

SUNWEST SCHOOL DIVISION REVIEW:
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP REVIEW

SUB REPORT ►► JUNE 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The reviewers would like to thank members of the Sun West School Division for their full cooperation in conducting this section of the review. Many people made time to meet with reviewers, complete surveys, and respond to our many needs for information. It is our hope that this review will provide the necessary information and stimulation to move forward in the Division' quest for excellence in its instructional leadership. May this excellence lead to powerful instruction and to "Success for All."

JSGS Review Team

May 2014

BACKGROUND TO REPORT

In January 2014, the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy was informed by Sun West School Division that their proposal for a comprehensive review of Sun West School Division had been accepted. Part of this larger review required a review of the effectiveness of Sun West School Division's instructional leadership. This aspect of the more comprehensive Division Review is a part of a continuing process of due diligence for the Sun West School Division Board as set forth in its policies. With this review, the Board seeks to continuously develop, and manage the maturing processes of its mandate for Sun West School Division.

INTRODUCTION

Effective instructional leadership is a vital factor if the Sun West School Division is to succeed in its intention to improve its instructional practice and its students' learning success. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) report a key finding in their large five-year study of the connection between leadership and student learning success. They assert that next to teachers' pedagogy, leadership is the second most important factor in learning improvement. It is also clear from their study that effective instructional leadership is one of the chief means of influencing pedagogy.

The RFP requested specific reviews of school level instructional leadership and school division level leadership. In addition, other aspects of the review including questions regarding teamwork, leadership structure, and leadership succession will be addressed in this leadership review. One significant limitation of this review is its focus on superintendents and principals. Other significant leadership roles including coordinators, consultants, learning coaches, 21st Century catalyst teachers, and others exercising in-school leadership have not been studied in any depth.

This report on Instructional Leadership in the Sun West School Division will begin with the description of the conceptual framework that serves as the basic outline for this review. The framework informed the development of the Instructional Leadership survey as well as the format for the interviews with superintendent and principals. The methodology will then be reviewed. The bulk of the report is taken up with the presentation and analysis of data collected in this review. Finally, the significant findings with the parallel recommendations for action are offered.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: TOWARD LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

This review of instructional leadership will rely upon a growing research base that connects leadership to students' learning. The term "instructional leadership" is still in wide use, but its meaning is often clouded by imprecise use and by the inclusion of additional elements by many. The developing study of leadership in education has included the advocacy of many leadership styles, most of which have some merit. These include transformational leadership, servant leadership, adaptive leadership, shared leadership, and many others. Hallinger (2010) suggested that rather than argue the benefits of one style versus another, that we take the practices from each style that have been proven to have a positive impact on students' learning and adopt them into our leadership repertoire of practices. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins (2006) and Robinson, Lloyd, & Lowe (2008) agreed with Hallinger's notion that we adopt a more general, research proven set of leadership practices. Hallinger (2010) called this approach "Leadership for Learning." Such an approach has informed the conceptual framework of this review of leadership in Sun West School Division.

The conceptual framework is represented in **Figure 1: Leadership for Learning Framework**. At the centre of the framework is the goal of leadership in education, the improvement of instruction and student learning. In the four quadrants surrounding the goal, four categories of leadership practices are represented. These categories of practices have a strong foundation in recent educational research. The outside ring of the framework indicates that the overall framework is embedded in a collective,

professional practice of leadership. Each element of this framework will be briefly introduced.



Figure 1: Leadership for Learning Framework.

THE CENTRE OF LEADERSHIP: IMPROVING INSTRUCTION & STUDENT LEARNING

The centre of the Leadership for Learning Framework is “Improving Instruction and Student Learning.” This central position in the framework represents a key theme in recent research connecting leadership to student learning. Robinson et al. (2008) summed it up this way: “the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students’ outcomes” (p. 664). The centrality of improving instruction also addresses Elmore’s (2000) challenging question: “why not focus leadership on instructional improvement, and define everything else as instrumental to it?” (p. 14).

In the Leadership for Learning Framework, improving student learning and achievement means learning success and equity for all students. This matches the intention of Sun West’s vision of “Success for All.” A rich version of learning is intended in which students are authentically engaged (Schlechty, 2002) and in which they will become more proficient learners better equipped to tackle life’s learning challenges as they assume their roles as citizens, family members, and participants in the economy. Within this concept of learning, literacy and numeracy are considered not just as the achievement of proficient scores on standardized tests, but as foundational and multi-faceted learning skills that open a whole new world to our students. Learning here matches the Sun West Board’s intentions in their Policy 18: 21st Century Competencies. Many sources of information about student learning must be used to define students’ learning success. More traditional measures of literacy and numeracy along with

important assessments of student engagement, early development, and cultural strength offer a more complete picture of student learning success.

Fullan's (2010) emphasis on focus is related here. Too often leaders are pulled in many directions resulting in insufficient attention to the improvement of instruction and students' learning. The unambiguous centre of the framework states the clear intention to have leaders focus on the improvement of instruction and students' learning and that all other leadership functions and tasks serve this central purpose (Elmore, 2000).

LEADERS PARTICIPATE IN CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

This category of leadership practices includes what many consider to be the essence of instructional leadership. The more specific practices of this category are outlined by researchers including Leithwood et al. (2006) who indicate that leaders manage the teaching program through more specific practices related to students' success such as staffing, providing teacher support, monitoring teaching and learning, and buffering the staff from distractions to their core work. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) clearly identified that leaders engaging in practices related to instructional leadership have a strong influence on improved instruction that in turn positively affects achievement. They suggested that "to learn how leadership contributes to student learning, we must ask how leadership affects instruction" (p. 27). Robinson et al. (2008) identified the practices in this category as falling within their dimension of planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum. They attribute a 0.42 effect size to this category of practices.

Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005) found that some practices related to this category were positively connected to student learning including leaders' knowledge of and involvement in curriculum, instruction and assessment. They also identified monitoring and evaluating as key responsibilities of school leaders, practices that clearly fit this category. Reeves (2006) found that more frequent monitoring of instruction and student learning resulted in improved student learning.

More traditional practices of instructional leadership merit mention here. Clinical supervision is still practiced to advantage in many jurisdictions. Glickman's (2002) conceptualization of developmental supervision addresses teachers at different states of development and motivation and offers leaders a continuum of approaches, including more directive ones, that fit particular situations.

Fullan (2005) issued an important challenge to leaders. He states that "the role of the school leader is to help lead and facilitate the revolution in pedagogy so necessary for sustainable learning in individuals and organizations" (p. 57). This category of leadership practices strongly connects leadership to this revolution in learning. These practices clearly recognize Lyn Sharratt's frequent reminder that "learning is the work of schools."

LEADERS PROMOTE & PARTICIPATE WITH TEACHERS IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

When leaders promote and participate with teachers in their professional learning, they are engaging in activities that are strongly connected to student learning success. Robinson (2011) asserted that "the most powerful way that a school leader can

make a difference to the learning of their students is by promoting and participating in the professional learning and development of their teachers” (p. 104). Her finding of a 0.84 effect size for this kind of leadership activity is “ ... twice that of any other leadership dimension” (p. 104) and is among the largest quantitative findings connecting leadership actions to student learning success. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) concurred that this kind of leadership action is significant and devote a whole category to “developing people,” a group of practices that include providing individualized support and consideration, offering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and practices. Marzano et al. (2005) included intellectual stimulation as one of their twenty-one responsibilities of a leader that correlate with student academic success. Fullan’s (2010) elevation of both collective and individual capacity building in his framework for whole system reform echoes this concern with leaders’ practices in regard to the professional learning of teachers and leaders. He further elaborated that “leadership roles are defined so that leaders participate as learners in working with teachers to address instructional needs” (p. 36). In a more recent consideration, Fullan (2014) supported what he has called “learning leadership,” and relied upon Robinson’s (2011) findings to assert that learning leadership is the central of three keys to maximizing the impact of the principals’ leadership.

Robinson (2011) offered some ideas as to why this category of leadership action is so powerful and has such potential. She begins her explanation with Elmore’s (2000) contention that accountability for improvement can only come with a reciprocal commitment to improve the capacity of those who are expected to achieve the

improvement. She further suggested that the leader's participation in teachers' professional development symbolically models the importance of being a learner, ensures that leaders understand concepts that enable them to intelligently participate in discussions about new practices, and enables leaders to understand the challenges of learning new practices and the conditions required if teachers are to succeed. As most Sun West principals take an active role as teachers, the practice of principals learning with their teachers is immensely practical.

In order to maximize the effect of leaders' participation in teachers' professional learning, it is increasingly important that leaders develop a working knowledge of the characteristics and practices of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009; Joyce & Calhoun, 2010; Joyce & Showers, 2002; and Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). If superintendents and principals are to be the "lead learners," then they must understand how teachers learn and then use powerful learning models with their students.

LEADERS DEVELOP STRONG, PURPOSEFUL PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES

The Director has been a strong advocate for increasing levels of teamwork in the Division. His advocacy is warranted by the research on the positive effects of collaborative work on students' learning. Rozenholtz's (1989) study of elementary schools as teachers' workplaces revealed the importance of teachers working in collaborative rather than isolated settings. Elmore (2000) has been a most persuasive advocate for a more collegial teachers' practice and a more distributed form of school leadership. Based upon his case study of New York District #2, he identified "isolation

[as] the enemy of improvement” (p. 20). He also proposed that a new norm for teacher collegiality would include conversations in which teachers are comfortable in discussing and challenging each others’ beliefs and practices. He noted that collaboration will only result in improved instructional practice when the organization focuses upon instruction.

DuFour and Marzano (2011) proposed that leaders who are concerned with learning improvement must develop their schools into professional learning communities. They suggested that “if we are to help all students learn, it will require us to work collaboratively in a collective effort to meet the needs of each student” (p. 23). DuFour and Eaker’s (1998) description of the characteristics of a professional learning community includes collective inquiry and collaborative teams.

In their recent study, Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) found that a strong professional community can lead to improved teachers’ instructional practice that in turn can lead to improved student achievement. They also found that establishing a strong professional community can itself have a direct influence on student learning and that the leadership of the principal is a significant factor in developing professional communities. They further suggested that changing teaching practice can be accomplished one–on–one within the more traditional model of instructional leadership, but they note that “it is far more efficient for principals and other school leaders to create settings in which practice is shared and motivation to experiment is developed” (p. 231). Fullan (2014) also made a strong case for heavily investing in collaborative professional learning rather than focusing on individuals’ development as professional

teachers. With limits on their time, leaders may more profitably spend time in developing a professional community rather than focusing exclusively upon more direct involvement in supervising and coaching teachers.

Childress, Elmore and Grossman (2007) reminded us that leaders often view culture as something that defies management, but that through specific actions including redefining roles and altering expectations, leaders can change a culture into something much more productive and learning-oriented. Fullan's (2010) insistence that "collective" capacity is key to whole system improvement places an exclamation mark on the significance of leaders working to establish collegial work as the new norm for educators.

LEADERS DEVELOP CLEAR, FOCUSED DIRECTION WITH HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Leadership has to do with setting the team or organization's direction. This is clearly reflected in the research regarding leadership practices that have a positive influence on students' learning. Leithwood et al. (2006) suggested "setting direction" as one of four categories of leadership practices associated with improved student achievement. These practices include establishing vision, setting goals, and developing high performance expectations. Kouzes and Posner (2007) found that inspiring a vision is a practice of exemplary leaders. One of Robinson et al.'s (2008) five dimensions of leadership practice is establishing goals and high expectations to which they attribute a modest, but worthwhile 0.42 effect size. Marzano et al. (2005) found a number of leadership responsibilities within this category that are positively correlated with student achievement. These include being a change agent, bringing focus to the

improvement of learning, ensuring that leaders and teachers are inspired by their ideals/beliefs, and ensuring teachers' input into important decisions, including the creation of a shared vision that will drive the improvement effort. In defining the characteristics of a professional learning community, DuFour and Eaker (1998) stated that a shared mission, vision, and values are vital.

Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) connected Fullan's (2001) notion of "moral purpose" to what they intend by setting direction. Elmore (2000) was clear that "... organizational coherence on basic aims and values ... is a precondition for the exercise of any effective leadership around instructional improvement" (p. 17). Sharratt and Fullan (2012) included Shared Beliefs and Understandings as the first of 14 parameters that they describe as the "nitty-gritty of deep and sustainable capacity-building" (p. 10). This parameter means that leaders and teachers surface their beliefs and challenge themselves to achieve common beliefs that are consistent with learning success. Bishop, O'Sullivan, and Berryman (2010) in describing the Te Kotahitanga initiative to improve New Zealand's Maori students' learning success, underline the importance of challenging teachers' beliefs about their students' capabilities. The significance of teachers and leaders believing in their students and in themselves was echoed within Reeves' (2008) research regarding the positive impact of the adults in the school believing that the variables that have an impact on learning success are variables within their control. This finding clearly connects to Leithwood et al.'s (2006) assertion that leaders must work with their staff to ensure that high performance is expected of all students and all teachers.

Fullan (2010) along with Marzano et al. (2005) brought the concept of focus to the discussion of setting direction. Fullan made it very clear that leaders must work with their staff and constituents to determine only a few initiatives that will receive the attention, resources, and persistent effort over time that is required for success.

LEADERSHIP EMBEDDED WITHIN A COLLECTIVE, PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

This Leadership for Learning Framework proposes that leadership will be a powerful source of influence on excellent teaching and students' learning when it exists within a vibrant, collective profession of leaders who work in all levels and roles within the education system.

Recent research supports this more collective approach to leadership, an approach that goes beyond the more traditional focus on principals to include both formal and informal leaders within the ranks of teachers, school-based leaders, leaders at the district and wider system levels, researchers, and potentially parents and community members.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2012) found that "collective leadership has a stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership" (p. 11). Heck and Hallinger (2009), in their four-year longitudinal study, found "significant direct effects of distributed leadership on change in the schools' academic capacity and indirect effects on student growth rates in mathematics" (p. 659). They also suggested that leadership should be re-conceptualized as an "organizational property rather than an individual attribute of the principal" (pp. 683-684). Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) made a significant new contribution to the leadership research with their finding that collective

school leader efficacy makes a significant contribution to school improvement and student learning success. They said, “While individual efficacy has positive effects in schools, it is collective efficacy that appears to be among the most powerful sources of influence that districts can exercise on schools and students” (p. 230). Fullan (2005 and 2010) advanced this collective approach to leadership. His analysis of various improvement efforts leads him to insist that leadership at all three levels, school, district, and system must be developed and that teachers’ leadership should be expected from the very beginning of their careers. He (2014) also promoted the idea that principals, in addition to being learning leaders, need to be division and system players if they are to maximize their impact as leaders. Principals must participate in a division wide leadership that will improve their own schools yet also allow them to contribute to the success of other schools in the division.

A variety of researchers have explored leadership at the division level including how it may interact with school leadership. Fink and Resnick (2001) described the positive impact of instructional leadership in New York District #2 that is exerted across and between school and district leadership roles. Marzano and Waters (2009) described the practices of division leaders that make a difference to students’ learning. Leithwood (2010) described the characteristics of school districts, essentially the actions of leaders, that are effective in closing achievement gaps. The College of Alberta Superintendents of Schools (2009) created an evidence-based framework for system leaders that is intended to guide the leadership practice of district leaders so that excellence and equity in students’ learning will be achieved.

Printy and Marks (2006) clarified that teachers make important contributions to instructional leadership and that “best results occur in schools where principals are strong leaders who also facilitate leadership by teachers” (p. 130). They suggested a re-conceptualization of instructional leadership to include a shared approach where the principal is not considered as the sole leader but is rather the leader of other instructional leaders. Spillane (2009) reminded us that both those in formal leadership positions and many others who are not formally designated as leaders can and do exert leadership in schools. Elmore (2000) proposed that leadership be distributed and offers principles to guide such leadership. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) noted that shared leadership is strongly related to strong instructional practice and professional community, and that both of these are in turn closely connected to improved student learning. Anderson (2012) made it very clear that by distributing leadership to others, principals do not diminish their own influence. Fullan (2005) reminded us that the “main mark of an effective leader is how many good leaders he or she leaves behind who can go even further” (p. 35).

Linking the powerful concept of “professional” to leadership brings with it the importance of professionals establishing and working collaboratively from an established research base and engaging in rigorous preparation as well as on-going learning to ensure the currency of that research base (Darling-Hammond, 2009). The client orientation of a profession also applies well to educational leaders who have focused their practice on the improvement of instruction and student learning. The distinction of being a profession also implies accountability to leadership peers as well

as to the students and society served by the profession. This professional leadership would be supportive of professionalized teaching, but in addition to teachers' professional knowledge and competencies that focus on instruction, curriculum, and assessment, professional educational leadership would have its own discrete knowledge base and competencies based upon a framework such as the one utilized in this report.

Hopkins (2007), in his analysis of the English reforms, concluded that national prescription can take reform only so far and that the answer to on-going improvement is to have the professionals in schools take the lead in improvement. Barber (2009) echoed this conclusion that we must move from government prescription to professionalism if learning is to progress beyond the plateaus experienced after the initial success of improvement efforts such as those in England. Darling–Hammond (2009) argued that professional and democratic approaches are necessary if our educational systems are to succeed.

Leaders will also need to learn to take advantage of opportunities for what Fullan (2005) referred to as lateral capacity building. District and state leaders must become very aware of the need to create networks among leaders in schools, districts, and educational systems.

Printy and Marks (2006) asserted that the shared approach to instructional leadership must be deliberately pursued or it is not likely to develop. Darling-Hammond and Orphanos (2007) offered the profession of educational leaders what they regard as a consensus regarding the features of strong leadership development programs. These features include research-based content, strong collaboration between leadership

development and school programs, and cohort groups that will enhance teamwork and thus establish a strong sense of the collective nature of leadership proposed here. The profession of educational leadership must take into account the existing research and foremost thinking regarding leadership development as it carefully considers how to build the overall profession as well as the individual leaders within it.

METHODOLOGY OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP REVIEW

A wide variety of sources were used to collect pertinent data for this review. These include three surveys, interviews with superintendents and principals, document analysis, and observation of meetings.

SURVEYS

Three surveys were used in the instructional leadership review. A new survey was developed based upon the Leadership for Learning Framework described earlier in this report. The section of the survey concerning leaders' efficacy owes a clear debt to the work of Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012). This survey provided a research-based means of viewing the practice of leaders in the Sun West School Division. In the final section of the survey, respondents were asked to rate the collective leadership of the school division by considering statements based on the research regarding effective division-level leadership and the characteristics of effective school districts (Fullan, 2010; Leithwood, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Five learning superintendents and six principals completed this survey. Each had an additional five informants complete the matching surveys regarding aspects of their leadership practices. Of the 66 possible responses, 65 were completed and returned.

A Leadership Impact survey was also completed by each superintendent and five observers for each superintendent. This survey offers a wider view of leadership and compares the superintendents' leadership to norms based on the findings for 5,000 managers. Once again, any reference to this survey will present the collective findings.

In this case, however, each superintendent is confidentially provided with the specific findings concerning their own leadership.

Principals also engaged in an additional survey that looks more widely at leadership. The Management Effectiveness Profile System was completed by the same six principals as completed the Leadership for Learning survey. Each principal also had five observers who were familiar with the principals' work and who may have other roles than that of teacher. Once again, the collective findings were used in the analysis while principals received specific findings about their own leadership in confidence.

INTERVIEWS

The five learning superintendents and the six principals were interviewed regarding their instructional leadership and related topics. Each interview was conducted in person and lasted from one hour to an hour and a half.

The content of each interview began with a consideration of the state of students' learning and of teachers' instruction. From there, factors that impact learning success and instruction were explored. These factors included professional development, organizational structure, and instructional leadership.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

A number of documents related to instructional leadership were reviewed. They include Sun West Handbooks regarding reading strategies, teacher professional practice, and school based administrators' professional practice. Relevant Administrative Procedures were also reviewed. The Board Policy Manual was reviewed to ensure understanding of pertinent policies including Policy 18: 21st Century Competencies.

Less formal documents including a brief from Tony Baldwin regarding Instructional Leadership Development in Sun West were most helpful. In addition, Mr. Baldwin shared the Sun West School Based Administrator Instructional Leadership Capacity Survey. Documents that offered insights into students' achievement included the Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework Report 2012-2013 and the current Tell Them From Me Report. Other documents including meeting agendas (School-based Administrators, Committee of the Whole Board, Central Office Meeting, etc.) helped reviewers to better understand the work of leaders in the Division. The developing Hochin Kanri Plans were also made available and were most helpful in understanding the evolving strategic planning processes.

OBSERVATIONS

Members of the Review Team observed the following meetings that were pertinent to the Instructional Leadership Review:

- School-Administrators Meeting on March 5, 2014
- Committee of the Whole Board Meeting March 11, 2014
- Division Central Office Staff Meeting April 7, 2014
- Administrative Council (Supervisors and Superintendents) Meeting April 7, 2014
- Superintendents of Learning Meeting April 7, 2014

RESULTS FROM THE REVIEW OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

The data collected provided reviewers with an understanding of instructional leadership in Sun West School Division. Before addressing the data that will appear within the conceptual framework, the results of the Management Effectiveness Profile System (MEPS) and Leadership Impact surveys will be discussed. Then other results will be presented using the main headings of the conceptual framework. Some applicable sub-headings will be used where warranted.

MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS PROFILE SYSTEM (MEPS) & LEADERSHIP IMPACT (LI)

These surveys offer a much wider view of leadership than more educationally specific tools such as the Instructional Leadership Survey and the interviews. The results of both surveys rate superintendents (LI) and principals (MEPS) against a norm created by a pool of thousands of managers in a wide variety of endeavours. Full reports of the collective results and analysis are available in Appendices that accompany the overall review. Each leader will receive a confidential personal profile of the results. A brief overview of each survey with a general statement of the composite results is provided below.

Leadership Impact (Superintendents)

The five superintendents of learning each completed this survey on their own leadership and requested five others who know their work to also assess their leadership. The results for the superintendents are profiled against the results for 5000 managers.

This survey reports the extent to which a leader's actions motivate people to behave in constructive or defensive (either aggressive or passive) ways. Each participant generates an ideal impact profile that is compared to the actual description of the leaders' impact by the leader and other participants in the survey. Overall, those rating the superintendents' leadership impact, regard their impact as overwhelmingly encouraging constructive behaviours. This very positive result shows the superintendents well above the norms for constructive impact and well below norms for defensive impact. This survey paints a very positive view of the superintendents' leadership, one that encourages achievement, self-actualization, affiliative, and humanistic/encouraging behaviours.

Management Effectiveness Profile System (principals)

Six principals each completed this survey on their own leadership and requested five others who know their work to also assess their leadership. The results for the principals regarding 14 management skill areas are profiled against the results for 4800 other managers who have completed the survey. The 14 management skills are organized into three categories: Task Skills, Interpersonal Skills, and Personal Skills.

The normed scores illustrate that overall the principals scored well above the norms for managers for all 14 skills. The principals' score for all skills resulted in the conclusion that the level of their skills is considered to be an asset relative to the norm. This survey offers a very positive view of the six principals' leadership.

IMPROVING STUDENTS' LEARNING

The ultimate reason for leadership in a school division is to fulfill its purpose, the successful learning of the division's students. Although this review did not specifically focus on the status of students' learning in the Division, it was important to get a general overview of the state of students' learning in order to properly consider the Division's instructional leadership.

Data from interviews as well as from documents such as the Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework Report and the Tell Them From Me Report offered a glimpse of the current status of Sun West students' learning and achievement.

Generally, leaders report that the Division's students are doing well with their learning. They point to evidence of strong graduation rates that currently surpass the provincial targets for graduation rates in the developing provincial education sector plan. They also referred to Assessment for Learning data from provincial tests that show Sun West students have performed at or above provincial norms. The leaders' view of literacy scores is also that current achievement levels surpass the targets contained in the provincial education sector plan. Such views are based on extensive assessment that includes common scoring rubrics, RAD for reading, common mathematics assessments, DRA for Grade 1-5 reading, and Tell Them From Me survey results.

One interesting observation came from leaders regarding the impact of technology use as a tool in students' learning in regular classes as well in the Distance Learning Centre classes. Leaders described a new-found sense of excitement and of increased independence among many students. One principal said that "kids and

teachers are excited” and that this excitement was “infectious.” Another principal observed that students are generally able to work independently and have the skills to handle distance education.

Some leaders attributed part of the Division’s success to favourable demographics. The Division does not have any cities nor First Nations reserves. Typically students from these two groups do not fare as well on achievement measures (2010 Saskatchewan Core Indicators Report: Prekindergarten to Grade 12). Some mentioned that many students came from families that valued learning and supported their children in their learning. Parents were seen to support academic rigor, work ethic, and a high level of achievement. Terms such as “fortunate” and “lucky” were used to describe this state of learning success.

However, some concerns were expressed about students at some schools where achievement was below the Division norms. Leaders also shared their concern with particular communities where demographic factors challenged students’ learning success. Some communities are becoming more transient and have more students whose learning is at risk. One principal noted that there are “lots of fires not related to instruction.” Another noted that students are doing less homework and receive less support at home than in former years. The Division has moved to address some of these concerns. One approach is to identify Grade 9 students who are deemed to be “off track” in their learning. Forty students or about 15% of the Division’s Grade 9 students have been identified. Letters have gone home to parents of these students to initiate some interventions that will bring these young people back “on track” to graduate. It

was noted that attempts to better serve students who are at-risk does have an impact on service to other students. Some leaders also expressed concern for the learning of students with special needs and others for students who are gifted. One expressed the opinion that “we should be a lot better at the high end.”

Another potential area of concern has to do with student engagement as measured on the Tell Them From Me survey administered across the province. Sun West students score well compared to national norms on most measures but are below national norms on two significant items. Regarding “Positive Homework Behaviours,” Sun West students in Grades 4-7 score at 64% relative to the national norm of 75%. In Grades 6-12, only 37% are rated as having positive homework behaviors compared to the national norm of 62%. Another measure considers whether Students are “Interested and Motivated.” For the Grade 4-7 students, 58% of Sun West students rate themselves as being interested and motivated compared to the national norm of 65%. For Grade 6-12 students, just 28% are rated as being interested and motivated compared to an alarmingly low national norm of 33%. The discrepancies between Sun West students and the national norms on these measures, especially for the older students, warrants further consideration and may also inform consideration of “Improving Instruction.”

To the great credit of many Division leaders, there is a strong sentiment that “we want to be better.” One Board member indicated that while 85% achievement (on literacy measures) is good, we are asking “why not success for 100% of all students?” The Director has spoken forcefully on the need to improve students’ learning.” Leaders

also referred to the Board’s encouragement to improve learning as evidenced by the Board’s adoption of the 21st Century competencies policy and their subsequent support for action to implement this policy.

IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

Teachers’ pedagogy is the most significant factor in an educational jurisdiction’s work to achieve students’ learning success. Teachers’ pedagogy is not a focus of this review, however, it is difficult to consider the effectiveness of instructional leadership without a brief look at the state of instruction in the Division’s classrooms.

Leaders were asked to offer their view of the state of instruction in the Division. A number of themes emerged from the interview data. Some consideration of student assessment data, including students’ engagement in their learning, has also been incorporated into this section.

Expertise in Instruction and the Use of New Strategies and Technology

It was noted by interview participants that teachers use a mix of new and old strategies. Many superintendents and principals referred to teachers who show great expertise in their instruction. Some referred to the use of guided reading, Leveled Literacy Intervention, writing strategies (expert models), the Reading Strategies Handbook, and a school-wide approach to learning how to read across the curriculum. The Director pointed out the use of project-based learning and its influence in the development of Leadership 20 and 30 courses. One principal commented that “we are not explicit enough” about learning models introduced and often do not see the

strategies introduced in professional development through to actual implementation in classrooms.

Some noted that the use of technology as a tool in learning allows individualization. FLIP classes employ the use of video recorded classes for student review thus providing students with more choice, flexibility, and greater ownership of their learning. One superintendent commented that “This ownership is growing: a wave is starting.” One related comment was that students can self-evaluate using technological tools. Substitute teachers also use these recorded lessons to ensure that programming continues in the teacher’s absence.

The use of technology as a tool in instruction is a change from what teachers are used to. Generally teachers who are earlier in their careers are reported to be more willing to learn new strategies, especially those associated with the 21st Century competencies. It was noted that younger teachers are more “gung-ho.” The Division provides lots of support for new teachers, especially those recruited from afar who need to learn the Saskatchewan curriculum. The work of learning coaches was noted and their efforts have, in the opinion of many leaders, provided greater differentiation in teachers’ professional learning and the infiltration of new strategies into schools.

Traditional Teaching & Resistance to New Strategies

A common comment from leaders was that some teachers are very traditional. Some teachers “are in the 1950’s” in regard to their instruction. One principal mentioned that it is tough to break traditions and that he sees “workbooks and kids in rows.” Students in one school reported “note, notes, and more notes” and expressed a

desire for more diversity in learning approaches. Many more experienced teachers (20+ years) are regarded as “old school” and seem less willing to try new strategies. They struggle with new approaches. This inability to break away from traditional teaching approaches may be one of the underlying reasons for the low levels of interest and motivation noted earlier in the Tell Them From Me survey.

The leaders seem to agree that in many cases, instruction is not where they want it to be. General instruction for students needs to improve and “we need to teach students how to learn.” One superintendent noted that “baby steps” have been taken toward learning new, more powerful strategies. Others focused on resistance to change and a lack of understanding about new approaches such as differentiated instruction. One of the principals noted that the capacity or desire to improve is a huge issue.

Challenges to Learning New Strategies

Several informants mentioned the challenge of how teachers learn new strategies. One said that we work on new strategies, but teachers always revert back to their former practice. This supports a comment reported earlier where a principal noted that strategies learned in professional development sessions are not implemented into teachers’ active repertoires. Another said that time is the biggest concern and that teachers say they do not have time to implement new strategies. Another principal noted that at his school they get good results when there is follow-up and use of the strategies that were learned in professional development.

Who Chooses Strategies?

The general impression from the leaders' interviews is that individual teachers usually chose strategies. Several principals mentioned that teachers have a "fairly individualized repertoire." One principal expressed this as follows: "we have a wide range of strategies and competencies. We do not have a shared practice. We are generally collaborative, but not about our teaching."

One principal offered a different view of what happens in his school where the staff work on common strategies (e.g., Questioning, Cooperative Learning, Reading skills). At this school, decisions are made about the new strategies to be learned and adopted at the school level.

It was interesting to note in reflecting upon the interviews with leaders, that there does not seem to be a common language of instruction in the Division, at least among the leaders. This lack of common terminology and seeming lack of shared instructional practice points to the need for significant sharing and discussion about how teachers teach. Perhaps a common framework of instruction would assist leaders in developing an exploration of teachers' instructional practice.

Using Data to Choose Instructional Strategies

There were very few comments about the use of data in selecting teaching strategies. One person did say, however, that teachers are getting better at using data to select instructional strategies. One school reported using data regarding student behavior so that new approaches to ensure students' appropriate behavior were introduced that would in turn lead to improved academic learning.

The state of instruction among Sun West teachers seems varied with some teachers using new, more powerful learning strategies, while others are using more traditional methods and resisting adding new strategies to their repertoires. Although an analysis of the state of instruction in Sun West Schools is not a focus of this review, the brief glimpse offered through interviews provides an impetus for ensuring strong instructional leadership.

LEADERS PARTICIPATE IN CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

This section presents the results related to leadership practices that most closely align with the traditional interpretation of instructional leadership. The evidence from research indicates that leaders' skillful participation in curriculum, instruction, and assessment represents an important set of leadership practices that are proven to have a positive impact on teachers' instructional practice and thus students' learning success.

This section of the report relies upon the Instructional Leadership survey regarding eight leadership practices related to superintendents' and principals' participation in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Six principals rated themselves on the practices in this category. Each of the six principals invited five teachers to also rate them on these same practices. A total of 29 out of 30 teachers responded. Five superintendents of learning also rated themselves on these practices. Each of the five superintendents invited five staff members to rate their leadership practices. All 25 completed the survey. In addition, all 65 survey participants rated the collective Division's leaders' practices connected to this category. Interviews with superintendents and principals provided important context and information.

The wording in the survey for the eight leadership practices in this section is slightly different for each participating group. The wording in all tables presented in this report is the version that principals completed.

The responses of the four groups of informants to these eight practices are presented in Table 1: Results for Items Regarding “Leaders Participate in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.” Table 1 reports three numbers in each cell. The first is the percentage of respondents who indicated a positive response in that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The next two numbers, the mean rating and the standard deviation, appear in brackets. The mean is generally understood to be the average rating on this item by the participating group. The third number, the standard deviation, indicates the level of agreement or disagreement among responses of the participant group. Complete agreement among participants would result in a standard deviation of 0.0. The greater the degree of disagreement, the higher the standard deviation. The highest standard deviation reported in this analysis is 1.2, a standard deviation that indicates significant disagreement among participants.

Table 1: Results for Items Regarding “Leaders Participate in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.”

	Principal Self-Assessment	Teachers’ Observations of Principal	Superintendent Self-Assessment	Observations of Superintendent
9. I have modelled strong instructional practice.	100(4.2, 0.4)	79.3+(4.1, 0.8)	80.0+(4.4, 0.9)	84.0(4.4, 0.9)
10. I have worked with our teachers to understand and act upon student learning data.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	89.7(4.2, 0.9)	100(4.4, 0.5)	88.0(4.4, 0.7)
11. I have effectively coached our teachers to become stronger in their instructional practices.	83.3+(3.8, 0.4)	69.0+(3.9, 1.0)	100(4.6, 0.5)	92.0(4.4, 0.9)
12. I have paid attention to measuring and monitoring students’ learning.	66.7+(3.7, 0.5)	82.2(4.1, 0.9)	100(4.6, 0.5)	96.0(4.5, 0.6)
13. I have effectively aligned school resources with our learning priorities.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	86.2(4.1, 0.8)	100(4.8, 0.4)	88.0(4.4, 0.7)
14. I have monitored teachers’ instructional practices in our school.	100(4.2, 0.4)	75.9(4.1, 1.2)	100(4.6, 0.5)	80.0(4.2, 0.9)
15. I have ensured that the curriculum is implemented across this school in a coordinated manner.	83.3+(3.8, 0.4)	72.4+(3.9, 0.9)	80.0+(4.2, 0.8)	76.0+(4.2, 0.9)
16. I have ensured that our school has the teachers and support staff needed to accomplish our goals.	100(4.3, 0.5)	85.7(4.1, 0.8)	80.0+(4.2, 0.8)	88.0(4.3, 0.8)
Grand Means	(4.0, 0.1)	(4.1, 0.7)	(4.5, 0.4)	(4.3, 0.6)

Note: Principal, teacher, superintendent and observer questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys. The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response. The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more said “neutral”

* =25% or more said “disagree to some extent”

The following discussion considers highlights from the data presented in this table. The first item of note is that for all practices in this category, superintendents were rated highly with the lowest rating being a mean of 4.2 on #14, #15, and #16 by either themselves or by those who observe them. Superintendents and their observers had very similar perceptions of the superintendents’ practices as seen by relatively similar percentages of favorable responses and relatively similar means.

The overall ratings of principals’ practices were generally favorable, but the Grand Means are lower than for superintendents. Grand mean ratings by teachers of

their principals' practices for this category is 4.1. The principals' assessment of their own practices yielded a Grand Mean of 4.0. The highest mean score in this category as perceived by teachers is for #10, principals understanding and acting upon student data. The lowest rated practice of principals was #11, the effective coaching of teachers. The mean rating by teachers for this practice was 3.9 while the principals' own perception of this practice was 3.8. Sixty-nine percent of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that their principals effectively coached teachers. This is a significantly low result given the intensive training of principals on cognitive coaching just a couple of years ago. Another low rating to note was for #12, where only 66.7% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that they have paid attention to measuring and monitoring students' learning.

Principals and the teachers who informed the review also had remarkably similar ratings of the principals' leadership practices in this category. An exception is #12 where principals' perceptions of their attention to measuring and monitoring students' learning (3.7) are much lower than their teachers' rating (4.1).

In addition to the eight questions in which informants responded regarding specific leaders, a group of 20 questions later in the survey asked all informants to offer their perceptions of the overall Division leadership practices associated with students' learning success. Seven of the 20 questions are related to this category of Participating in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. The ratings for all four groups of respondents on these seven statements are presented in Table 2: Results For Division

Leaders’ Collective Practices Regarding “Participation in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.”

Table 2: Results For Division Leaders’ Collective Practices Regarding “Participation in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.”

	Principals	Teachers	Superintendents	Observers of Superintendent
2. Our Division leaders skillfully use data to shape learning improvement in our classrooms, schools, and across the Division.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	62.1+(3.8, 1.1)	80.0(3.6, 0.9)	76.0+(4.0, 0.8)
3. Our Division leaders have made high quality teaching a priority in our schools.	100(4.3, 0.5)	79.3(4.0, 0.8)	100(4.4, 0.5)	88.0(4.5, 0.8)
5. Our Division leaders intervene early and energetically when students and schools experience difficulty.	66.7+(4.0, 0.9)	44.4+(3.4, 1.2)	80.0+(4.2, 0.8)	80.0(4.0, 0.9)
14. Our Division leaders actively monitor our students’ learning.	80+(4.0, 0.7)	75.9+(4.0, 0.8)	100(4.2, 0.4)	80.0+(4.2, 0.8)
15. Our Division leaders invest in developing instructional leadership in its current and aspiring leaders.	100(4.3, 0.5)	75.9+(4.0, 0.8)	100(4.8, 0.4)	96.0(4.4, 0.6)
16. Our Division leaders have an articulated and common view of what high quality instruction looks like.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	72.4+(3.9, 0.9)	80.0+(4.4, 0.9)	64.0+(4.0, 0.8)
19. Our Division leaders regularly monitor teachers’ instructional practices.	66.7+(3.7, 0.5)	69.0+(3.7, 0.8)	80.0+(4.4, 0.9)	76.0+(4.1, 0.8)
Grand Means	(4.1, 0.5)	(3.8, 0.7)	(4.3, 0.5)	(4.2, 0.6)

Note: For each question respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 whether they believed the practice “is not very well done” or if the practice “is very well done”; 1 indicates that the practice “is not very well done” and 5 indicates that the practice “is very well done”.

Principal, teacher, superintendent and observer questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys.

The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response (4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5). The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more indicated a neutral response (3 on a scale of 1-5)

* =25% or more indicated a negative response (1 or 2 on a scale of 1-5)

It is notable that teachers generally rate the Division’s leaders’ practices in this category to be much lower (Grand Mean of 3.8) than other participant groups. Two practices of Division leaders received a mean score of 4.0 or greater from all four groups. The two are #14, the practice of Division leaders actively monitoring students’ learning and #15, Division leaders investing in developing instructional leadership.

Three of the seven practices were generally rated lower than the others as perceived across the four groups. Number 5, the practice of early and energetic intervention, had the lowest rating by teachers with only 44.4% either agreeing or strongly agreeing, with more moderate, but lower ratings from other groups. Number 16, Division leaders having an articulated and common view of high quality instruction, was notably the lowest score by the superintendents (only 64% agreed or strongly agreed). Number 19, the regular monitoring of teachers' instructional practices was rated relatively low with means for 3.7 from both teachers and principals.

These ratings suggest potential areas for improvement of Sun West leaders' instructional leadership practices. Such practices requiring attention include principals coaching practices, early intervention when students or schools are struggling, monitoring both student achievement and teachers' instructional practices, and the articulation of a common view of high quality instruction.

In addition, interviews with superintendents and principals revealed other aspects of principals' leadership practices. Principals seem ready to accept the larger role in teacher supervision envisioned by the Director. Some principals mentioned that they already have input into this process while others commented on the challenge of getting to this work given all of the other tasks in a principals' day. One superintendent said that senior leaders may need to take some things off principals' plates and provide some additional administration time to allow principals to take on this more active role in teacher supervision.

Many principals also expressed support for their continuing roles as teachers as a part of their instructional leadership practice. Some mentioned that it allowed them to model instruction and an open door when teaching. Others added that it helped them to understand what teachers are going through. Principals also prominently mentioned the practices of “walk throughs” and of engaging in instructional conversations with teachers.

Superintendents spoke to their practices in this category. Three of the superintendents play a significant role in teacher supervision. Others mentioned that they are most effective when they work directly with principals on plans for their schools. One mentioned that she “gets in there and scores assessments.” It is clear that superintendents actively participate in curriculum, instruction, and assessment in a variety of ways.

Judging from responses to leaders’ practices in this category, there is need to commend many leaders on their direct participation in this work. It is also clear that because of the importance of this work, some leaders’ practices in this category must improve if excellence in instruction and student achievement is to be achieved.

LEADERS PROMOTE AND PARTICIPATE WITH TEACHERS IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

This section describes the results regarding leadership practices related to leaders’ promotion and participation with teachers (and principals in the case of superintendents) in their professional learning. The evidence from research indicates that leaders’ practices in this category is proven to have a positive impact on students’

learning success. In fact, Robinson and her colleagues' meta-analysis (2008) found that this category of leadership practice had by far the strongest connection to student learning success. It is also notable that being a "lead learner" is the central role in Fullan's (2014) description of practices that maximize the impact of principals' work.

This section of the report relies upon the Instructional Leadership survey regarding nine superintendents' and principals' leadership practices related to leaders' promotion and participation with teachers (and principals) in their professional learning. Two additional survey items regarding the Division's collective leadership also informs this section. In addition, interviews with the superintendents and principals provide important context and information. The Leadership Impact survey (regarding the superintendents' leadership) and the Management Effectiveness Profile System surveys (regarding the principals' leadership) also inform this section.

In the Instructional Leadership survey, nine specific practices of superintendents and principals related to Leaders Promote and Participate with Teachers in Their Professional Learning, were rated by the four groups described earlier in the report.

The wording in the survey for the nine leadership practices in this section is represented by the wording used when principals self-assessed their leadership practices. The ratings for these survey items are presented in Table 3: Results for Items Regarding "Leaders Promote and Participate in Teacher Professional Learning."

Table 3: Results for Items Regarding “Leaders Promote and Participate in Teacher Professional Learning”

	Principal Self-Assessment	Teachers’ Observations of Principal	Superintendent Self-Assessment	Observations of Superintendent
25. I have participated with teachers in professional learning (their learning and mine).	100(4.2, 0.4)	93.1(4.6, 0.6)	100(4.8, 0.4)	100(4.7, 0.5)
26. I have been the lead learner in this school.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	67.9+(3.9, 1.0)	100(4.8, 0.4)	96.0(4.7, 0.6)
27. I have had a positive impact on the capacities of teachers in this school.	83.3+(3.8, 0.4)	72.4+(4.2, 1.0)	100(4.8, 0.4)	88.0(4.6, 0.7)
28. I have focused teachers’ professional learning on exemplary instruction and assessment practices.	83.3(3.5, 0.8)	79.3+(4.1, 0.8)	80.0+(4.0, 0.7)	96.0(4.4, 0.6)
29. I have strongly promoted professional learning amongst our teachers.	100(4.3, 0.5)	82.8(4.2, 0.8)	100(4.8, 0.4)	100(4.7, 0.5)
30. I have used student achievement data to help us shape our professional development activities.	83.3+(3.8, 0.4)	82.8(4.2, 1.0)	100(4.4, 0.5)	76.0+(4.3, 0.8)
31. I have provided differentiated support to our teachers (i.e., different support for different needs and roles).	100(4.5, 0.5)	82.8(4.2, 0.8)	100(4.8, 0.4)	88.0(4.3, 0.9)
32. I have kept teachers thinking about research and innovation in teaching and learning.	83.3+(3.8, 0.4)	93.1(4.3, 0.6)	80.0+(4.2, 0.8)	88.0(4.4, 0.7)
33. I have encouraged teachers to use new strategies that we have learned in workshops or from our learning coaches.	100(4.2, 0.4)	89.3(4.2, 0.7)	100(4.6, 0.5)	96.0(4.6, 0.6)
Grand Means	(4.0, 0.1)	(4.2, 0.7)	(4.6, 0.3)	(4.5, 0.5)

Note: Principal, teacher, superintendent and observer questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys. The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response. The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more said “neutral”

* =25% or more said “disagree to some extent”

Overall the results of the survey in this category of leadership practices suggest that these practices are in place and noticed by survey participants. The greatest support was for #25, the participation of leaders with teachers (and principals in the case of superintendents) in professional learning. Principals in Sun West schools have usually maintained a teaching role, a fact that lends itself to principals’ participation in teachers’ learning. One superintendent explained that he/she “had better be learning it

with teachers.” Another widely supported practice was #29, the promotion of professional learning by leaders. A third item that received strong support was #31, the provision of differentiated support to staff members.

The ratings of superintendents’ practices in this category by both the superintendents themselves and by the 25 others invited to rate their practices were very positive. It seems that the five superintendents of learning offer strong leadership in the area of professional learning. One superintendent mentioned that modeling was an important way to leading others’ learning, a leadership practice clearly recognized by the research.

The self-ratings of principals are of special note. For four of the nine statements, principals’ mean rating of their practices in this category fell below 4.0 with a fifth response at 4.0. These ratings are well below the ratings that teachers gave for their principals regarding these practices. It is also interesting to note that teachers’ lowest rating of their principals (3.9), and the only mean below 4.0, was for #26, “Our principal has been the lead learner in this school.” Sixty-eight percent of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 11% disagreed and 21% were neutral. This rating may indicate that a greater emphasis should be placed on the principal being the school’s lead learner.

The lowest overall rating among the nine items was for #28, the leaders focusing of professional learning on exemplary instruction and assessment practices. In this case, both principals’ and superintendents’ self-assessment of this practice received the lowest mean score (3.5 for principals and 4.0 for superintendents). This result is of

particular interest in that if leaders do not see themselves focusing professional learning on exemplary instruction and assessment, then the impact of the many strong practices regarding professional learning may be undermined by a lack of focus on what matters most to students' learning success, teachers' pedagogy.

Two additional statements in the latter portion of the survey concerning the Division's collective leadership are directly related to this category. The results for these items are presented in Table 4: Results for Division Leaders' Collective Practices Regarding "Leaders Promote and Participate in Teachers' Professional Learning."

Table 4: Results for Division Leaders' Collective Practices Regarding Leaders Promote and Participate in Teacher Professional Learning.

	Principals	Teachers	Superintendents	Observers of Superintendent
4. Our Division leaders enthusiastically participate with teachers and principals in their professional learning.	83.3+(4.3, 0.8)	58.6+(3.7, 1.0)	100(4.8, 0.4)	88.0(4.4, 0.7)
11. Our Division leaders invest in high quality professional development for our employees.	100(4.3, 0.5)	69.0+(3.8, 0.9)	100(4.6, 0.5)	92.0(4.5, 0.7)
Grand Means	(4.3, 0.6)	(3.8, 0.9)	(4.7, 0.4)	(4.5, 0.6)

Note: For each question respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 whether they believed the practice "is not very well done" or if the practice "is very well done"; 1 indicates that the practice "is not very well done" and 5 indicates that the practice "is very well done".

Principal, teacher, superintendent and observer questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys.

The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response (4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5). The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more indicated a neutral response (3 on a scale of 1-5)

* =25% or more indicated a negative response (1 or 2 on a scale of 1-5)

The overall results on these two items are strong among principals, superintendents, and those who commented on superintendents. The ratings by teachers, however, were low for both of these items. For #4, the overall Division leadership's participation in professional learning, only 59% of the 29 teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This rating is in stark contrast to the

overall strong rating when specific principals' and superintendents' participation in professional learning activities is considered. Another low rating by teachers was given to #11, the Division's leaders invest in high quality professional development. Only 69% of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

LEADERS DEVELOP STRONG, PURPOSEFUL PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES

This section describes results related to leadership practices regarding building strong professional teams and collaborative approaches in the work of educating students. The evidence from research indicates that leaders' skillful building of teams and of other forms of collaborative work is proven to have a positive impact on students' learning success. Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) report that the existence of strong professional communities has a direct link to students' learning success. This section of the survey directly addresses the questions regarding the status of teamwork and the organizational structure of the Sun West Division.

This section of the report relies upon the Instructional Leadership survey regarding eight superintendents' and principals' leadership practices related to leaders' development of strong, purposeful professional communities. In addition, five items in a later portion of the survey regarding the Division's collective leadership also inform this section. Interviews with the superintendents and principals provide important context and information that will bring the survey data to life. The Leadership Impact survey (regarding the superintendents' leadership) and the Management Effectiveness Profile System surveys (regarding the principals' leadership) also inform this section.

In the Instructional Leadership survey, eight specific practices of superintendents and principals related to Developing Strong, Purposeful Professional Communities were rated by the four groups identified earlier in the report. The wording in the survey for the eight leadership practices in this section is represented by the wording used when principals self-assessed their leadership practices.

The ratings for these survey items are presented in Table 5: Results for Items Regarding “Leaders Develop Strong, Purposeful Professional Communities.”

Table 5: Results for Items Regarding “Leaders Develop Strong, Purposeful Professional Communities”

	Principal Self-Assessment	Teachers’ Observations of Principal	Superintendent Self-Assessment	Observations of Superintendent
17. I have helped to build a collaborative culture at our school.	100(4.3, 0.5)	75.9(4.0, 1.0)	100(4.6, 0.5)	96.0(4.7, 0.6)
18. I have invited teachers to participate in decisions that are important to our school.	100(4.8, 0.4)	96.6(4.5, 0.6)	100(4.8, 0.4)	84.0(4.5, 0.9)
19. I have earned teachers’ trust.	83.3+(4.3, 0.8)	89.7(4.6, 0.8)	100(4.8, 0.4)	92.0(4.6, 0.7)
20. I have invited teachers to take on leadership roles.	100(4.5, 0.5)	96.6(4.6, 0.7)	100(4.8, 0.4)	96.0(4.8, 0.5)
21. I have encouraged our staff to adopt collective responsibility for our students’ learning successes.	100(4.3, 0.5)	100(4.4, 0.5)	100(4.4, 0.5)	96.0(4.4, 0.6)
22. I have structured our school community in ways that support collaboration.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	79.3(4.1, 0.9)	100(4.2, 0.4)	92.0(4.4, 0.6)
23. I have helped build productive relationships with families and our community.	100(4.5, 0.5)	86.2(4.4, 0.7)	100(4.6, 0.5)	92.0(4.4, 0.6)
24. I have encouraged teachers to engage in more collegial practices by facilitating joint work amongst teachers	100(4.3, 0.5)	86.2(4.1, 0.8)	100(4.6, 0.5)	92.0(4.4, 0.6)
Grand Means	(4.4, 0.3)	(4.3, 0.6)	(4.6, 0.4)	(4.5, 0.5)

Note: Principal, teacher, superintendent and observer questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys. The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response. The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ = 15% or more said “neutral”

* = 25% or more said “disagree to some extent”

Generally, the ratings of leaders' practices regarding building professional community are strong. The highest rated of the eight practices is #20 in which leaders invite others to take on leadership roles. This practice has the highest means for both the teachers commenting on their principals (4.6) and for those others who reported regarding superintendents' leadership (4.8). Interview data support this rating. One superintendent noted that "we try to draw people into leadership." A principal indicated a strong belief in shared leadership and reliance on the team. Opportunities for teachers' leadership that were noted in interviews include the role of the 21st Century catalyst teachers and the leadership of teachers in RtI and SWISl projects. Regarding the leadership of one SWISl project, a principal noted that we "rely on and expect teachers to lead." Another principal noted that a wider ownership might be achieved by increasing opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles.

Item #22, in which leaders structure the school or the larger organization in ways that support collaboration was the lowest overall rated item in this category. It is especially interesting that this item also has the lowest mean when both principals and superintendents self-assess regarding this practice. It would seem that formal leaders are wondering if their current structures are adequate to properly support collaborative work.

The latter portion of the survey that rates Division leaders practices includes five items in this category. Ratings for these items are presented in Table 6: Results for Division Leaders' Collective Practices Regarding "Leaders Develop Strong, Purposeful Professional Communities."

Table 6: Results for Division Leaders’ Collective Practices Regarding “Leaders Develop Strong, Purposeful Professional Communities”

	Principals	Teachers	Superintendents	Observers of Superintendent
8. Our Division leaders engage our parents and communities in supporting students’ learning successes.	100(3.8, 0.4)	51.7+(3.6, 0.9)	100(4.0, 0.0)	72.0+(4.0, 0.9)
10. Our Division leaders instill pride in our employees as members of the Sun West School Division.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	72.4(3.9, 1.0)	100(4.8, 0.4)	92.0(4.4, 0.6)
17. Our Division leaders share a common understanding of what leaders do to have a positive impact on students’ learning.	83.3+(4.2, 0.8)	75.0+(4.0, 0.8)	60.0+(4.0, 1.0)	84.0+(4.2, 0.7)
18. Our Division leaders emphasize teamwork as an important means to students achieving learning success.	100(4.5, 0.5)	85.7(4.3, 0.8)	100(4.6, 0.5)	92.0(4.4, 0.7)
20. Our Division leaders have restructured our organization to better achieve our student learning goals.	66.7+(3.8, 0.8)	55.2+(3.6, 0.9)	100(4.6, 0.5)	88.0(4.3, 0.7)
Grand Means	(4.1, 0.4)	(3.8, 0.8)	(4.4, 0.5)	(4.3, 0.6)

Note: For each question respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 whether they believed the practice “is not very well done” or if the practice “is very well done”; 1 indicates that the practice “is not very well done” and 5 indicates that the practice “is very well done”.

Principal, teacher, superintendent and observer questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys.

The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response (4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5). The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more indicated a neutral response (3 on a scale of 1-5)

* =25% or more indicated a negative response (1 or 2 on a scale of 1-5)

The responses to the five statements related to the development of strong professional communities resonate with the earlier set of responses although with lower overall ratings. Respondents generally acknowledged the emphasis that has been placed on teamwork in the Division. This set of responses was the highest in the overall set of twenty statements regarding the overall Division leadership. Of special note, however, is the relatively low rating for #20 that asks about the Division’s leaders restructuring of the organization to better achieve student learning goals. Only 55.2% of teachers and 66.7% of principals agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Item #8, leaders engagement with parents and communities in supporting students’ learning,

may also require some thought. Only 51.7% of teachers and 72% of the observers of superintendents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Interestingly, all principals and superintendents either agreed or strongly agreed. Leaders may wish to check this significant discrepancy in ratings between formal leaders and others. This rating is in contrast to the rating of #23 in the earlier portion of this category that showed a generally positive view of leaders relationships with parents and communities. Perhaps the emphasis on engagement in support of students' learning explains that while relationships are generally regarded to be strong, they are not exploited in support of students' learning success.

This category of practices was rated as relatively strong compared to the other categories of leadership practices included in this survey. The Director's focus on the promotion of teamwork appears to have had a positive effect. As the Division moves to increase teacher leadership and other forms of collaborative work, a reminder of the importance of focusing this work on instructional improvement is worthy of consideration. Because the Director has determined that principals will take a larger role in teacher supervision in coming years, it is important to note that although one-to-one supervision and coaching is important, it may be more efficient to invest in developing a shared practice where leaders encourage enhanced teamwork among teachers. The lower rating for the creation of structures for more collaborative work indicates that organizational structure is a potential area of exploration as the Division's leadership considers next steps in this area. Shared leadership and enhanced teamwork will really pay off if they are focused on instructional improvement and students' learning success.

LEADERS DEVELOP CLEAR, FOCUSED DIRECTION WITH HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Leadership is about setting direction. The evidence from research indicates that setting clear, focused direction with high expectations is an important set of leadership practices if students are to be successful in their learning.

This section of the report relies upon the Instructional Leadership survey regarding eight superintendents' and principals' leadership practices related to Developing Clear, Focused Direction with High Expectations. In addition, participants' responses to six survey items from the section on Division leaders practices will be considered. Interviews with the superintendents and principals provide important context and information that will bring the survey data to life. The Leadership Impact survey (regarding the superintendents' leadership) and the Management Effectiveness Profile System surveys (regarding the principals' leadership) also inform this section.

In the Instructional Leadership survey, eight specific practices of superintendents and principals related to Developing Clear, Focused Direction and High Expectations were rated by four distinct groups. Twenty-nine teachers and six principals rated principals' practices in this category. Twenty-five staff members and five superintendents rated the learning superintendents on these practices. The wording in all tables presented in this section is the version that principals completed. The results for the Instructional Leadership survey regarding practices related to Leaders Develop Clear, Focused Direction with High Expectations are presented in Table 7: Results for Items Regarding "Leaders Develop Clear, Focused Direction with High Expectations."

Table 7: Results for Items Regarding “Leaders Develop Clear, Focused Direction with High Expectations.”

	Principal Self-Assessment	Teachers’ Observations of Principal	Superintendent Self-Assessment	Observations of Superintendent
1. I have helped build a shared vision for our students’ learning amongst the school staff and community.	83.3(3.8, 1.0)	86.2(4.2, 0.9)	100(4.8, 0.4)	92.0(4.3, 0.6)
2. I have created expectations for high performance in our students’ learning.	100(4.2, 0.4)	82.8(4.2, 1.1)	100(4.8, 0.4)	96.0(4.6, 0.6)
3. I have focused the school on reaching a few important student achievement goals.	100(4.0, 0.0)	75.9(4.0, 1.0)	100(4.4, 0.5)	84.0(4.0, 0.9)
4. I have championed our staff members’ commitment to our school and division goals.	100(4.2, 0.4)	82.8(4.3, 0.9)	100(4.6, 0.5)	88.0(4.3, 0.8)
5. I believe that all students can succeed in learning.	100(4.5, 0.5)	96.6(4.6, 0.6)	100(5.0, 0.0)	100(4.8, 0.3)
6. I have effectively communicated and refreshed the instructional approaches that we, as a staff, have established.	83.3(3.7, 0.8)	86.2(4.2, 0.8)	100(4.6, 0.5)	76.0+(4.0, 0.9)
7. I have made our priorities obvious through my own daily work.	100(4.2, 0.4)	79.3(4.1, 0.9)	100(4.8, 0.4)	88.0(4.5, 0.8)
8. I expect that staff members can successfully teach all students, including those who have struggled to learn.	100(4.8, 0.4)	100(4.7, 0.5)	100(5.0, 0.0)	100(4.8, 0.4)
Grand Means	(4.2, 0.3)	(4.3, 0.6)	(4.8, 0.1)	(4.4, 0.5)

Note: Principal, teacher, superintendent and observer questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys. The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response. The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more said “neutral”

* =25% or more said “disagree to some extent”

Generally, the perceptions of the principals and superintendents engaging in these practices are very favourable, with all but two of 32 mean ratings above 4.0. Interestingly, these two ratings were principals’ self-assessments. The two highest rated practices in this category both have to do with setting high expectations. For #8, the highest rated practice with 100% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing, leaders are perceived to expect staff members to successfully teach all students. For #5, the leaders are clearly perceived to believe that all students can succeed in their learning.

Only one out of 65 participants did not agree or strongly agree with this statement. The lowest overall rated practice was #3, which has leaders focus the schools' work on a few student achievement goals. Three of four means were 4.0, a relatively low rating within this set of ratings.

In addition to the eight questions in which informants responded regarding specific leaders, six additional statements regarding the overall Division leadership practices are related to this category of Developing Clear, Focused Direction and High Expectations.

Results for these items are presented in Table 8: Results for Division Leaders' Collective Practices Regarding "Leaders Develop Clear, Focused Direction with High Expectations."

Table 8: Results for Division Leaders' Collective Practices Regarding "Leaders Develop Clear, Focused Direction with High Expectations"

	Principals	Teachers	Superintendents	Observers of Superintendents
1. Our Division leaders relentlessly focus on student achievement.	83.3+(4.3, 0.8)	79.3+(4.1, 0.8)	100(4.2, 0.4)	80.0+(4.3, 0.8)
6. Our Division leaders closely align the Division's resources with our priorities for students' learning.	100(4.3, 0.5)	58.6+(3.7, 0.9)	100(4.4, 0.5)	84.0+(4.2, 0.7)
7. Our Division leaders shield us from distractions that might take away from our focus on student achievement.	83.3(3.5, 0.8)	37.9+*(3.0, 1.2)	80.0+(3.8, 0.4)	56.0+(3.5, 1.0)
9. Our Division leaders communicate our core messages up and down, across and throughout the Division.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	60.7+(3.6, 1.0)	60.0+(3.8, 0.8)	68.0+(4.0, 0.8)
12. Our Division leaders have a mission and vision that is widely shared by its employees and stakeholders.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	75.9+(3.8, 0.7)	100(4.4, 0.5)	84.0(4.2, 0.8)
13. Our Division leaders engage employees and stakeholders in collaborative goal setting.	100(4.2, 0.4)	65.5+(3.8, 1.1)	100(4.6, 0.5)	76.0+(4.1, 0.8)
Grand Means	(4.1, 0.5)	(3.7, 0.7)	(4.2, 0.4)	(4.1, 0.6)

Note: For each question respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 whether they believed the practice "is not very well done" or if the practice "is very well done"; 1 indicates that the practice "is not very well done" and 5 indicates that the practice "is very well done". Principal, teacher, superintendent and observer questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys. The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response (4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5). The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more indicated a neutral response (3 on a scale of 1-5)

* =25% or more indicated a negative response (1 or 2 on a scale of 1-5)

When considering the collective Division leadership rather than specific individual leaders, the ratings regarding practices related to setting direction are much lower. The Grand Mean of teachers' ratings in this category is 3.7, the lowest for any participant group in the overall survey. The highest rated of these six practices is #1 in which Division leaders relentlessly focus on student achievement. The lowest rated practice is #7 where leaders shield staff from distractions that take away from the focus on students' learning. All means for #7 are below 4.0 with only 37.9% of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing. The next lowest rating is for #9, which is about communicating core messages throughout the Division. Only 60.7% of teachers and 60% of superintendents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

The survey results offer some ideas regarding current strengths as well as areas to address in this category of leadership practices. Strengths clearly include setting high expectations for students' learning, including those who often have difficulty with their learning. This strength includes leaders' belief that all students can learn. A contrasting perspective emerged in interviews where mention of demographic barriers to learning was raised by several leaders.

One area of concern is setting priorities and establishing a clear and perhaps narrower focus in school and Division plans. A related concern is what participants perceive to be a lack of communication of core messages throughout the Division. Teachers were also very clear that their Division leaders did not shield them from distractions that reduced their focus on their students' learning.

In interviews with superintendents and principals about their leadership practices, very little was brought to the interviewer's attention by these leaders about their own practices of developing clear, focused direction with high expectations. Observations of leaders in action made it clear that stakeholders were brought into important processes including committees to develop aspects of the Division's strategic plan and to review the Division's policies. Leaders ensure that plans are collaboratively developed, a strong practice in this category.

COLLECTIVE, PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF LEADERSHIP

This section reports on results related to leadership practices about leaders belonging to a professional leadership collective or team. It also considers leaders' sense of personal and collective efficacy. The evidence from research indicates that leaders' belonging to a wider leadership team and a sense that this team of leaders can have a positive impact on students' learning is proven to have a positive impact on students' learning success. In fact, Leithwood and Seashore Louis (2012) found " ... that a key focus for district leaders should be the further development of their principals' collective sense of efficacy for school improvement" (p. 120).

This section of the report relies upon four items in the Instructional Leadership Survey in which superintendents and principals are rated by participant groups on practices about their active membership in a wider leadership team. Superintendents and principals also self-report in the Instructional Leadership Survey regarding questions of personal and collective efficacy. In addition, the interviews with the superintendents and principals provide important context and information. The Leadership Impact

survey (regarding the superintendents’ leadership) and the Management Effectiveness Profile System surveys (regarding the principals’ leadership) also inform this section.

Collective Practice of Leadership

In the Instructional Leadership survey, four specific practices of superintendents and principals related to the Collective, Professional Practice of Leadership were rated by the four groups identified earlier in this report. The wording in the survey for the four leadership practices in this section is represented by the wording used when principals self-report their leadership practices. Ratings for these survey items are presented in

Table 9: Results for Items Regarding the “Collective, Professional Practice of Leadership.”

Table 9: Results for Items Regarding the “Collective, Professional Practice of Leadership”

	Principal Self-Assessment	Teachers’ Observations of Principal	Superintendent Self-Assessment	Observations of Superintendent
34. I work closely with other Division leaders, including: other principals, superintendents, learning coaches, and teacher leaders.	100(4.5, 0.5)	82.8+(4.3, 0.8)	100(5.0, 0.0)	100(4.8, 0.4)
35. I have encouraged and developed other leaders.	100(4.5, 0.5)	82.8(4.2, 0.8)	100(5.0, 0.0)	100(4.8, 0.4)
36. I have encouraged teachers to learn from other teachers, including teachers in other schools and other school divisions.	100(4.5, 0.5)	85.7(4.1, 0.8)	80.0+(4.4, 0.9)	96.0(4.6, 0.6)
37. I have been an active member of our Division’s leadership team.	83.3+(4.2, 0.8)	82.8+(4.3, 0.8)	100(5.0, 0.0)	100(4.8, 0.4)
Grand Means	(4.4, 0.4)	(4.2, 0.6)	(4.9, 0.2)	(4.7, 0.4)

Note: Principal, teacher, superintendent and observer questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys. The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response. The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more said “neutral”

* =25% or more said “disagree to some extent”

Overall, ratings of both principals and superintendents in regard to practicing leadership within a collective were very high from all four participant groups. Nine of 16

total ratings had all participants either agree or strongly agree. Ratings for superintendents had very high Grand Means of 4.9 for superintendents' self-assessment and 4.7 by their observers.

The highest rated practice was #34 in which principals and superintendents work closely with other leaders in the Division. The opportunities for leaders to work together was clearly witnessed in school-administrators meetings, learning superintendents meetings, and very importantly in the make-up of committees such as the one that was to conduct the annual policy review or the ones that are developing Division plans for the priorities in the provincial education sector plan. The membership of these committees almost always seemed to include leaders from every employee group, community group, or others who had a stake in the work being done.

Data from interviews also support the existence of a collective leadership practice within the Division and beyond. The Director and superintendents clearly work within a provincial context. This work on a provincial scale has increased with the Ministry's development of the Hochin Kanri approach to strategic planning. One superintendent spoke of frequent meetings with superintendents from other school divisions who have a similar role. Another superintendent spoke of initial plans with another school division to collaborate on developing a Masters cohort for aspiring leaders. Some superintendents pointed out the advantages of deepening their collaboration so that a more coherent approach would be apparent to schools. Another superintendent expressed the desire to build a closer team and to change the administrative structure because the current one "does not lend itself to discussions on

instruction.” Another superintendent thought that closer teamwork could be achieved by enhancing processes rather than making structural changes.

Collective Efficacy

The items in the Instructional Leadership survey related to self and collective efficacy of Division leaders were self-reports by five learning superintendents and six principals. The items in this section of the survey are represented in the wording used by principals to self-report on this aspect of their leadership. Results for this section of the survey are represented in Table 10: Results for Leaders’ Self-Efficacy and in Table 11: Results for Collective Efficacy.

Table 10: Results for Leaders’ Self-Efficacy

	Principal Self-Assessment	Teachers’ Observations of Principal	Superintendent Self-Assessment	Observations of Superintendent
40. I find that I am able to motivate teachers.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	x	100(4.6, 0.5)	x
41. I have been able to generate enthusiasm for a shared vision in this school.	66.7*(3.5, 1.2)	x	100(4.8, 0.4)	x
42. I have successfully managed change in this school.	100(4.3, 0.5)	x	100(4.8, 0.4)	x
43. I have helped to generate a positive learning environment in this school.	100(4.3, 0.5)	x	100(4.8, 0.4)	x
44. I have made a positive difference in our students’ learning successes.	100(4.3, 0.5)	x	100(4.8, 0.4)	x
Grand Means	(4.1, 0.5)	x	(4.8, 0.3)	x

Note: Principal and superintendent questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys. The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response. The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more said “neutral”

* =25% or more said “disagree to some extent”

The self-ratings for both superintendents and principals regarding their self-efficacy were relatively high, with superintendents higher on all ratings. Leaders in both roles seemed to feel that they are able to have an impact on the work of others in their

schools or the Division with high ratings for leaders believing that they have successfully managed change (#42), generated a positive learning environment (#43), and made a positive difference in students’ learning success (#44). Only one item, #41, was rated with a mean lower than 4.0. Of the six principals, two disagreed with the statement that they have been able to generate enthusiasm for a shared vision in their schools (mean of 3.5).

Table 11: Results for Collective Efficacy

	Principal Self-Assessment	Teachers’ Observations of Principal	Superintendent Self-Assessment	Observations of Superintendent
45. School staff members in our Division have the knowledge and skill they need to improve student learning.	100(4.2, 0.4)	x	80.0+(3.8, 0.4)	x
46. In our School Division, most view continuous improvement as an essential part of our work.	83.3+(4.0, 0.6)	x	80.0+(4.2, 0.8)	x
47. In our Division, problems are viewed as issues to be solved, not as barriers to action.	100(4.2, 0.4)	x	100(4.6, 0.5)	x
48. Division staff members communicate a belief in the capacity of teachers to successfully teach even students with the most difficult learning challenges.	100(4.5, 0.5)	x	100(4.4, 0.5)	x
49. We widely believe that learning improvement hinges on the actions of the adults in our schools, not students.	83.3+(4.2, 0.8)	x	100(4.4, 0.5)	x
Grand Means	(4.2, 0.5)	x	(4.3, 0.5)	x

Note: Principal and superintendent questions were worded slightly differently on their surveys. The first number is the % of respondents who indicated a positive response. The mean and standard deviation appear in brackets.

+ =15% or more said “neutral”

* =25% or more said “disagree to some extent”

In the five survey items in Table 11, principals and superintendents were asked to rate the collective Division’s efficacy or belief that the Division as a collective can do the job. The Grand Mean for principals’ responses (4.2) was close to the norm across the survey, but the Grand Mean for superintendents’ responses was lower than their usual responses when the overall survey is considered.

Item #45, the statement that school staff members in the Division have the knowledge and skill they need to improve students' learning, received a mean rating by superintendents of 3.8 with no superintendents strongly agreeing. This is by far their lowest rating in this section. Given the superintendents' closeness to what is happening in schools in their roles in teacher supervision, support services, professional development, and other important functions, their vantage point on the question of whether or not staff have the knowledge and skills necessary to improve student learning is an important one to note and underlines the significance of successful instructional leadership and professional learning to the future success of students' learning.

Another interesting rating is of item #49, the belief that learning improvement hinges on the actions of adults, not students. The rating by both sets of leaders for this item was positive (4.4 for superintendents and 4.2 for principals), but in the mid-range for both groups within this section of the survey. This positive rating is somewhat at odds with common interview comments regarding demographic influences being important factors for both students' learning success (we are "fortunate," "lucky") as well as for hindering their learning success.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SUN WEST SCHOOL DIVISION

The key findings and recommendations flow from the analysis of data in the previous sections of this report. Findings are discussed followed by the resulting recommendations for that section of the conceptual framework.

OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Director, senior leaders, and school-based leaders of the Sun West School Division are to be commended for the recent emphasis on instructional leadership. A strong beginning is reflected in the actions reported within the data. The development of a shared definition of instructional leadership by school-based administrators illustrates the benefit of having a common definition that will facilitate dialogue and understanding among leaders. The desire to improve is also commendable given the generally positive assessments of Sun West students' learning.

The next step is to take advantage of this strong beginning and to intensify efforts to strengthen instructional leadership and ensure its positive impact on instruction and student learning success.

The Division is well positioned to take this next step as leaders feel positive and empowered. The effort and the necessity to develop expertise is necessary for success and should not be underestimated. Leaders and teachers only get better when they learn new, more powerful ways to do their work. We suggest that the Division conduct an intense exploration of the powerful instruction required to accomplish curricular outcomes and have students develop the 21st Century competencies. We also

recommend that the Division undertake a parallel exploration of what it is that leaders must do to ensure that teachers learn and utilize powerful learning and assessment models in their classrooms.

Recommendation #1:

- a) that current efforts to develop strong instructional leadership among superintendents, school-based administrators, and teacher leaders (learning coaches, 21st century catalysts, etc.) be continued;*
- b) that planned initiatives, including one for aspiring leaders, be implemented;*
- c) that the Division conduct an intense exploration of the powerful instruction required to accomplish curricular outcomes and to have students develop the 21st Century competencies; and*
- d) that the Division undertake an exploration of what it is that leaders must do to ensure that teachers learn and utilize powerful learning and assessment models in their classrooms.*

IMPROVING STUDENTS' LEARNING

Generally, Sun West students are doing well in their learning. Evidence such as graduation rates and levels of literacy development indicate that Sun West students have already surpassed the targets in the developing provincial education sector plan. Accounts of students' excitement with the use of technology in their learning were noted. Some leaders attribute students' overall success to favourable demographics and families' interest and support of education. Some concerns, however, were expressed regarding some schools where students' achievement was below Division norms. Fifteen

per cent of Grade 9 students have been identified as “off track” and at risk of not graduating. Although most measures of students’ engagement closely correspond to national norms, others indicate Sun West students to be below national norms. To their great credit, many leaders expressed a strong determination to improve students’ learning.

Recommendation #2:

- a) that the state of students’ learning, while generally good, will require continuous and intensive attention through strengthening the practice of instructional leadership; and*
- b) that leaders investigate the research that connects leaders practices to students’ learning success (see Recommendation 1. d) and then establish a Sun West framework for instructional leadership that will provide the common ideas and language necessary to sustain strong instructional leadership beyond the terms of the current group of individuals who lead the Division and its schools.*

IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

The state of instruction among Sun West teachers seems varied with some teachers using new, more powerful learning strategies, while others are using more traditional methods and resisting the addition of new strategies to their repertoires. It seems that a common language of instruction does not exist among the Division’s teachers and leaders. Although an analysis of the state of instruction in Sun West Schools is not a focus of this review, the brief glimpse offered through interviews with

leaders provides an impetus to explore teachers' instruction as a key step in ensuring strong instructional leadership.

The exploration of pedagogy recommended in Recommendation #1 might result in the creation or adoption of a framework or mental model that would facilitate conversations, reflection, and collaborative professional learning through a common language of instruction. This framework or mental model of instruction would go much deeper than the general ideas presented in the instructional section of the current Teacher Professional Practice Handbook. A number of helpful frameworks exist including those of Joyce, Weil & Calhoun (2014), Marzano, Pickering & Pollock (2001), and Bennett & Rolheiser (2008). The five-circle model of instructional strategies created in 1991 by the Ministry of Education may also be useful. These research-based frameworks could form the basis of a Sun West framework for learning and assessment models.

The creation of such an instructional framework is an important step in setting instructional goals for the Division as well as for addressing the challenge of coherence as new approaches to learning are introduced through initiatives in 21st Century competencies (e.g., non-directive teaching, cooperative learning), curricular reform (inquiry models) or in Support Services (e.g., various strategies for Tier 2 and 3 intervention). As specific learning goals are determined through provincial or Division plans, the search for specific learning approaches designed to address such goals must follow. It may be time to emphatically put "instruction" back into "instructional leadership."

Recommendation #3:

- a) that the improvement of teachers' instruction become a target for intensive work;*
- b) that the improvement of instruction be based upon the results of the exploration set out in Recommendation 1.c) and the subsequent development or adoption of a framework or mental model for a shared, research-based instructional practice by Sun West teachers;*
- c) that an assessment of teachers' current instructional repertoires relative to that framework/ mental model be used to plan future professional learning; and*
- d) that teachers and leaders engage in strong, research-based professional learning focused on developing the shared instructional practice set out in the framework.*

LEADERS PARTICIPATE IN CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

This category of leadership practices is vital to the improvement of instruction and students' learning. Many of these practices are rated highly by informants, but others are judged to be in need of strengthening. School-based administrators own assessment of their practice indicates the need to strengthen their work in teacher supervision. Some leaders mentioned that attention to a deeper implementation of cognitive coaching may be necessary. Given the direction to have principals take a larger role in teacher supervision, a number of leadership practices in this category require additional attention.

Recommendation #4:

That practices in which leaders participate in curriculum, instruction, and assessment receive continuing emphasis and development. Practices requiring focus include:

- a) monitoring and supporting a deeper implementation of cognitive coaching by school-based leaders;*
- b) ensuring that early intervention takes place when students or schools are judged to be struggling;*
- c) employing the use of data in planning school improvement;*
- d) monitoring teachers' instructional practices; and*
- e) constantly sharing and emphasizing the common view of high quality instruction described in the mental model or framework developed in Recommendation #3 b).*

LEADERS PROMOTE AND PARTICIPATE WITH TEACHERS IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Leaders in Sun West are generally perceived to actively promote and participate in the professional learning of teachers and principals. This finding is much stronger when survey participants rated individual leaders than the Division's collective leadership.

The lowest rated practice in this category is the leaders' focus of professional learning on exemplary instruction and assessment practices. Overall, the six principals do not rate themselves very highly on the practices in this category. This strong perception aligns with the Director's sense that significant development of instructional leadership among school-based administrators is necessary for future success.

Recommendation #5:

a) that the Division's leaders create a more deliberate focus on teachers and principals learning powerful instructional and assessment models. This will ensure that the investment in professional learning pays off in improved students' learning success; and

b) that continued efforts be made to develop leaders' competencies in facilitating teachers' learning by focusing on the characteristics and practices of research-based professional development.

LEADERS DEVELOP STRONG, PURPOSEFUL PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES

The ratings on this category of practices were relatively strong compared to the other categories of leadership practices. The Director's focus on the promotion of teamwork appears to have had a positive effect. As the Division moves to increase teacher leadership and other forms of collaborative work, a reminder of the importance of focusing this work on instructional improvement is worthy of consideration. Because the Director has determined that principals will take a larger role in teacher supervision in coming years, it is important to note that although one-to-one supervision and coaching is important, it may also be more efficient to invest in developing enhanced teamwork among teachers. The lower rating for the creation of structures for more collaborative work indicates that organizational structure is a potential area for exploration as the Division's leadership considers next steps.

Recommendation #6:

- a) that the Division's leaders carefully reconsider its structures to ensure that central and school structures facilitate collaborative work among teachers and other employee groups. The facilitation of collaborative work is suggested as a key criterion in evaluating and developing central and school-based structures;*
- b) that the development of collaborative teams focusing on improving instruction have a significant place in the Division's plans to supervise and develop its teachers. Developing such teams has the potential to complement and achieve even greater positive impact than one-on-one supervision and coaching; and*
- c) that leaders build upon current strong relationships with parents and communities and refocus these relationships on achieving students' learning success.*

LEADERS DEVELOP CLEAR, FOCUSED DIRECTION WITH HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Survey results indicated that leaders might bring greater focus to fewer priorities in school and Division plans. It is also clear from the survey results and observations of meetings that leaders have ensured the wide participation of various stakeholders in developing various plans. The Division's leadership is to be commended on this inclusionary practice.

Survey results also suggest that leaders might place greater emphasis on communicating core messages throughout the Division. Another interesting finding from the surveys is that teachers do not see leaders taking the necessary measures to shield them from distractions that take away their focus on their core work, their students' learning.

Leaders in Sun West have high expectations for students' learning, including those students who often have difficulty with their learning. This belief by leaders as expressed in surveys is contrasted by some interview comments regarding perceived demographic barriers to learning.

Recommendation 7:

a) that leaders consider setting fewer priorities in school and Division plans. Achieving such focus will be in keeping with the developing provincial education sector plan;

b) that leaders better communicate core messages throughout the Division;

c) that leaders take necessary measures to shield teachers from distractions that take away their focus on their core work, their students' learning; and

d) that leaders challenge their staff members' beliefs about their students' capabilities.

Interesting approaches to such discussions are found in Sharratt & Fullan (2012) and Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman (2010).

COLLECTIVE, PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF LEADERSHIP

Superintendents and principals believe that they are a part of a collective leadership. This collective has a strong sense of efficacy, a belief that they can lead in a way so that learning will improve in the Division's schools. The significant extension of leadership to learning coaches, consultants, and 21st Century catalysts in each school is commendable. The expertise developed by these teacher leaders is significant to long-range success and provides an informal and potentially successful strategy for leadership succession in both school and Division level leadership.

Superintendents raised the need to achieve greater coherence in their work as a team through changes to structure or through improved processes. Perhaps more time for sharing key initiatives among superintendents could be found. Superintendents should be well-informed about the specifics of initiatives, especially regarding the learning and assessment models being championed and implemented, whether they come from 21st Century competencies, Support Services, or Curriculum and Instruction. All of this work lands in schools, thus a coherent approach that represents the Division's priorities and that respects the limits of leadership action in schools is required.

The creation of frameworks for both instruction and for instructional leadership (see earlier recommendations) would greatly assist in creating greater coherence. These frameworks would emphasize the Division's priorities and create opportunities for creating common language and a shared professional practice.

Recommendation #8:

- a) that leaders continue their efforts to develop a sense of collective leadership in the Division. This includes the continued empowerment of teacher leaders in various roles and the inclusion of leaders from various employee and stakeholder groups in Division planning committees; and*
- b) that coherence in the work of the learning superintendents be addressed through processes, frameworks, and possibly the structure of the senior administration. Such processes might include more regular time set aside for superintendents to share and explore the Division's initiatives and their impact on schools.*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Director, senior leaders, and school-based leaders of the Sun West School Division are to be commended for the recent emphasis on Instructional Leadership. A strong beginning is reflected in action reported within the data for this Instructional Leadership review. The desire to improve is also commendable given the generally positive assessments of Sun West students' learning. Others with such results might rest on their laurels and be complacent, but Sun West has chosen to move forward. In the words of Jim Collins (2001), Sun West has chosen to move from "good to great."

The next step is to take advantage of this strong beginning and sense of efficacy among leaders by intensifying efforts to strengthen instructional leadership and ensure its positive impact on instruction and student learning success.

The Division is well positioned to take this next step as leaders feel positive and empowered. One superintendent spoke of a "wave coming." The effort and development of expertise necessary for success in these next steps, however, should not be underestimated. Leaders and teachers only get better when they learn new, more powerful ways to do their work. We strongly suggest that the Division undertake an intensive exploration of the powerful instruction required to accomplish curricular outcomes and have students develop the 21st Century competencies. We also suggest that the Division embark on a deep consideration of what it is that leaders must do to ensure that teachers learn and utilize powerful learning and assessment models in their classrooms.

It is our hope that this report will be helpful in moving the Sun West School Division toward the exemplary practice of instructional leadership.

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