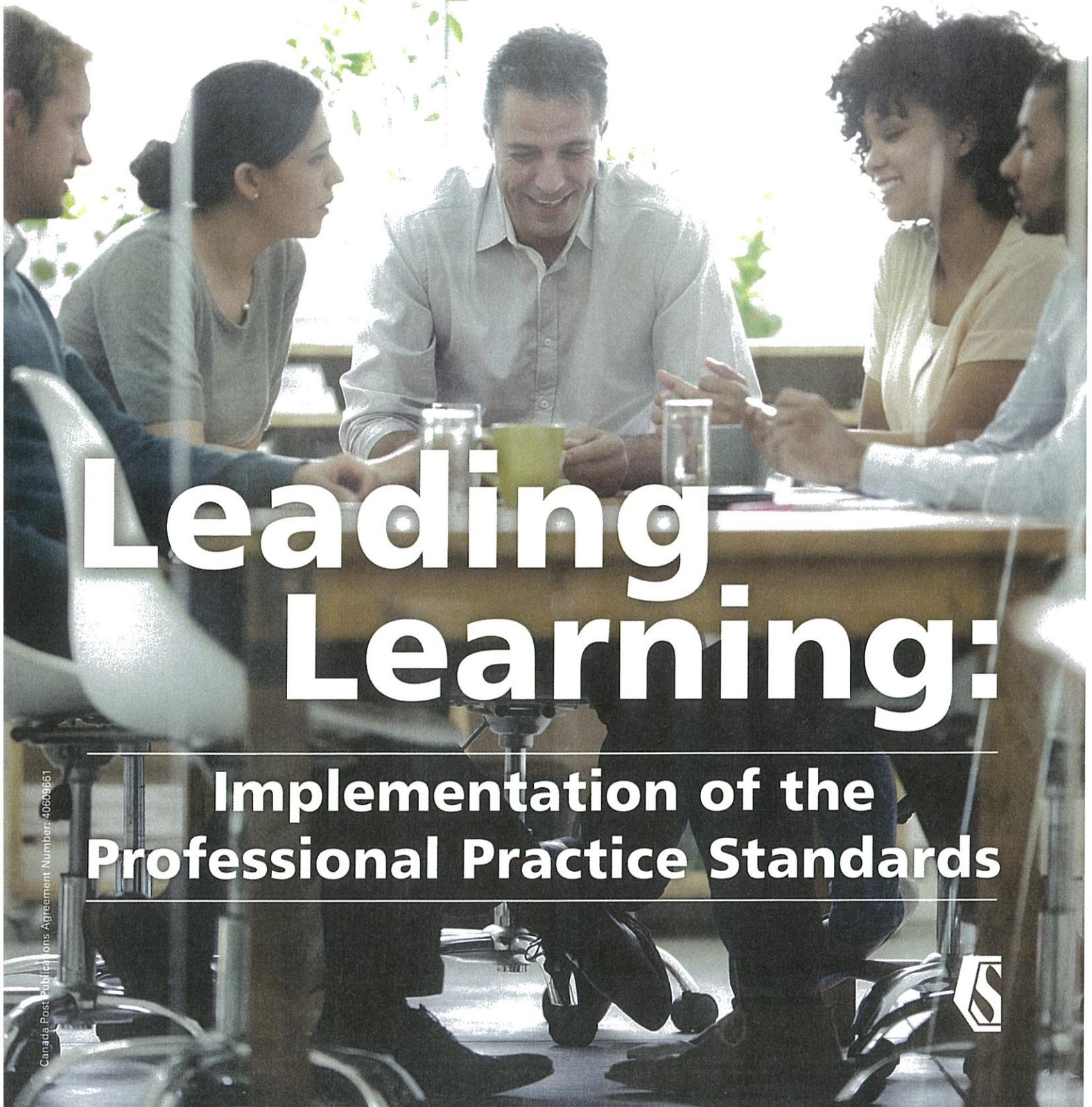


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# Leading Learning:

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## Implementation of the Professional Practice Standards

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# Implementing the LQS through Collaborative Professional Learning

By Shan Jorgenson-Adam, Battle River School Division; Rita Marler, Battle River School Division; Dr. Christy Thomas, University of Calgary; and Jim Brandon, University of Calgary

*Battle River School Division's partnership with the University of Calgary is supporting the development and exploring the impact of a collaborative professional learning model aimed at helping school and division leaders meet identified goals related to Alberta's new Leadership Quality Standard.*

**W**ith the implementation of Alberta's new *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS), many school districts are considering how to build leadership capacity in relation to this standard and its nine competencies (Alberta Education, 2018). This article outlines how we are addressing the LQS through the design and implementation of our ongoing, collaborative professional learning and coaching model in Battle River School Division (BRSD).

Our approach is guided by the insights of a number of reputable studies. Harris (2011) argues for collective leadership, a form of distributive leadership, where capacity building

involves collective responsibility and engages individuals in collaborative work to improve their practice. Mendels and Mitgang, (2013) recommend that districts focus on standards, work to improve principal training, and invest in mentorship and professional development.

Providing these ongoing opportunities for leadership capacity building (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Goldring, Preston & Huff, 2012) that are embedded, continuous, and personal (Breakspear, Peterson, Alfadala, & Khair, 2017; Timperley, 2011) is recommended. Investing in leadership development and building collective leadership capacity (Harris, 2011) has

considerable value given that school leaders have a direct impact on teaching practices (Davis et al., 2005; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Louis et al., 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

As an Alberta school division, we are keenly aware that the LQS is key to building our collective leadership capacity.

## **Collaborative professional learning design**

Collaborative professional learning aims to develop leadership capacity in both central office and school-based leaders and helps create a culture of growth and collaborative work across all levels of leadership (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). This purposeful investment in BRSD's leadership is intended to make a difference for students in our schools as research demonstrates a direct link between leadership and students learning at high levels (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson,

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2011). We believe that implementing this professional learning model also reflects BRSD's strong commitment to our leaders in supporting their learning and growth in relation to the LQS.

During the summer of 2018, we designed the collaborative professional learning for our Division Leadership Academy (DLA). These sessions take place once a month between September 2018 and May 2019. An important element of the Division Leadership sessions is that both educational and non-educational leaders from the division participate in these sessions. When developing this model, BRSD looked to current research in the areas of: adult learning, collaborative professional learning, coaching, growth planning, and reflective practice.

DLA sessions were planned for half days. Each session has a participant guide, which are designed using the same format as the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) participant guide modules used for the CASS Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA) summer conference. These participant guides outline the structure for each session, provide a summary of the research that was used in the planning of the session, a description of each of the activities used in the session, and any additional resources required.

Each session also includes a group relationship building activity, a group processing activity, a peer coaching component, and a group learning component. Each session ends with an individual reflection time and a short homework assignment.

Our first DLA session provided division leaders with the opportunity to complete a pre-survey that asked leaders to assess their achievement of LQS competencies and to select a competency to focus on for their professional learning for the year. Leaders were also asked to provide a rationale for their choice and two to three suggested strategies for meeting their goal.

Once participants had identified their focus competency they were split into

smaller groups (no larger than seven). The main foci for the beginning DLA sessions was building relationships and trust amongst competency group members, developing group norms, and creating their individual growth plans. The mix of leaders in each group illustrated the need to ensure there was time in each session for members to build relational trust, especially if they were going to be vulnerable enough to talk about their growth areas and seek advice and support from a peer coach.

Time was also provided for groups to develop norms. Common expectations from their individual group norms were used to form large group norms as well. When participants began to develop their draft growth plans it was surprising to see that almost all of the plans were focused on growing others rather than themselves. For example, plans focused on goals that built leadership skills in their team or developing professional learning for their team. They did not focus on their own individual growth.

It was clear that we had to go “back to the drawing board.” Consequently, leaders were challenged to be “selfish” with their growth plans and to focus on what they needed personally to meet their chosen LQS competency. Coaching protocols have been used to enhance the development of their revised plans. Practicing these protocols will support later work when participants begin to enact the strategies laid out in their plans.

### Coaching model

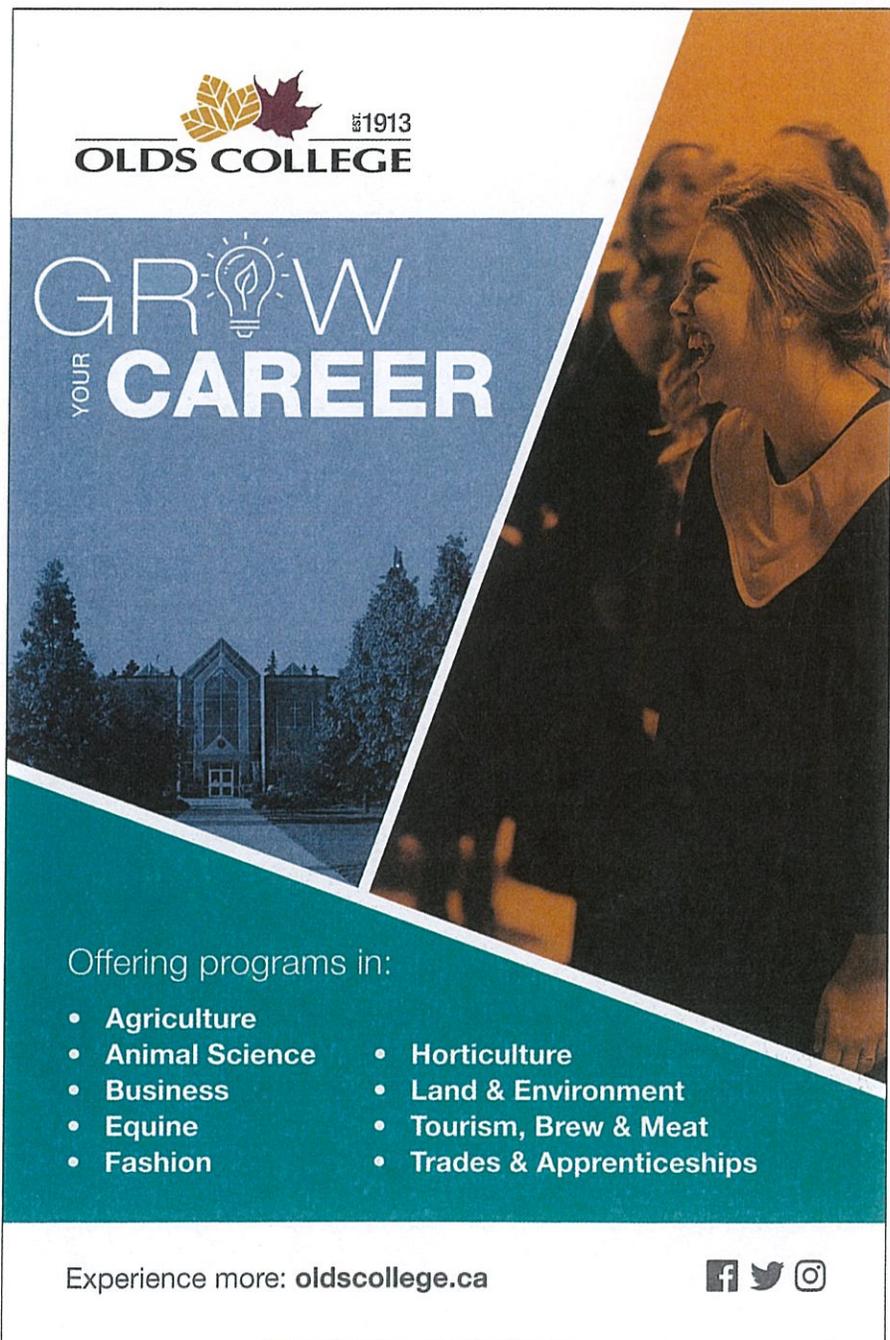
To support the actualization of participant’s goals, leaders used variations of a number of coaching models (Campbell & Nieuwerburg, 2018; Killion & Hirsh, 2013; Knight 2018). In the development of participant’s growth plans, a coaching trio protocol was used. This coaching protocol uses guided questioning to assist participants in looking critically at their growth plans, ensuring that they reflect the professional learning they want to achieve.

In their book, *The Leader’s Guide to Coaching in Schools*, Campbell and Nieuwerburg (2018) define coaching as “a

one-to-one conversation that focuses on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate” (p. 4). All coaching activities planned for DLA sessions are vetted through this definition in support of a participant’s achievement of the goals identified in their professional growth plan.

### Next steps

In the coming months, there are four DLA sessions planned. At the final DLA session, we will be distributing a post-survey that will give leaders an opportunity to reassess and reflect on their growth in relation to the LQS this year. We have also partnered with the University of Calgary to explore the impact of our collaborative professional learning and coaching model, and researchers will be analyzing data collected from participant’s during the year. Findings will be shared with BRSD and be used to develop an action plan for next year’s DLA sessions and coaching.



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## Conclusion

We recognize that districts are seeking ways to implement the new LQS and build leadership capacity in relation to these new competencies. We suggest that professional learning designs and coaching may be a way to support leaders in their growth in these competencies. The partnership between BRSD and the University of Calgary is aimed at examining the impact of this collaborative professional learning model to find out how effective it is in

helping leaders meet their goals for LQS and to examine the role coaching is playing in assisting leaders in meeting these goals.

Through this research, we hope to learn what the impact of this collaborative professional learning model has had on developing leadership capacity in relation to the LQS and to identify ways to improve the model to better support the leadership learning. These findings will be transferable and useful for other districts who are doing similar work. ■

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