided by the jurisdiction for the processes to be used to increase the chances of school improvement success. The jurisdiction promotes a set of central goals to be met by schools' improvement efforts.

☐ Improvement efforts in schools are guided by explicit and well tested policies and practices, All stakeholders have clearly defined roles to play in this approach.

☐ Improvement efforts in schools are guided by explicit and well-tested frameworks, policies and practices, as well as widely shared goals that permit local adaptation. All stakeholders have clearly defined roles to play in this approach to school improvement.

46. Your jurisdiction integrates changes in the jurisdiction with existing policies and procedures in which of the (one) following ways?

☐ Each new change is introduced with little effort to understand or explain its relationship to earlier initiatives.

☐ The relationship of earlier change efforts to new initiatives is verbally explained by jurisdiction leaders to teachers, school leaders and support personnel, but the implications for existing policies and routines are rarely discussed.

☐ Jurisdiction leaders make clear the relationship between earlier and current changes and alters existing routines and procedures accordingly. This effort does not acknowledge the value of integration and continuity of core values and existing institutional structures.

☐ Jurisdiction leaders integrate new initiatives into existing routines and practices. Established structures and procedures are maintained and they build on those structures and procedures. Stress is placed on continuity and extension of core values and existing institutional structures in service of new initiatives.

47. Your jurisdiction builds the internal capacities of schools in which (one) of the following ways?

☐ The jurisdiction acts as though schools already have the capacities they need to engage in productive school improvement initiatives.

☐ The jurisdiction provides modest resources to schools to further help them develop their internal capacities for improvement.

☐ The jurisdiction has adopted, as a goal for school improvement, helping schools develop internal capacity and a coherent instructional program.

☐ The jurisdiction has adopted, as a goal for school improvement, helping schools develop internal capacity and coherent instructional programs. Improvement efforts are aimed, as well, at developing professional communities within schools focused on improving student learning.

DIMENSION 12: *Leveraging Technology*

48. **The degree to which changes in emerging technologies positively impact the instructional core is best described as**
    - ☐ Not at all
    - ☐ To a limited degree
    - ☐ On an increasing basis
    - ☐ In an ongoing and systematic manner

49. **The degree to which the jurisdiction provides leadership and support for the implementation of technology for learning.**
    - ☐ Not at all
    - ☐ To a limited degree
    - ☐ On an increasing basis
    - ☐ In an ongoing and systematic manner

50. **The degree to which senior leaders employ** *IT governance* **approaches to align the system's strategic IT direction with the jurisdiction's goals, to manage IT risks and to ensure that resources are used appropriately responsibly.**
    - ☐ Not at all
    - ☐ To a limited degree
    - ☐ On an increasing basis
    - ☐ In an ongoing and systematic manner