

Summer 2026

Leaders & Learners

The official magazine of the Canadian
Association of School System Administrators

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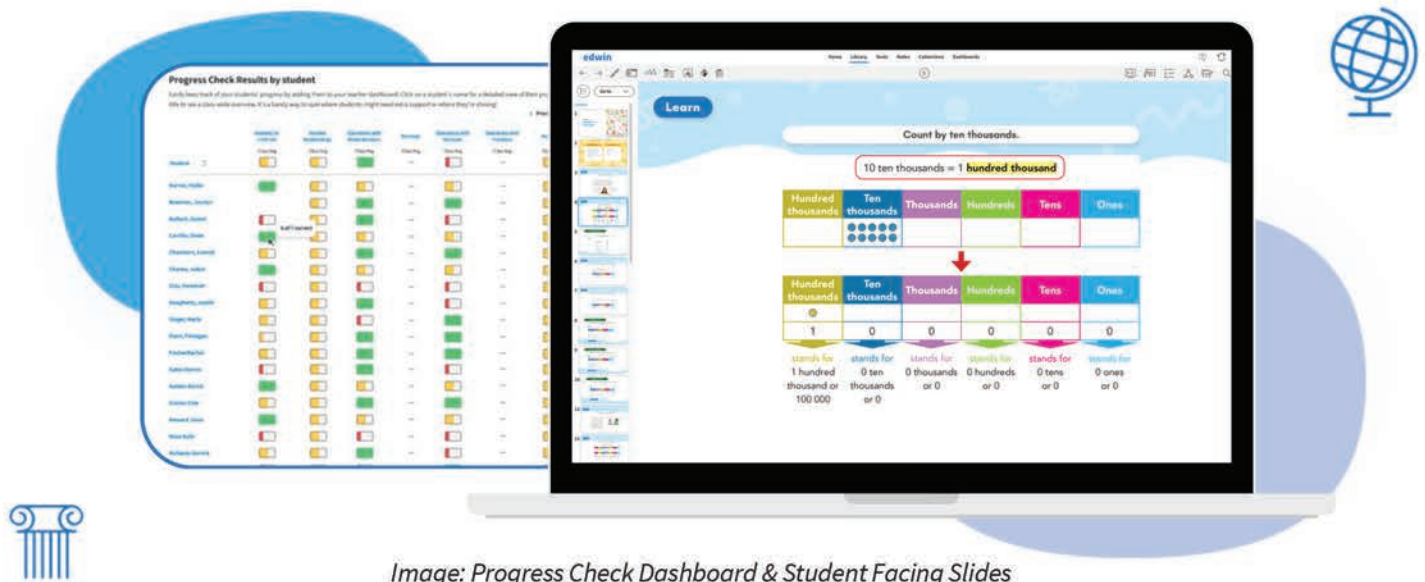


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**Summer 2026
PUBLISHED FOR:**
**Canadian Association of
School System Administrators /
Association canadienne des
gestionnaires de commissions scolaires**
1123 Glenashton Drive
Oakville, Ontario L6H 5M1
Tel: 905-845-4254
www.cassa-acgcs.ca

PUBLISHED BY:
Matrix Group Publishing Inc.
Return all undeliverable
addresses to:
309 Youville Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2H 2S9
Toll-Free: (866) 999-1299
Toll-Free Fax: (866) 244-2544
www.matrixgroupinc.net
Canada Post Mail Publications Agreement
Number: 40609661

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Michael Helm
CASSA/ACGCS President

Strength in Community

I hope you are all looking forward to some well-deserved rest and relaxation this summer.

As I write this message, I am reminded that this will be the last time I address you as President of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA). Serving in this role over the past two years has been a tremendous honour and one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career.

I have been privileged to work alongside an outstanding Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and Executive Directors – past, Ken Bain, and present, Reg Klassen. Together, we have worked through challenges, celebrated successes, and advanced a strong strategic plan focused on professional development, communications, and governance. The opportunity to represent this exceptional organization, build meaningful connections, and learn from so many talented colleagues has been both inspiring and humbling.

This July, I will transition into the role of Past President, and I am excited to support Clint Moroziuk as he assumes the presidency of CASSA. Clint is a visionary leader with a deep commitment to public education and educational leadership. I am confident that under his leadership, CASSA will continue to expand its reach, strengthen its influence, and amplify its voice on behalf of education leaders across the country. Our organization is in excellent hands.

I would also like to extend my congratulations to Kevin Kaardal, whose term as Past President concludes this July. Kevin has devoted many years of service to CASSA, continuing his commitment even into retirement. Thank you, Kevin, for your service and leadership.

In this summer edition of *Leaders and Learners*, we are fortunate to feature contributions from a remarkable group of educational leaders who have generously shared their expertise, insights, resources, and reflections. Their collective knowledge reflects the strength of our network and the commitment of our members to continuous learning and improvement. I encourage you to take some time over the summer to explore this issue, reflect on the ideas presented, and connect with colleagues whose work resonates with you.

One of the greatest strengths of CASSA is our community. Every member is only an email, text message, or phone call away. The willingness of our members to support one another, share ideas, and collaborate across jurisdictions is what makes this organization so special. Together, we continue to learn from one another and strengthen educational leadership across Canada.

Thank you for the trust, support, and encouragement you have shown me throughout my time as President. I look forward to continuing to contribute in my new role as Past President.

Wishing you a restful and enjoyable summer with family and friends.

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Reg Klassen

CASSA/ACGCS New Executive Director

Truth and Reconciliation: A Decade of Progress, and the Work Ahead

Recently I had the privilege of participating on a panel that was hosted by People for Education in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was one of eight events in a series across the country entitled ‘The Promise of Public Education.’ Our topic was Truth and Reconciliation (TRC), with an overriding question exploring the progress we’ve made in education over the past decade.

In Manitoba treaty education is no longer an optional enrichment activity – it is now a provincial expectation. Initiatives such as *Treaty Education for All*, the *Mamàhtawisiwin* framework, and strengthened partnerships with the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba and the Manitoba Métis Federation have helped move reconciliation from isolated classrooms into more system-level planning. Many schools now engage Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and land-based learning in ways that were rare 10 years ago.

However, implementation varies widely between divisions and even between schools. Some classrooms offer deep, relational learning grounded in Indigenous worldviews; others rely on symbolic gestures like Orange Shirt Day without sustained followthrough. Teachers continue to report feeling underprepared to navigate difficult conversations about colonial history, racism, and identity – especially in a climate of rising polarization. While schools often report what activities they’ve completed, few measure whether students are developing the knowledge, empathy, and civic responsibility that reconciliation requires.

In our panel discussion we determined several policy shifts would accelerate this work.

- Indigenous education should be treated as a core professional competency. Requiring Indigenous-focused coursework in teacher and administrator preparation – and linking ongoing learning to recertification.
- The creation of Education Councils with strong representation from First Nations, Métis, Inuit communities and youth would help align local priorities, budgets, and accountability with community needs.
- Programs that ensure stable, multi-year funding for land-based learning and community partnerships are among the most powerful tools for building understanding.
- Reconciliation must be connected to the skills students need to navigate an increasingly polarized world. Embedding media literacy, structured dialogue, and restorative practices into curriculum would help students learn to stay in difficult conversations rather than retreat from them.

The challenge now is to deepen, sustain, and protect this work – so reconciliation becomes not a moment, but a durable part of how we educate future generations. Nigaa Sinclair, in his second last paragraph of his book *Winipek, Visions of Canada From An Indigenous Centre*, says, “it is time to take the bravest step of all. Act. Fulfill this vision. Don’t just be an ally, but live as one... When you stumble – and you will – get up and start again.”

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By Michael Lawlor,
Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board

The transition to kindergarten is both an exciting and uneasy time for children and their parents. Worries about readiness, forming friendships, and adjusting to a new environment often weigh on the minds of mothers and fathers and can surface in youngsters as feelings of fear, anxiety, and frustration. Yet, experts in the field of early childhood education and human development, like Charles Pascal (2009), remind us that “investing in early learning provides a remarkable return in better outcomes for children and a healthier and more prosperous society for everyone [because it is] more costly to intervene later than it is to address a child’s needs in the early years.”¹

The Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board, located in

southwestern Ontario, has developed an elementary school-based transition event to help prepare children to overcome their anxieties and enter the formal learning environment successfully. *Kick Start to Kindergarten*, offered in the late fall or early winter prior to beginning school, introduces families to school staff and various community service agencies that can support their child’s transition to the classroom. The use of intentional transition programming provides early learners with a strong foundation to succeed socially and academically.

Kick Start to Kindergarten is designed to introduce a culture of wrap-around services to support children beginning school. The event is held in an open space, such as the school’s library or gymnasium, for up to two hours on a weekday in the late afternoon or early evening to accommodate parents’ work schedules and children’s

bedtime routines. The principal collaborates with the district’s Childcare and Early Years Coordinator, a person with a background in the field of childcare, and the Student Achievement Consultant for Early Years, a practicing member of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), to establish an informal program that welcomes parents and early learners to move freely around the space to meet school staff, engage in play-based learning, and explore invited community services.

The school’s kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators (ECE), and special education resource teachers are available to meet parents and their children to provide information about such topics as classroom readiness, toileting behaviours, and available academic supports.

The centre of the room is set-up as a play-based activity area for the children with a variety of manipulatives, such as blocks, puzzles, and magnet tiles. Staff volunteers use the Looksee Checklist®, a subscription-based tool designed by a Canadian



Welcome to Kindergarten!



non-profit organization of early childhood specialists called NDDS to measure the developmental progress of young people. Observing the children while at play, staff use the instrument to evaluate physical abilities such as dexterity, balance, coordination, and fine motor skills.

Parents are welcome to debrief with the personnel screening their child at a quiet table on the room's periphery to further discuss the physical and developmental habits of their youngster. The conversation often includes an assessment of the early learner's progress acquiring literacy, numeracy and socialization skills. Where social or academic deficiencies are noticed, parents can be referred to appropriate community service agencies which have been invited by the principal to set up around the perimeter of the room.

Families are also welcome to casually engage attending community service agencies to learn more about their offerings. Organizations such as the local library, public health unit, regional service navigation agency and lead agencies for youth autism, mental health, and developmental services

The use of intentional transition programming provides early learners with a strong foundation to succeed socially and academically.

are often eager to attend *Kick Start to Kindergarten* events because it allows them to showcase their services to potential clients. In addition, local EarlyON Child and Family Centres, offering educational and childhood development programs for families and children from birth to six years old, also attend and offer their support to parents and their young ones.

Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), employed by the local YMCA and funded federally by Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, are

invited to the event to support newcomer families who need assistance navigating community services and the school registration process. An optometrist participating in Eye See Eye Learn®, a program that provides fully insured eye exams through the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) to kindergarten students, provides information to parents about the importance of early vision screening. Parents are welcome to engage as many community services as they find helpful to support their child's development.

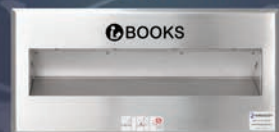
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The overall objective of the *Kick Start to Kindergarten* event is to expose parents and their children entering school to available supports and enrichment opportunities that make transitioning to classroom learning easier. Providing an intentional program can alleviate anxieties about starting school and properly prepare young people for their journey from their childcare years to formal education. Navigating the complex web of community service agencies that municipalities and regions have to offer is often daunting for families.

Complicating matters further, schools often do not have the personnel or time to provide consultations or services to help prospective early learners prepare for the play-based learning environment. A *Kick Start to Kindergarten* event establishes a foundation of wrap-around services to support children on their pathway to begin school with success and sets the stage for future orientations to the kindergarten classroom.

Michael Lawlor is a Superintendent of Education with the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board. Michael is the supervisory officer responsible for Early Years and owes a debt of gratitude to the vibrant team of educators who support this portfolio and created the Kick Start to Kindergarten program. Michael has also authored articles in Principal Connections, a magazine published by the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario.



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Reference:

1. Pascal, C.E. (2009). With our best future in mind: *Implementing early learning in Ontario*. Report to the Premier by the Special Advisor on Early Learning. https://www.msdsb.net/images/CS/reports/2009_Statistics/Pascale_Report_with_Our_Best_Future_in_Mind.pdf



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Our Shared Responsibility: A Framework for Collective Action

By Cheryl Lenardon, Cariboo-Chilcotin School District (School District No. 27)

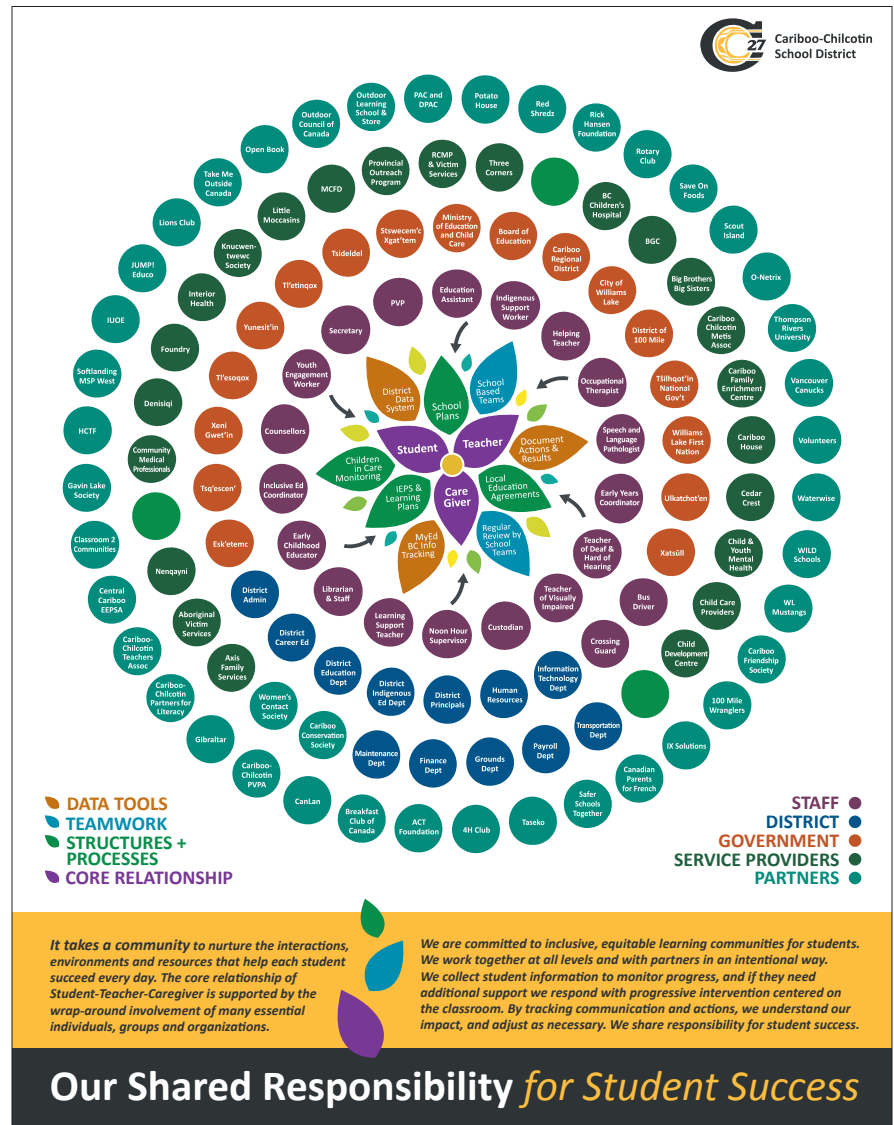
Across Cariboo-Chilcotin School District, distance shapes us. Our district spans a vast and varied landscape, home to communities that are proud, resilient, and deeply individual. For years, that independence showed up in our schools in quiet ways, with people doing remarkable work, often on their own and behind closed doors. There was care, commitment, and creativity everywhere, but not always connection. What was happening in one school or department was not always known, shared, or built upon in another.

A few years ago, we recognized the need for a reset. Not because good work was not happening, but because it was not happening together. We needed something that could bring people into alignment while still honouring the uniqueness of each community.

Out of that need, the Shared Responsibility Framework was born. More than a structure, it offered a common language and a clear path forward. At its heart is a simple but powerful idea: the most important relationship in education is the one between the student, the classroom, the teacher, and the caregiver. Everything else in the system exists to strengthen and sustain that core.

From there, the conversation shifted. Instead of focusing on isolated roles, we began asking how each person's work supports that central relationship. People began to see themselves as part of something larger. Bus drivers, maintenance teams, education assistants, Indigenous support workers, administrators, and community agencies all became part of a connected system of care. Just as importantly, their contributions began to be recognized and celebrated.

To support this shift, we invested in tools that help turn intention into action. A new district data warehouse and information system brings together what we know about students, including learning, attendance,



The Cariboo-Chilcotin School District Our Shared Responsibility for Student Success chart. Graphic and photo courtesy of Cheryl Lenardon.

strengths, and challenges, into one place. This has strengthened conversations in staff meetings, Individual Education Plan discussions, Local Education Agreements with First Nations, and school-based team meetings. Shared documentation allows staff to monitor progress and adjust course as part of an ongoing cycle of evidence-based planning. As needs become clearer, the circle of support expands to include the right people at the right time.

We also knew that for the framework to truly live, people needed to see themselves in it. With Jeff Sotropa of Sotropa Communications, we created a visual that reflects both the structure and spirit of the work. As Jeff explains, “business charts are often functional. I think they can also be inspirational. The school district’s Shared Responsibility program is all about people and their connections to each other in

The Marie Sharpe Elementary School version of the Our Shared Responsibility chart.



support of each student... the idea came very naturally to centre the chart around a flower, the locally found trillium... where everyone is joined in shared purpose."

That image now lives in our schools. Large versions hang in hallways and meeting rooms, while smaller versions support planning conversations and are adapted to reflect local partnerships. These are living tools that invite reflection, collaboration, and shared understanding.

Across the district, this shared approach is taking root. Principal Heather Auger describes how the model comes to life at her school: "At Skyline Alternate 'it takes a village' isn't just a catchphrase, it's the operational blueprint... The staff ensures that no student navigates their challenges alone, turning collective responsibility into a pathway for student success."

At Marie Sharpe Elementary, the same commitment is evident in daily practice. As Vice-Principal Marina Campsall shares, "We've been doing a lot of great work as a team... the student, teacher, and caregiver are at the centre of everything we do. When that connection is strong, it makes such a difference." Their school-based team meets regularly to review student information and identify the supports that will have the greatest impact. "These conversations are thoughtful, honest, and always focused on what each student needs... We also lean on district staff and community supports when needed, knowing that we are all working toward the same goal."

Sharing these stories has become an important part of sustaining the work. Schools and departments highlight how shared responsibility is being lived, creating a growing collection of examples grounded in gratitude, pride, and collective purpose.

This work continues to evolve, but the shift is clear. Where there was once isolation, there is now connection. Where there were separate efforts, there is now shared purpose. The Shared Responsibility Framework has created a way for us to align our work, strengthen our relationships, and move forward together in support of every student, every family, and every member of our district community. ○

Cheryl Lenardon is the Superintendent of Cariboo-Chilcotin School District, situated across the spectacular unceded territories of the Secwépemc, Tsilhqot'in, and Dakelh Nations. A fierce advocate for public education, she brings more than 30 years of experience in K-12 learning, including 15 years in district leadership.



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The Collaborative Advantage

By Daniel Stargratt, Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board

For decades, professional development (PD) in education has followed a “top-down” model: a one size fits all workshops delivered predominantly by outside consultants or district administrators. Yet both research and classroom reality continue to point in a different direction: professional learning has the greatest impact when it is shaped and led by the people doing the work. Our front-line educators live the daily realities of the modern classroom.

When educators lead the PD, the content shifts from abstract theory to practical, usable strategy. Educators bring the understanding of the various constraints and nuances involved with the modern classroom. This ensures that learners leave not with prescribed solutions but tools that can be implemented within a very short time.

As leaders we emphasize that for our school systems to truly learn, they must shift from focusing on individual teacher excellence to building collective capacity. Real change happens when teachers, leaders, staff and the entire school community work as an integrated unit, sharing knowledge and pursuing a common vision rather than working in isolation. Peter Gamwell speaks to this as “flattening hierarchies” to uncover the brilliance within every individual. In this view, learning is not a series of individual tasks, but a culture that lives across the system.

The Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board (SMCDSB) initiated this idea in 2023 with its secondary panel. After two years of its implementation receiving much support, the program team decided we needed to give the elementary panel the same level of learning opportunity that the secondary panel had been receiving. Using the original planning template, the team sat down to brainstorm a plan to make it happen. Ideally, we would have all elementary staff together but with over 42 schools and a



▲ Assorted coffee and pastries made by the Joan of Arc Catholic School students, highlighting their learning. Photos courtesy of Daniel Stargratt.

▶ (L to R:) Dr. Shelley Moore, key note speaker, and Daniel Stargratt, at the Secondary Symposium.

limited budget, we decided it would be best to hold one in fall and one in spring. Using our own high schools as venues we were able to remain fiscally responsible.

But the real shift wasn't logistical. It was philosophical.

Planning moved from a top-down structure to a “ground-up” approach. Ownership of professional learning shifted from system leaders to front-line educators, recognizing the expertise that already exists within SMCDSB and its community partners. What emerged were not traditional PD days, but

Continued on page 16





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Cadmus Delorme delivering his keynote speech to the Elementary Symposium last year.

Continued from page 13

something far more dynamic: internally created symposiums, designed by the system, for the system. This model empowers all SMCDSB employees to identify their own needs and share their expertise. What makes these symposiums so unique? The planning, the collaboration between departments, the partnership with our union affiliates, the voice of our employees, but most importantly, the opportunity to learn and grow as a system. These are not just symposiums, they are super, extremely well-planned conferences just for SMCDSB created by SMCDSB.

The plan

Using the secondary task list, we began discussing the possibility of holding two elementary symposia in June 2025 after receiving ministry directives for the upcoming year's professional development days. Over the next month, we met with union affiliates to explore a potential partnership, as this was something the elementary panel had been requesting.

This marked the beginning of a collaboration that led to three highly successful symposia. More importantly, it demonstrated that when the board, unions, educators,



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and leaders work together, great things can be accomplished.

Planning for each symposium began well in advance – often the year before – to ensure there was sufficient time to attend to every detail. This included foundational decisions such as selecting keynote speaker(s), as well as curating diverse, grade-appropriate sessions to ensure each offering provided practical value for participants.

Additional considerations included confirming the venue, parking, transportation, and accessibility. Communication also played a pivotal role, with consistent messaging shared through emails and social media, along with invitations extended to community partners.

Attention to detail was evident throughout – from hospitality and lanyards identifying participants' selected sessions, to the Director's welcome and the opening prayer service, which grounded the day in our faith and identity as a Catholic community.

Finally, feedback was gathered immediately following each event to identify successes and areas for future growth. And, of course, none of this would have been possible without the setup the night before and the cleanup once the day was completed.

The efforts of the entire program services team needs to be recognized for their work to move this from plan to reality. The leadership of our ASO, and both secondary and elementary coordinators was phenomenal. A special shout out to all the Executive Administrative Assistants but especially ours in program services who do so much work behind the scenes.

What are the benefits to the system and to employees?

Firstly, educators and subject-matter experts identify their own areas for growth and play an active role in developing the training content. In partnership with union affiliates, each presenter is provided with time to plan and prepare their session.

Learning occurs through collaboration, co-creation, and peer-to-peer exchange, rather than through formal lectures alone. Presenters are supported in their planning through collaboration with Program Services consultants, and the learning continues as they facilitate their sessions.

Presentations are grounded in "examined experience" – learning by doing, solving real-world problems, and reflecting on the

results. This approach helps ensure that the learning is practical, relevant, and immediately applicable.

Educators, leaders, and staff feel that their voices and ideas are valued, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability for their professional growth. The collective wisdom of those directly engaged in the work often leads to more creative, innovative, and practical solutions than any one individual could achieve alone.

Finally, all presentations align with both Ministry of Education directives and the Board's mission and vision. As Director of Education Kimberly Dixon noted: "At the Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board, we are working at the intersection of the pillars in our strategic plan. This morning we began our P.A. Day with a focus on nurturing engagement and learning, strengthening equity and inclusion, and fostering wellbeing while developing our leaders." ○

Daniel Stargratt is the Superintendent of Student Engagement and Learning (K-12), Programme Services and First Nation, Metis and Inuit Education, for the Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board.



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The entrance to Carlyle Elementary School, with the 2025 Exhibition, "Sweet Planet of Mine," portraits on display. Photo courtesy of Dina Vourdousis.

Recovery Learning After the Pandemic in Quebec at Carlyle Elementary School

By Dina Vourdousis,
Carlyle Elementary School

Carlyle International Baccalaureate World School Primary Years Program is a fully integrated neuro-diverse and neuro-typical instructional establishment within the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) network. The constructivist, hands-on, critical thinking and community learning approach forms the foundation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) philosophy.

Early learning through play underpins the social and personal development of preschool and primary-aged students. During COVID-19 lockdowns, face-to-face

The International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum is a project-based, student-led program, aligning with the Quebec *Education Act*, igniting inspiration that sparks creative thinking that stagnated during the COVID-19 pandemic. IB accommodates the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) learning initiatives such as early literacy and numeracy, academic and career guidance content – platforms geared towards the development of personal and social competencies.

socialization lacked growth and many students' social-emotional development slowed as opportunities to decode verbal and visual social cues diminished. Live classroom interactions necessary for understanding responsible learning behaviour were limited while participation remained virtual.

By being physically present in the classroom community, students develop patience, critical thinking, reflection, and citizenship competencies through in-person social interaction. These experiences refine the decoding of social cues and provide the scaffolding required to synthesize thoughtful social-emotional responses. Citizenship develops through self-regulation in relation to others in a shared physical space, and after COVID-19, the interpretation of cultural social cues needed to be reintroduced. Developing personal and social competencies fundamentally requires physical spaces such as classrooms, excursions, and performances that provide structured opportunities for interaction within educational settings.

Quebec Education Reform introduced the Culture and Citizenship in Quebec (CCQ) framework and the Academic and Career Guidance Content (ACGC) platform, replacing the Ethics and Religious Cultures program. At the same time, early literacy and numeracy initiatives implemented by the EMSB aligned with the Quebec *Education Act* reforms and the constructivist IB philosophy of learning through doing. By 2023, these platforms coalesced to support the holistic development of personal and social competencies and strengthen post-pandemic pedagogy, social-emotional growth, and intellectual development.

An EMSB initiative aligned with IB and Quebec Education reforms invites parents of preschool-aged students to participate in groups with teachers modeling activities in person throughout the year. This initiative strengthens learning both at home and at school by bridging public and private learning spaces. Engaging in practical, hands-on activities with parents models learning skills that can continue to be developed at home.

The preschool math and literacy program at Carlyle, embedded within the ACGC framework, provides young learners with a strong foundation in numeracy and language skills within a bilingual, inquiry-based, and constructivist environment. Students engage in developmentally

By being physically present in the classroom community, students develop patience, critical thinking, reflection, and citizenship competencies through in-person social interaction.

appropriate, play-based activities that build counting, patterns, problem-solving, phonemic awareness, listening, speaking, emergent reading, and writing skills. These live learning experiences integrated within the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) approach enhance confidence, curiosity, reasoning, communication abilities, and agency in both French and English while students actively learn through social interaction.

In Cycle 1, numeracy and literacy skills are applied to collaborative group projects that foster citizenship and relationship-building skills in preparation for the Grade six IB Exhibition. In Cycle 2, social integration becomes more prominent through self-actualization and learning about oneself in relation to others. Since 2023, students have developed initiatives such as first aid training, media club, and entrepreneurship. Through these in-person activities, students strengthen relationships and refine leadership qualities. Students have hosted podcasts with Quebec public figures and local creators, won entrepreneurship prizes through OSCEntreprendre, and participated in certified first aid training. More than 40 students are selected through an application process for the Leadership program beginning in Cycle 3.

The ACGC framework continues in Grade five through the Self-Knowledge component, complementing the IB Unit of Inquiry on Who We Are in relation to Transitions as students explore physical, psychological, and emotional changes. The Knowledge of the World of School component complements the IB Unit on Sharing

the Planet in relation to the Human Rights unit by helping students understand equal opportunities and children's rights around the world. The Knowledge of the World of Work component complements the IB Unit on Where We Are in Place and Time in relation to Technology where students examine the impact of technology on society and the workforce.

As part of COVID-19 recovery efforts, the two EMSB IB PYP established the IB Exhibition Exchange initiative. Grade five students from Carlyle and Michelangelo International Elementary School visit each other's Exhibitions as part of the complementary ACGC and IB learning experience.

As Quebec law states, students are no longer permitted mobile phones in class. Students have found this liberating, allowing technology to function as a tool rather than commanding their attention. The 2023 Exhibition, "Artificial Intelligence Meets Authentic Ingenuity," reflected students' belief in preserving human creativity in the face of AI expansion. In 2024, "Express Yourself" explored artistic forms including oil painting, black-light painting, and fashion design. In 2025, "Sweet Planet of Mine" showcased artworks created with recycled materials donated by a local university.

In conclusion, learning within the Quebec Education and IB programs is enhanced through meaningful social interaction and learning together within the classroom community. ○

Dina Vourdousis is the principal for Carlyle Elementary School.

When Data Becomes a Tool for Learning: What CCSD Shows Us About What's Possible



By Sean Cameron, Cariboo-Chilcotin School District
(School District No. 27)

From left to right clockwise: Sean Cameron, Director of Instruction – Innovation; Grant Gustafson, Director of Instruction – Indigenous Education; and the Williams Lake First Nations Education Team, Leah Briault, Norma Sure, Michelle Carrier.

In schools, we talk often about using evidence to inform practice. We want to understand attendance patterns, follow learning progress, support student wellbeing, and make thoughtful decisions about staffing and resources. Most school districts already collect this information but accessing it in ways that truly support educators and learners is not always easy.

For many educators and leaders, data feels removed from daily work. Reports take time to create, numbers don't always align, and pulling information together can feel more like an administrative task than a learning conversation. When this happens, data becomes something we react to rather than something that supports timely, student-centred decisions.

Cariboo-Chilcotin School District (CCSD) in British Columbia shows that there is another way. By rethinking how

district data is organized, supported, and accessed, CCSD demonstrates how districts can make information easier to use, more trustworthy, and far more helpful for teaching, leadership, and planning.

A challenge shared by many districts

CCSD serves students across a large and geographically diverse region, working closely with teachers, principals, Indigenous education partners, and district teams. Like many school districts, CCSD had access to large amounts of information about students, staffing, and operations, but using that information effectively was increasingly difficult.

Reports often depended on exporting data from different systems and combining it by hand. Looking at trends over multiple years was challenging. Staff spent valuable time checking and reconciling numbers, sometimes discovering inconsistencies only after reports were already circulated.

Creating a clear, shared picture

Rather than continuing to add new reports on top of old processes, CCSD chose to build a stronger foundation. In partnership with MSP Corp, the district adopted a managed data warehouse that brings together student, staffing, and financial information in one place. Data is gathered automatically from existing systems and carefully checked for accuracy before it is used.

The most important shift was not technical, it was practical. Educators and leaders now work from the same reliable information. Questions about attendance, learning progress, or staffing are grounded in shared understanding rather than competing spreadsheets.

This shift has helped move professional conversations away from “Are these numbers right?” toward “What do these patterns tell us, and how can we respond?”

Making information easy for educators to use

CCSD's approach prioritizes usability. Interactive dashboards allow educators and leaders to explore information visually, without needing special technical skills. Patterns can be reviewed by school, grade, or time-period, making it easier to notice changes early and reflect on progress.

Because historical information is retained, educators can see whether strategies and supports are making a difference not just in the current year, but over time. Information is available when it is needed, rather than months later.

Access is also carefully managed. Teachers, principals, and district staff each see information appropriate to their role, ensuring privacy while still promoting transparency and trust.

Why a managed service model matters

A key reason CCSD's work has been sustainable is how it is supported. Rather than relying on internal staff to build and maintain complex systems, the district uses a managed service model.



The Data Warehouse solution in action, being used to guide and inform a Local Education Agreement with the school district and Williams Lake First Nation. Photos courtesy of Sean Cameron.

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By rethinking how district data is organized, supported, and accessed, CCSD demonstrates how districts can make information easier to use, more trustworthy, and far more helpful for teaching, leadership, and planning.

Through the MSP Corp Managed Data Warehouse, the technical work, maintaining data accuracy, security, and system reliability is handled behind the scenes. This allows district staff to focus on their core work: supporting educators and students.

For districts, this model offers clear advantages:

- **Lower and predictable costs**, without needing to hire specialized technical staff,
- **More time for instructional leadership**, not systems maintenance,
- **Reliable, consistent information**, supported by automated checks, and
- **Capacity that grows over time**, rather than depending on individual roles.

A foundation for ongoing improvement

At CCSD, the data warehouse now supports more than reporting. It enables new digital tools and reduces manual processes across departments. As district priorities evolve, whether focused on equity, student engagement, or wellbeing, the foundation is already in place to explore questions thoughtfully and responsibly.

Most importantly, data has become part of everyday professional learning conversations rather than a separate technical exercise.

An invitation to other districts

The experience of Cariboo-Chilcotin School District illustrates what is now possible for K-12 systems. Modern data tools

are no longer limited to large districts with extensive technology teams.

The MSP Corp Managed Data Warehouse is designed for rapid deployment and is ready to support districts using MyEd BC, MySchoolSask, or Atrive ERP. This allows districts to move quickly from initial conversations to practical use, without rebuilding systems from scratch. School District 71, Comox Valley Schools; and School District 5, Southeast Kootenay have both recently implemented the same solution deploying a full enterprise warehouse in months rather than years.

For districts wondering how to make better use of the data they already have, CCSD offers a compelling example. With the right foundation and managed support model, information can become timely, reliable, and genuinely useful supporting stronger conversations, better planning, and more proactive support for learners.

The data is already there. The opportunity now is to make it work for learning. ○

Sean Cameron is the Director of Instruction for Cariboo-Chilcotin School District in British Columbia.



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Re-imagining Growth and Evaluation Cycles for Teachers as Inquiry

By Dr. Cara Colorado, Sandra Herbst, Karen Boyd, Ryan Francis, Jón Olafson, Elise Downey, Brenna Frith, Eric Miron, Miranda Moore, Royce Manary, and Tanis Ziprick, River East Transcona School Division

Processes to support teacher professional growth have often been implemented as check-box tasks for teachers. However, in responding to needs in increasingly complex classrooms in Canada, we argue there is a need for systems not just to cultivate Master Teachers, but to create a commitment to nurturing *teachers as Master Learners*: teachers engaged in “self-directed lifelong learning and learner-centeredness.”¹ In this context, River East Transcona School Division (RETSD) has been focused on reconceiving growth plans to nurture, cultivate, and encourage teachers as Master Learners, able to utilize a growth mindset to be responsive to changing dynamics in education.

Using design thinking to plot and refine action

In envisioning a growth plan process that might centre teachers as Master Learners, we utilized our divisional Design Thinking Framework. This inquiry framework outlines six stages of design thinking as outlined in Figure 1. We ask our students to take on

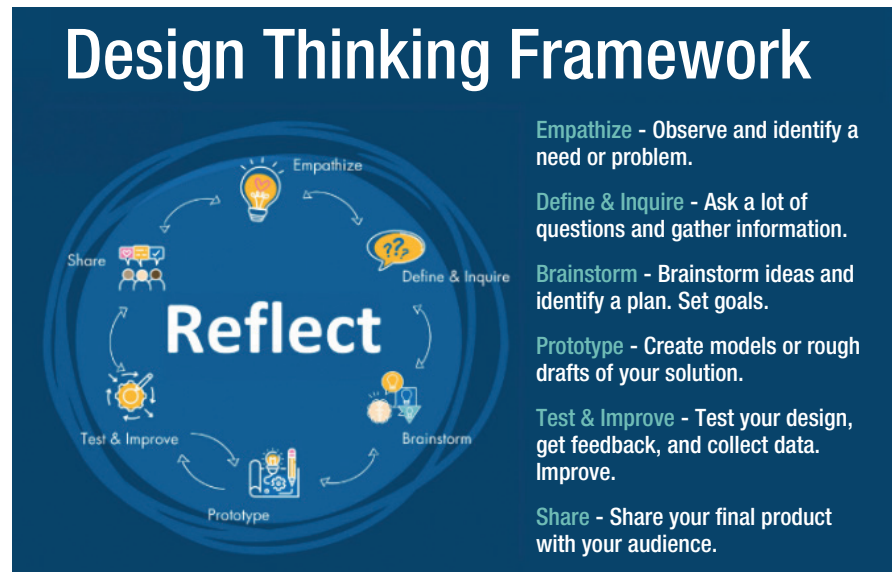


Figure 1: River East Transcona School Division's (RETSD) Design Thinking Framework. Graphics courtesy of RETSD.

this frame to refine their thinking as learners, and we used the steps in this process to guide our own inquiry.

1. Empathize: Considering the context for teachers as Master Learners

Insofar as assessment-for-learning strategies can be used with adults in support of growth and change in schools and systems,²

and with an intent to redefine growth plan processes to cultivate teachers as Master Learners, we considered:

- **The move to competency-based education frameworks:** In the age of AI, we have seen a movement towards curriculum frameworks like Manitoba's Framework for Learning,³ which focus

Growth Plans	Past Process	Extension
	Growth Plans are completed annually by all teachers.	Growth plans are completed annually, linked to the school plan, and rooted in an inquiry question. The growth plan process follows the Design Thinking Framework.
	Growth plan meetings take place in the fall between teachers and administrators to identify teachers' areas of growth and strategies to support learning.	Growth plans are conversation and evidence-based; the fall planning meeting focuses on identifying a plan for learning, which includes triangulated strategies to support formative assessment, including: ongoing feedback cycles, collection of evidence, planned reflection, and identification of resources.
	Growth plans may be connected year to year, or may stand alone.	The growth plan cycle is a five-year cumulative cycle; reference to ongoing growth and learning via the design-thinking process is underscored.
	Growth plan evaluation takes place via an administrator meeting in the spring.	Growth plan evaluation is rooted in teacher collection of digital evidence, take-aways from ongoing feedback cycles with mentors, and culminating with an annual personal reflection.

Figure 2: Shared Understandings and Extensions.

on developing global competencies in students, rather than relying solely on facts to teach. Student achievement in this competency-based education system is directly related to a teacher's ability to employ growth mindset, allowing them to be responsive in nurturing skills and dispositions in ever-evolving classroom of students.⁴

- **Commitments equity, diversity, and inclusion:** We are mindful that historic models of growth planning have centred “technocratic, positivist, hierarchical, and skills-oriented approaches”, which fail to capture broader socio-political demands placed on teachers from equity-deserving groups.⁵ Models intended to support teacher growth must thus: (a) be responsive to diverse teaching needs, and (b) centre agency within the teacher as Master Learner.
- **Prioritization of teacher wellness and retention:** Growth plans inclusive of formative feedback have been shown to increase efficacy, self-reflection, and feelings of support for new teachers.⁶ As Canadian classrooms become more diverse,⁷ and school systems take on multi-modal supports for students,⁸ frameworks supporting teacher-generated inquiry have been shown to support teachers to utilize differentiated instruction to support diverse learning needs.⁹

2. Define and inquire: Engaging school leaders in shared understanding of the work

Aligned with this literature review, a working group of school and divisional

leaders reviewed existing processes and anecdotal data outlining impacts of the current structure, paving the way for a shared understanding of what our revised process sought out to do:

- To create a system that fosters reflective practices that develop teachers as Master Learners: teachers who are reflective, who seek out feedback to grow practice, and whose teaching is responsive to the particular constellation of students they teach;
- To build collegial and collaborative structures in schools, supporting innovative thinking, teacher support, and teacher growth, while empowering teachers to be responsible for (and to maintain agency in) their own professional growth; and
- To model instructional leadership that empowers school leaders to engage in learning-focused interactions with teachers on a regular and ongoing basis.

3. Brainstorm: Developing a process that supported shared understandings

In RETSD, we have focused, over the last number of years, on the creation of inquiry questions that drive learning. Knowing the collective understanding and support for inquiry models already established in the system, we focused on these types of questions as central to the professional growth process. We used shared understandings of inquiry to extend past practices, and to create alignment with classroom/school priorities, as shown in Figure 2.

4. Prototype: Using technology to support meaningful feedback

Central to our shared work was a prototype document, which asked teachers to start their year with a clear identification of an inquiry question related to their own practice: (a) responsive to a current need; (b) aligned with their broader school plan and individual class profile; and (c) conceptualized to drive learning, trial, growth, and reflection (not simply a list of things to “do”). Following a creation of an inquiry question, each teacher identified strategies to support their learning throughout the year (in the form of conversations, observations, readings, professional learnings, things to try, data to monitor, and so on). At the end of the year, there is a formalized opportunity for reflection and consolidation of learning. The prototype can be seen in Figure 3.

Arguably, more important than the document itself, a key component of our work was the purposeful creation of an interface to allow (and expect) teachers to collect and share evidence of learning in service of their inquiry, and to engage in feedback about their evidence with a critical partner. To this end, we utilized a Collection of Digital Evidence (CODE) forum for each teacher – a chat function with school-based mentors. The CODEs serve as platforms for teachers to log learning and trials, and to engage in reciprocal interactions related to each teacher's inquiry. Arguably, this is the crux of the work – the focused and specific reciprocal engagement that can occur with a shared inquiry as a leverage point which emphasize the importance of setting aside not only time to *do* things, but to reflect on their impact, and the implications for future work. An example of CODE chats between teachers and principals is shown in Figure 4.

5. Test and improve: Linking the growth plans with broader teacher evaluation processes

Our take aways from the field are encouraging. Principals have shared that with the use of the teacher inquiry growth plans and CODE chats, learning-focussed interactions between staff have increased: “regular feedback and conversation is happening successfully... [and] learning has been made more visible and more immediate.” Principals report that

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL INQUIRY, FEEDBACK, AND GROWTH

Part 1 to be completed and approved by the teacher and administrator by October 15. Part 2 & 3 to be completed and signed by the teacher and administrator by May 30.

TEACHER INFORMATION

Teacher: Click or tap here to enter text.	School: Click or tap here to enter text.
Position: Click or tap here to enter text.	Administrator: Click or tap here to enter text.
Approval date: Click or tap here to enter text.	

PART 1 - PLANNING (To Be Completed by October 15)

Empathize	Alignment: How will your inquiry question align with your School Mission Statement, Throughline Question or Area of Focus for Teacher inquiry, Feedback and Growth Cycles:
	Click or tap here to enter text.
Design & Inquire	Guiding inquiry question: In collaboration with your school administrator, identify your guiding inquiry question:
	Click or tap here to enter text.
Brainstorm	Strategies and evidence collection: Identify what strategies you will use to support your learning and the evidence you will collect in service of your learning, including what products, conversations, and observations you might use to support your learning and reflection throughout this process in your Collection of Digital Evidence (CODE) Teams Channel?
	Strategies to support your learning: Click or tap here to enter text.
	Products, Conversations, and Observations you will collect for formative assessment: Click or tap here to enter text.
	Impact on Practice: How will this learning visibility impact on pedagogy and professional practices as outlined in the Indicators of Effective Thinking document?
	Click or tap here to enter text.

PART 2 - TEACHER REFLECTION AND EVIDENCE OF LEARNING (To be completed in the spring)

Prototype	Reflection: Thinking about your guiding question, what were your most impactful learnings and areas of growth? What do you believe had the biggest impact on student learning?
	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Highlighting evidence: What evidence would you want to highlight from your Collection of Digital Evidence (CODE) Channel that supported this learning and growth?
	Click or tap here to enter text.
Test and Improve	Connections: As you reflect on your learning related to the Indicators of Effective Teaching , other professional resources you've accessed, and evidence of student learning, how has your practice evolved?
	Click or tap here to enter text.
Test and Improve	Next Steps: Discuss additional areas of growth or inquiry that have been highlighted via this process. What are your next steps?
	Click or tap here to enter text.

Figure 3: The Inquiry Growth Plan Prototype.

their ability to conduct observations with meaningful feedback has been improved; instead of long observation with sometimes undefined purpose, the teacher's area of inquiry focuses what the observer is looking for. As a result, principals indicate, "it is easier to give feedback... and post feedback related to shorter classroom observations."

Furthermore, feedback demonstrates that the focus on ensuring that individual

growth plans are aligned with broader school plan goals and classroom needs has improved application of common visions in the classroom: "What really helped was last year, [as principals were] talking about equity and excellence, which was brought back to the schools in the form of excellence and professionalism in teaching. When the growth plans came in, it was framed as another way to support excellence in teaching and professionalism."

I really appreciate these reflections. I loved how you articulated the connections between your assessments and authentic representations of student learning, especially when play-based opportunities are provided. Thank you so much for taking the time to share these thoughts in the chat.

Thank you. I've been thinking a lot about 'mistake-free learning' versus 'learning from errors.' From a growth mindset perspective, errors are powerful learning opportunities that emphasize reflection and resilience over perfection.

That's such an important distinction.

Traditional approaches often frame mistakes as failures, but modern pedagogy—and Manitoba's Global Competencies—encourage a growth mindset where mistakes are essential for deep learning.

Figure 4: A CODE Chat example between a principal and a teacher, in service of inquiry-based growth plans.

Finally, we are hearing that teachers appreciate the agency and the ability to have greater input in an authentic learning focus. One principal reports, "there seems to be a more positive attitude from staff, buy in seems increased" and another reports, "teachers [have] worked on the reflection more and [have] come up with more thoughtful questions... It has been easier to respond and continue conversations than face to face. We are getting more evidence of learning in the classroom through pictures and captions. The quality of the questions was more reflective and has been impactful in building relationships."

6. Share: Utilization of the process and saturation into the system

As a next step, the inquiry growth plans are being tied into evaluations so that teachers' cumulative learning over five-year cycles can come to bear in evaluations, resulting in enhanced agency to curate a collection of learning, and to receive summative feedback on a (more) robust data set. Furthermore, our broader mentorship work has been able to capitalize on the normalization of an inquiry growth plan for all teachers. For example, the mentorship we support for new teachers has been able to use the inquiry growth plan as a starting point for collaborative work forward.

The commitment to designing systems to be responsive to our current needs (rather than beholden to historical models of the way we “do” things) is never-ending work in education. The centring of not just a declaration of teachers as Master Learners, but purposeful systems and structures to support and expect teachers as Master Learners through our inquiry growth plan process has been a promising practice indeed. ○

Dr. Cara Colorado is the Assistant Superintendent – Human Resources; Sandra Herbst is the Superintendent/CEO; Karen Boyd is the Assistant Superintendent – Educational Programming; Ryan Francis is the Assistant Superintendent – Educational Services and Planning; Jón Olafson is the Assistant Superintendent – Student Services; and Elise Downey is the Secretary-Treasurer/CFO, for River East

Transcona School Division. Brenna Frith is the principal for Valley Gardens Middle School; Eric Miron is the principal for École Margaret-Underhill; Miranda Moore is a Curriculum Consultant; Royce Manary is the vice principal for Emerson School; and Tanis Ziprick is the principal for École Salisbury Morse Place School; all under the River East Transcona School Division.

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