

# High School Success



Planning Template  
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## Introduction

Alberta Education's *Action Agenda* (2011) states that, "Teachers have a critical role in creating positive learning environments and addressing student needs. It is vital that teachers be able to reflect upon, refresh, and develop new instructional practices so that they are better able to meet student needs." More specifically, the *Re-thinking High School* Symposium in January 2012 shone a light on 'next practice' thinking for implementing teaching strategies intended to *transform* the high school learning experience for Alberta students. The message could not be clearer: high school teaching must change – pedagogically, structurally and culturally.

Beginning with the *Removing Barriers to High School Completion* study in 2001, Alberta Education has systematically tracked completion trends and has regularly called upon school districts to explore ways to impact drop-out and returning rates for high school students (<http://ideas.education.alberta.ca/hsc/research.aspx>). One result of more than a decade of commitment to this purpose, *The Alberta High School Completion Framework*, addresses challenges that students face in finishing high school and seeks to ensure all students are given the opportunity to succeed. The provincial Framework identifies the following five core strategies as being integral to success:

1. Student Engagement
2. Successful Transitions
3. Collaborative Partnerships
4. Positive Connection
5. Tracking Progress

In addition to these five provincial strategies, the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) has committed to systemically enhancing high school student success through participation in the Alberta Education High School Flexibility project<sup>1</sup>. This level of commitment must be expanded to reflect the CBE's prototyping of a systems approach to the challenge of positively impacting student success, and has intentionally identified eight high school sites to bring greater focus to this approach. CBE's implementation of these provincial and local strategies will be guided by sustained attention to factors impacting the learning and success of all students. This will be achieved in all high schools through quality teaching and instructional leadership dedicated to a personalized curriculum and in the presence of a strong instructional core.

Drawing on insights and directions from the High School Flexibility Study and results derived from the AISI Cycle 4 project entitled *Personalization of Student Learning*, the Calgary educational community believes it is uniquely positioned to enact fundamental changes in the roles and responsibilities of high schools, pedagogically, community members engaging in a new discourse on the subject of high schools, dispositions toward improvement and expanded visions of learning success. Moreover, it will require generative community engagement and enhanced partnerships with Alberta Education.

## The Context

In the Calgary Board of Education (CBE), our vision for the personalization of learning is *a highly intentional and responsive process whereby teachers, students and content are engaged together in such a way that all students can participate, progress and achieve*. Foundational to the work of personalization is the understanding that 'all students'

"We feel a sense of urgency to demonstrate the strength of our commitment to public education.....we are not content with the way things are."



means *each and every student*, and that teachers and administrators make instructional decisions with both the collective and the individual in mind.

Within the context of the CBE's current system design, there exists an opportunity to create conditions whereby diverse aspects of our work as instructional designers and instructional leaders can become seamlessly integrated to act as catalysts to enhance pedagogical, structural and cultural change.

It is recognized within the CBE, that a parallel shift is required between the work in the classroom and the work of the system. Central to both is reframing the roles and creating the conditions for success for each child, every day, without exception. Change in thinking and decision-making is required to transition to a collaborative model for providing a continuum of supports and services. Teachers, as instructional designers, and administrators, as instructional leaders, will need to reconsider the possibilities for designing learning experiences *for* and *with* each student. Potential emerges for an unprecedented cultural shift in our beliefs about teaching and learning – a rethinking of what school is and what it could be. The CBE Three Year Education Plan focuses the organization on addressing the personalization of learning, building capacity, engaging the public and stewarding resources. Questions regarding how data is understood, used, and shared, for example, bring the community nature of learning into focus and offers assurance of more successful student transition from grade to grade, school to school, school to community or post-secondary.

Townsend and Adams (2009) have found that “programs do not account for clear progress in school improvement nearly so much as *people* do.” Similarly, Fullan (2011) suggests that cultural shift can be facilitated by giving people “new experiences in relatively non-threatening circumstances, and build[ing] on it, especially through interaction with trusted peers.” The Calgary Board of Education’s Three Year Plan is establishing an interactive, non-threatening environment to support the people--- teachers, instructional leaders, and instructional designers---to achieve this transformation agenda.

Instructional leadership within schools, when combined with a system-wide focus on exemplary teaching and learning practices (Hattie, 2003), provides a compelling framework for making decisions differently. Instructional leaders and instructional designers play pivotal roles in promoting the learning and success of all students. By focusing on learning and instruction in professional learning communities, instructional leaders and instructional designers work collaboratively to improve instruction and to clearly articulate why schools exist: *success for every student*. From the priority of empowering educators to make decisions differently, a new story of education emerges. The primary work of the learning organization is to provide appropriate supports so that instructional leaders and teachers can feel confident and competent in the professional decisions they make. Ultimately, success is measured by the extent to which these new ways of making decisions and teaching positively impact our students’ success.

Leadership supporting innovation must be consistent with the magnitude of the order of change that is represented by that innovation (Marzano, 2005). Implementing a district strategy that facilitates change on scale requires a *clearly articulated and widely held and understood point of view on high quality teaching and learning* (City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel, 2009).

“This must be done.....the only danger is if we don’t move forward. Our students need us to be bold.”

## Context – Starting Points

The Alberta Education High School Flexibility Enhancement Project began with 16 high school communities from across the province that were given the opportunity to explore changes in organization and delivery given the removal of the 25-hour per credit requirement (Alberta's adaptation of the Carnegie Unit). The purpose of the Alberta Education four-year High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is ongoing and has been designed to determine if the requirement that students have access to 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per course credit should be maintained.

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is fundamentally a study about the influence that the Carnegie Unit has had on the culture of teaching and learning in Alberta high schools. As the project has concluded its first year of the Pilot Project Phase, the discourse among participants indicates that the Carnegie Unit has had a significant role to play in the conception that the work of the high school is teaching-centric rather than learning-centric.

### Background: Alberta Education Flexibility Project<sup>1</sup>

#### Summary of The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project

The *High School Flexibility Enhancement Project* is in the final year of a three year Pilot. At the conclusion of this Pilot Project, it is intended that recommendations will be made to the Deputy Minister and his executive team for a decision about the future of the current requirement that requires schools to provide students with access to at least 25 hours of instruction per credit.

#### What is the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project?

The project involves 16 Alberta high school communities that have the opportunity to explore changes in program organization and delivery with the removal of the 25-hour per credit requirement (Alberta's adaptation of the Carnegie Unit).

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is fundamentally a study about changing the culture of teaching and learning in Alberta high schools. As the project has concluded its second year of the Pilot Project Phase, the discourse among participants indicates that the Carnegie Unit has had a significant role in determining the work of the high school and has contributed to the establishment of a and environment that focuses more on the work of the teachers and less on the learning of the students.

#### Who are the participants in the project?

The chart below shows the 16 schools and jurisdictions participating in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project.

School	District	Location
Grand Prairie Composite	Grande Prairie Public School District	Grande Prairie
Bellerose Composite	St. Albert Public Separate School District #6	St. Albert
Olds High School	Chinook's Edge School Division #73	Olds
JC Charyk School	Prairie Land Regional Division #25	Hanna

Bishop McNally High School	Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District #1	Calgary
Holy Trinity Academy	Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate Regional Division #3	Okotoks
Catholic Central High School	Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division #4	Lethbridge
M.E. Lazerte High School	Edmonton School District #7	Edmonton
Spruce Grove Composite	Parkland School Division #70	Spruce Grove
Wm E Hay Composite	Clearview School Division #71	Stettler
Peace Wapiti Academy	Peace Wapiti School Division #76	Grande Prairie
Edwin Parr Composite	Aspen View Schools Regional Division #19	Athabasca
St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy	Living Waters Catholic Schools Regional Division #42	Slave Lake
James Fowler High School	Calgary School District #19	Calgary
Ecole St. Marguerite-Bourgeoys	Conseil Scolaire Catholique et Francophone du Sud de l'Alberta	Calgary
Archbishop O'Leary Catholic High School	Edmonton Catholic Separate School District #7	Edmonton

In addition to the schools participating in the project, Alberta Education has granted permission for several additional schools in the province to operate outside of the 25 hour requirement. In addition to the schools participating in the project, Alberta Education has granted permission for several additional schools in the province to operate outside of the 25 hour requirement. These additional schools are not included in the cohort of the 16 participating schools when considering the measures for the project, but their progress and results will nevertheless be monitored. Below is a chart of the schools participating in the parallel study:

School	District
St. Joseph High School	Grande Prairie Roman Catholic Separate School District #28
Springbank High School	Rockyview School Division #41
Mother Margaret Mary High School	Edmonton Catholic Separate School District #7
Lethbridge Collegiate Institute	Lethbridge School District #51
Western Canada High School	Calgary School District #19
Central Memorial High School	Calgary School District #19
Ernest Manning High School	Calgary School District #19
Robert Thirsk High School	Calgary School District #19
National Sports School	Calgary School District #19
Alternative High School	Calgary School District #19
CBE Learn	Calgary School District #19

### What is happening in participating school communities?

As a result of the collaborative conversations that are emerging among participants, three major shifts are taking place in most participating schools. First, virtually all



schools have shifted the **structure** of their school day. These structural shifts have occurred as a response to the removal of the standardized approach to school timetabling formerly demanded by the Carnegie Unit. A driving force behind many of the decisions of schools to change their daily use of time has been the recognition that students learn at different paces and that student mastery of different outcomes requires differing amounts of time.

The structural shifts at participating schools have led to significant changes in the way schools imagine the roles of students, teachers, parents and administration. This re-thinking of roles has led to a shift in the **culture** of many of the participating schools. A key element in the shifting of culture is the emergence of a realization in participating school communities that their past practices have cast teachers in the role of controllers of the learning environment and students in the role of compliant workers. Questions about the nature of learning and the opportunity to explore new structures has led some schools to shift the focus toward the individual needs of each student first and then the role of the teacher as a responsive, caring adult who is there to support learning.

Finally, the shift in culture of the school has led educators to a deep and sometimes uncomfortable exploration of **pedagogy** and instructional practice. As participating school communities create new cultures of learning it is becoming apparent that old practices are often inconsistent with these new cultures. This has opened the door to a broad inquiry of pedagogy that is leading to student-centered approaches focused on both student engagement and achievement.

The three shifts led participating school communities to implement changes over the 2010/2011 school year. Participating schools implemented strategies in response to input from stakeholders and designed them to meet the needs of their communities. Although no two schools are implementing the same strategies there are commonalities. These changes include:

- The insertion of **flex time** into the experience of students and teachers. Flex time is time for students to direct their learning choices and receive assistance and instruction in areas of self-identified need.
- The establishment of a **Teacher Advisory** role that is designed to focus on relationship building among key stakeholders in students' learning.
- The exploration of **Credit Recovery** approaches that provide additional time to individual students who may have not been successful in meeting course outcomes within the boundaries of school-scheduled time.
- The development of **interdisciplinary approaches** to program delivery and design to bring meaning and relevance to students' learning.
- The emergence of **collaborative teaching approaches** to provide support for teachers and to increase the resources that are available to students as they progress through courses.

#### **What decision making process did schools use?**

Understanding the change processes used in participating schools is a critically important learning for the potential future transformation of the education system in Alberta. Observations made of engagement processes in participating schools have validated much of what research suggests about effective school leadership. First and foremost, the path of transformation and the ability for a school to maintain its focus in a context of change is highly dependent on the skills, attitudes and approaches of the principal.

Principals in the project have provided guidance to their communities by:

- Articulating a clear vision of the future state of their learning communities.



- Extending a great deal of effort to engage stakeholders in the community in a collaborative dialogue about the preferred future for their school.
- Assembling planning teams of teachers to conduct research, collect and analyze data and advise the principal about issues of climate in the school.
- Making wise use of the *Tell Them From Me* survey to collect student voice and create an environment that engages students meaningfully in the redesign of their learning community.
- Using various surveys and theme meetings in addition to the on-going work of School Councils to engage parents meaningfully in the process of redesign.

#### What are the results?

A suite of measures have been collected for each participating school over the project. Highlights of trends apparent in the measures collected to date in the project include:

- The High School Completion Rate has maintained or improved in 69% of the schools;
- The Drop-Out Rate has maintained or improved in 94% of the schools;
- The Diploma Exam Participation Rate has maintained or improved in 69% of the schools;
- Course Completion Rates have been maintained or improved in 88% of the schools;
- Intellectual Engagement, as measured by the *Tell Them From Me* survey, has been maintained or improved in 81% of the schools;
- There are positive trends in parents' perception of school improvement in 86% of the schools;
- There are positive trends in teachers' perception of school improvement in 67% of the schools.

Anecdotal evidence based on interviews with all participating principals and planning teams indicate the following significant shifts in culture at participating schools:

Principals and planning teams are observing that there is a marked **increase** in:

- Students taking ownership for their learning;
- A nurturing, caring and learning-focused relationship between students and teachers;
- A realization that current assessment practices do not align with a culture of personalization that is emerging in schools;
- Dialogue about the personalization of learning and the need to individualize approaches to support learning;
- Teachers being more flexible and open to considering various options for students to succeed;
- Generation of ideas among staff to try new approaches;
- Teacher collaboration;
- Teacher conversations about pedagogy and practice;
- Alignment of staff around the vision for the school.

Principals and planning teams are observing that there is a marked **decrease** in:

- Student discipline issues.
- The 'frenzy' and stress that often typifies a high school environment;
- Teacher-centric approaches to instruction;
- Negative attitude to change among stakeholders.

Additional information about the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project can be found at:

<http://ideas.education.alberta.ca/hsc/current-projects/flexibility-enhancement-pilot/>

## Calgary Board of Education – High School Success

### Milestones

Consistent with the above described context, in accordance with *Alberta Education's Three-Year Business Plan (2011 – 2014)* and in anticipation of a re-envisioned *Education Act (2012)*, this transformation agenda will identify structures and supports, policies and practices most likely to impact high school student completion in multiple contexts in all CBE high schools. For both teachers and administrators, this process will affect curricular, instructional, and assessment practices through the following transformational directions:

- **Reconsidering Success**
  - Expanded definitions of student success
  - Priorities for system directions that accommodate multiple versions of success
- **Setting a Common Direction for High School Completion**
  - Well defined and agreed-upon standards for excellence in personalized learning
  - Collaboration between CBE and Alberta Education to maintain coherent, focused, purposeful direction
- **Establishing High Expectations**
  - Clearly articulated decision-making that is pedagogically sound, contextually sensitive and student specific
  - Unambiguous goals that provide school leadership with the authority and autonomy for instructional leadership
- **Requiring Different Ways of Thinking and Working through the Student Learning Competency Framework**
  - Sustained and consistent exemplary teaching practice
  - Service and support models that empower leadership across the organization
- **Modeling and Supporting New Ways of Making Decisions**
  - Increased capacity for teachers to make instructional decisions within a problem-solving framework
  - Increased capacity for system and school administrators to provide instructional leadership in accordance with the Alberta School Leadership Competencies
- **Designing for Flexibility**
  - Expanded systems support for the provincial High School Flexibility Enhancement Project involving 7 CBE High Schools
  - Promoting pedagogical shifts – collaborative teaching, assurance model of assessment, development and support for student profiles and student learning plans

- Addressing structural shifts – exploring flex time (12 month, 6 day, 14 hour access to instruction), interdisciplinary approaches to competencies, localized timetabling, extended and accelerated time
  - Cultural shifts – inclusive learning contexts, teacher empowerment, student voice (agency and reciprocity) focus on building relationships within and beyond the classroom
- **Embedding Professional Learning in the Daily Work of the District**
  - Professional learning communities focused on the analysis of student work and exemplary teacher instructional practice
  - Broadly distributed responsibility for professional expertise and learning
- **Inviting Reflection**
  - Continuous analysis of practices, assumptions, habits and attitudes
  - Sustained attention to structures and policies that act as barriers to student success
- **Inviting and Facilitating Collaboration**
  - Ongoing dialogue between students, parents, teachers, administrators, outside service providers and system leaders
  - Coordinated wraparound supports between various service providers
- **Accessing Resources**
  - Anytime, anywhere access to quality web-based resources
  - Multiple points of access for different uses and users
  - Responsive and responsible decision making at the level of the learning organization
- **Contributing to the Development of an Assurance Model in Conjunction with Alberta Education**
  - Timely, broad-based and iterative assessment of system effectiveness
  - Systematic dissemination of results, success, and challenges
  - Established and/or adapted measures for assurance effectiveness

The *High School Success strategies* that constitute the focus of this agenda include implementation of:

- **Alberta Education’s Student Learning Competency Framework in order to facilitate personalized student learning plans and curricular re-design, as well as to re-examine assessment and measures of student success in alignment with the development of the Assurance Model**
- **Calgary School District’s Pathways Strategy in conjunction with the Alberta High School Completion Framework that will additionally support a twelve-month business operations model, and flexible staffing**
- **The Alberta Education/CBE High School Flexibility Project expanded to eight high schools for the purpose of examining alternatives to the Carnegie Unit, the current school year, and established course completion practices**
- **Alberta Educations’ Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders in Alberta for the purpose of enhancing professional learning structures for teachers and administrators**

“We are going to engage in a new level of dialogue about teaching and learning; a new narrative for CBE students. This will require a courageous conversation by all educators, community members, and stakeholders.”

## The Study

The goal of this study is to determine the ways and extent to which the above strategies impact the success of high school students in the Calgary Board of Education. Accordingly, research activities and data collection are designed to seek answers to the following primary question:

*In what ways and to what extent will implementation of the High School success strategies impact high school completion in the Calgary Board of Education?*

This case study methodology drawn from the developmental evaluation process (Patton, 2011)<sup>ii</sup> will encompass the following data sets:

**Chart 1: Summary of Year 1 Measures -Medians (All Schools September 2012)**

Measure	3 Year Average	Baseline Year 2012-2013	Baseline Measure	Year One Year	Year One Measure
High School Completion (3 year)					
Drop Out Rate					
Diploma Exam Participation (4 + Exams)					
Diploma Exam Acceptable (50% +)					
Diploma Exam Excellence (80+)					
Student Migration (% Grade 10 and 11)					
Student - Quality of Education					
Student - Quality of Teaching					
Parent - Quality of Education					
Parent - Quality of Teaching					
Parent - Improvement					
Parent - Stay the Same					
Teacher - Quality of Education					
Teacher – Quality of Teaching					
Teacher - Improvement					
Teacher – Stay the Same					
Course Completion					
Intellectual Engagement					
Social Engagement					
Institutional Engagement					

\*\*Note: Measures that are shaded lag by one school year.



## Description of Measures

### High School Completion

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. This measure is an indication of those students who completed high school within three years of entering Grade 10. A student is considered to have completed if they meet the requirements for an Alberta High School Diploma, a Certificate of high school achievement or an Alberta High School Equivalency Diploma (GED). Included as completers are: those students who may not have met the requirements above but have entered an Alberta post-secondary program, or have registered in an Alberta apprenticeship program, or have earned credit for five Grade 12 level courses, including four diploma exam courses.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

### Drop Out Rate

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. This measure is an indication of students who have left the education system without completing high school.

A decline in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

### Diploma Exam Participation

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. This measure is an indication of the percentage of students who have written four or more diploma examinations within three years of high school.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

### Diploma Exam Acceptable

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. The measure reports the percentages of students taking the examination who achieve the acceptable standard (i.e. a mark of 50%) as a weighted average taken over all exams written in the school. An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

### Diploma Exam Excellence

This measure is taken from the annual Accountability Pillar Reports for each participating school. The measure reports the percentages of students taking the examination who achieve the standard of excellence (i.e. a mark of 80%+) as a weighted average taken over all exams written in the school.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

### Student Migration

This measure is taken from annual September 30<sup>th</sup> enrolment statistics collected by Alberta Education. By comparing the registration of students from year-to-year on September 30<sup>th</sup> we are able to determine if a student migrated in or out of a school. Students are registered as “migrating out” of a school if they drop off a school’s registration in comparison to the previous year and are considered as “migrating in” if they appear on a school’s registration list for the first time in any given year. For a

Grade 10–12 school there will be a large migration of students into Grade 10 and is a large migration out of Grade 12 students (mostly to graduation).

In the spirit of creating an inclusive school community focused on the success of each child, school personnel are concerned when students leave their school before they have completed their high school studies. Although there will always be an element of migration out of a school for families that move to other communities, inclusive schools are focused on retaining those students they serve and stemming any movement of students between schools within the same geographic region.

For the purposes of a student migration summary statistic for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project, the percentage loss of students at the Grade 10 and Grade 11 level is reported as this best represents the students that inclusive schools would be interested in retaining through graduation.

A decline in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

## Measures collected through 2010/2011 school year.

### Student, Parent and Teacher Satisfaction

The charts provide 11 measures of satisfaction gleaned from the Accountability Pillar Survey that is administered annually to all teachers and to Grade 10 students and parents in Alberta schools. The 16 participating schools in the High School Success Initiative used surveys with all of their parents and students starting in the 2010/2011 school year. As a result, the results for 2010/2011 represent the satisfaction of ALL students, parents and teachers in these 16 schools whereas the baseline and 3-year average measures for the satisfaction questions represent the satisfaction of only the Grade 10 students and parents.

The questions from the Accountability Pillar Survey that the results are reporting on are as follows:

#### Student Satisfaction Questions:

- *Overall, is the education you are receiving at school (Very Good, Good, Poor, Very Poor, Don't Know)?*
- *Is the quality of teaching at your school (Very Good, Good, Poor, Very Poor, Don't Know)?*

#### Parent/ Teacher Satisfaction Questions:

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you... (Very satisfied, Satisfied, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied, Don't Know)

- *With the quality of education your child is receiving at school?*
- *With the quality of teaching at your child's school?*

An increase in these measures would indicate a positive trend.

### Course Completion

This measure comes from data that is collected from schools annually by Alberta Education. When a student completes a course, this information is reported to and stored by Alberta Education. The data includes the course name, number of credits and the assessed grade for each course that a student completes. The measure reported in the charts represents the average number of courses taken by a student in each of the participating schools based on the data that has been collected by Alberta

Education on behalf of the school. The credit value of a “course” may range from 1 to 10 credits. For example, all Career and Technology Studies courses are reported as 1-credit modules whereas a Work Experience course could be reported as 10 credits. The measure, as reported, does not factor in the credit value; it simply divides the total courses completed at the school by the September 30<sup>th</sup> enrolment at the school in the same year providing an overall average number of courses taken by each student each year.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

### Intellectual Engagement

The Intellectual Engagement measure is taken from the *Tell Them From Me Survey* which is given to students at each of the participating schools twice a year. The measure is a composite measure that is based on the responses of the students to 54 questions drawn from survey measures on Interest and Motivation, Effective Learning Time, Relevance, and Rigor in the subject areas of Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. Students who meet a certain response threshold are considered to be intellectually engaged. The result is measured as a percentage.

The *Tell Them From Me Survey* is widely used across Canada. As a result, a Canadian norm is available for measures collected by this survey. The Canadian norm for Intellectual Engagement Composite for high schools for the 2010/2011 school year was 44%. The Intellectual Engagement Composite for schools participating in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project for the 2010/2011 school year was 57%.

An increase in this measure would indicate a positive trend.

### Social Engagement

Social Engagement measures to be determined.

### Institutional Engagement

Institutional Engagement measures to be determined.

<sup>i</sup> Gerry Fijal, Project Manager, “High School Flexibility Enhancement Project”, November 2011, .Government of Alberta Education (exerpts used by permission)

<sup>i</sup> Patton, M.Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.