Alberta
Government

TELLING OUR SCHOOL STORIES

2.0

MOVING FORWARD WITH HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN

[AN INTERIM REPORT FOR 2014/2015]

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Executive Summary

In Alberta Education's 2016-2019 business plan, outcome one is that Alberta's students are successful.

A focus on student success is at the heart of Moving Forward with High School Redesign, an initiative that encourages innovative and sustainable strategies for enhancing learning by releasing schools from the 25 hours of instruction per credit requirement.

As this report highlights, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to student success. Rather, schools are moving forward by finding strategies and solutions that work best for their students, and for their communities.

Schools participating in High School Redesign show positive overall results. In 2014-2015, redesign schools have a high school completion rate that is 2.5 per cent higher than the provincial average.

However, the high school completion rate is just one measure of an initiative that is both broad-based and far-reaching. High School Redesign is encouraging school leaders and teachers to think and act more creatively and collaboratively. By focusing on student engagement, high achievement, and quality teaching, school leaders and teachers have the opportunity to transform the high school experience for students across the province.

This report on the experience of participating schools also notes some important emerging trends.
- High School Redesign is becoming an integrated component of school and district planning.
- Schools are creating more opportunities for students to explore career options, plan for post-secondary, and connect with the community.
- Many schools are beginning to proactively address the issue of learner readiness.
- Schools are increasingly recognizing the importance of trusting student voice.
- Schools are relying more on building positive relationships with students and collecting local data to inform instructional planning and educational decision-making.

High School Redesign is a grassroots initiative that has implications and insights for high school leaders and teachers across the province, and sheds light on practical approaches to improving student success.

Setting the Context

This report provides a snapshot of the 2014/2015 experiences and results of Alberta high schools in the first or second year of their redesign journey. By sharing their stories, schools are not only documenting their progress, they are creating opportunities for others to learn from their experience and insights.

Building on *Telling Our School Stories* (fall 2015), this report provides on the ground action research on how positive change is being implemented in high schools across the province.

This change is the result of Moving Forward with High School Redesign—an innovative, grassroots initiative focusing on creating responsive, student centred approaches to 21st century learning. At its core, High School Redesign is about helping to ensure students have the knowledge, skills and abilities to create a positive future for themselves, their families and their communities.

High School Redesign is built on work done by 16 schools in a High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. The 2008–2013 project focused on increasing learning options for high school students by releasing schools from the requirement that mandated 25 instruction hours per credit.

The results of the project were encouraging, and school leaders across the province expressed support for increased flexibility and local autonomy. By 2014/2015, there were over 200 high schools participating in the redesign journey. New schools created a redesign plan focused on three outcomes: student engagement, high levels of achievement, and quality teaching.

Individual school plans reflect the fact that while schools are working toward common outcomes, High School Redesign is based on local needs and priorities. Because this report focuses on qualitative data, strategies and results reported by one school may well be taking place in other schools across the province.

Schools participating in High School Redesign are showing positive overall results for 2014/2015. Redesign schools have a three-year high school completion rate of 79 per cent, compared to the provincial average of 76.5 per cent. The five year high school completion rate for redesign schools is 84.6 per cent, compared to the provincial average of 82.1 per cent.

While these results are positive, there is more to the story than completion rates. As this report highlights, the high school experience in Alberta is evolving, not only for students, but for teachers, school leaders and the communities that support them.

TELLING OUR SCHOOL STORIES

MOVING FORWARD WITH HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN

FALL 2015

Highlights

- In 2014/2015, more than 200 schools across Alberta participated in the high school redesign initiative.

- Alberta high school completion rates continue to increase for schools participating in this initiative. Redesign schools have a three-year high school completion rate of 79 per cent, compared to the provincial average of 76.5 per cent.

- Key outcomes of high school redesign include: engaged students, high levels of achievement and quality teaching.

- Schools are using nine foundational principles to inform their planning and identify strategies.

- Many schools are exploring meaningful ways to measure, reflect on, and report their success.

- Improving assessment practices has a positive impact on student engagement, high levels of achievement and quality teaching.

- Schools are using a variety of broad approaches and specific strategies to enhance student engagement.

- Schools identified that making changes to the organization and delivery of instruction contributed to improved levels of achievement.

- Focusing on literacy and assessment practices, providing holistic supports, and helping students plan for the future also enhance achievement.

- Collaborative planning and job-embedded professional learning supports quality teaching.

- Sharing results from 2014/2015 creates opportunities for schools across the province to build on this learning.

Measures of Success

In the 2014/2015 round of Telling Our School Story, there were many examples of how schools are looking for meaningful ways to measure, reflect and report on their success.

The three outcome areas of student engagement, high levels of achievement and quality teaching are mutually supportive and interdependent; because of this, schools used one measure, or a shared set of measures, for all three outcomes.

Tell Them From Me

Overall, *Tell Them From Me* survey questions were the most used measure, followed by Accountability Pillar reports. In addition, schools relied on diploma results, high school completion rates, course averages and course completion numbers as evidence of success. Five schools also used high school completion rates for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students as a measure.

> "We realize that we need clearer processes and time to acquire data analysis skills that will allow us to translate data into useful information that identifies what impacts achievement and informs decision making."

Local data

Schools are making more use of their local data, including:
- staff feedback during monthly collaborative meetings and professional learning sessions;
- student attendance;
- referrals to administration;
- suspension rates;
- number of credit recoveries;
- number of completed (or missed) assignments;
- number of students:
  - participating in extra-curricular activities;
  - participating in flex opportunities;
  - participating in dual credit;
  - applying for Rutherford scholarship;
  - completing a high school graduation plan;
  - accessing teacher tutoring; and
- samples of student work, reflections and presentations.

One school described the shift to relying more on the stories school members and stakeholders share. This anecdotal evidence is gathered and thematically analyzed by teachers and the school leadership team.

Classroom observations

Observations of classrooms was also identified as a measure by five schools. Administrators used walk-throughs and follow-up discussions to look for indicators of:
- teachers teaching differently; and
- student project work.

Surveys

The majority of schools used at least one survey as a measure, including:
- surveys for parents, including:
  - school authority or school developed surveys
  - Thought Exchange community engagement software;
- teacher surveys; and
- student surveys, including:
  - school authority and school created surveys;
  - Canadian student tobacco, alcohol and drug survey; and
  - OLWEUS survey (on bullying behaviour).

Student voice

Individual schools are beginning to use more innovative ways to facilitate student voice, including:
- focus groups and leadership committees; and
- graduate exit interviews.

The schools that focused on gathering student feedback typically commented on the importance of reporting back to students about how their feedback was used to inform planning and decision making.

Student Engagement

The Alberta Education High School Completion Strategic Framework describes student engagement as: "… when students make a psychological investment in learning. It is measured by the extent to which students identify with and value school outcomes, have a sense of belonging at school, participate in academic and non-academic activities, strive to meet formal requirements of schooling and make serious personal investments in learning."

Although the three outcomes of student engagement, high levels of achievement, and quality teaching are inter-related and mutually supportive, data from participating schools show that making student engagement the key focus has a number of benefits. These benefits include inspiring new instructional practices, enhancing academic achievement, and improving student teacher relationships and overall school climate.

Evidence of success related to student engagement

Evidence for improved student engagement was gathered through both provincial data (i.e., Accountability Pillar reports, including diploma results) and school-based measures such as surveys and student data.

Of all of the measures, the *Tell Them From Me* survey questions, when analyzed, provided individual schools with the most detailed evidence of how their efforts were impacting student engagement. Some schools found it helpful to compare their school results with the Canadian norms.

A number of schools noted increases on Accountability Pillar reports as evidence, though actual percentages were not always included. Increases reported ranged from two per cent to 12 per cent over two years. Other schools cited maintaining high results in the Accountability Pillar reports as evidence of success.

Student Engagement

The most frequently cited school-based evidence included:

- survey results indicating student support for flex time;
- classroom observations of strategies in place;
- teacher interviews about the effectiveness of strategies;
- increase in course completion rates, credit earned, high school completion rates, and Rutherford scholarship eligibility; and
- decreased truancy (and increased attendance).

In addition, individual schools provided evidence of increases in:

- credits earned;
- courses completed; and
- number of students participating in specific learning experiences, including flex time activities.

Schools are becoming more skillful at linking measures with evidence, and then linking this evidence to increased student engagement. For example, one school used teacher and student survey data to identify increases in:

- instruction reflecting student preferences, interests and readiness levels;
- students feeling comfortable approaching their teachers, asking questions and contributing to classroom discussion; and
- students feeling there are multiple supports in place for them.
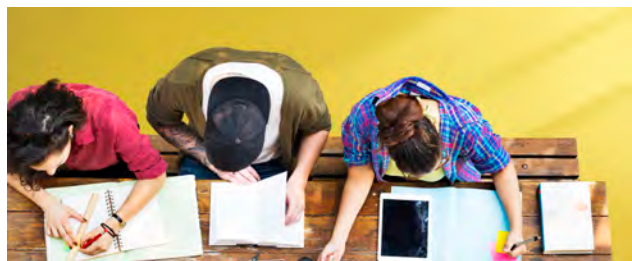
Strategies to increase student engagement

Schools report that they continue to implement a broad range of strategies. Some schools concentrated on broad approaches (e.g., comprehensive school health, restorative practices), while other schools chose to focus tightly on a small number of discrete instructional and learning strategies. Increasingly, there is a shared language around strategies, although some of the broad approaches such as Response to Intervention appear to mean different things to different schools.

Flex time

Flex time continued to be the most frequently cited and most comprehensively developed strategy related to increasing student engagement. Over 33 schools identified some sort of flex time as their key strategy. There was less emphasis on flex days, and more emphasis on regularly and frequently scheduled blocks of time. Flex time goes by many names (e.g., personalized learning time, seminar blocks, success blocks, focus class) and this year there appears to be an increased focus on academic supports through targeted tutorials. Some schools are also focusing on exploratory sessions related to career and post-secondary planning.

> "Classroom teachers have found that as they have experimented with new ideas and strategies, students have also been more willing to take risks and be more engaged in learning."

Teacher Advisory

Teacher Advisory programs (sometimes referred to as home room) were the second most frequently cited strategy for student engagement. Individual schools included minimal detail on how they organized and implemented this strategy, but there appeared to be overlap with the types of activities that other schools might be offering through flex time.

Student Engagement

Activities reported for Teacher Advisory time included:
- community building and bullying prevention;
- learning strategies instruction;
- tutorials on targeted topics;
- completing student profiles and learning inventories;
- individualized goal setting and learning plans; and
- portfolio development (such as MyBlueprint), career exploration and graduation plans.

Credit recovery

Credit recovery (sometimes called credit rescue) was the third most cited strategy used to enhance student engagement. A number of schools have incorporated this practice across subject areas and credit it with increasing students' willingness to persevere in learning.

Project-based learning

Project-based learning continues to be a professional learning focus for a number of schools, but implementation is often in the exploratory stage. Schools continue to see it as having promising potential for engaging learners, creating rigour, and making learning more meaningful.

Flexible schedules and spaces

Flexibility was evident in timetabling, organization of instructional time (e.g., early dismissals) and use of physical spaces.

Three schools identified the improved use of Learning Commons as contributing to increased student engagement.

Learning opportunities

Differentiated instruction was identified as a key instructional strategy for student engagement.

Schools continued to identify and explore a number of solutions for broadening course options, including:
- options outside the regular timetable; and
- blended learning (including supporting students who are completing distance learning courses within the school setting).

Blended learning was identified by six schools as a successful strategy for increasing opportunities for learning. Reports indicate that blended learning opportunities are more integrated and supported than the previous year. One school proposed this equation: blended classes = more innovation and opportunities for growth.

> "Students appreciate the flexible pacing that the school's blended learning program offers; it allows them to accelerate or take extended time to complete courses."

Assessment strategies

Assessment strategies were identified as contributing to success in all three of the outcome areas. Specific strategies included developing school-wide assessment guidelines and school assessment policies.

Several schools described flexible assessment as a natural and everyday practice.

> "As part of our school-based professional development, we have been focusing on differentiated instruction to make learning more accessible for all students. Through differentiation, multiple pathways for learning are being made. This offers a form of personalization within the classroom."

Student Engagement

Co- and extra-curricular opportunities

Schools identified a number of co- and extra-curricular activities they implemented to engage students and increase their participation, commitment, and sense of belonging. Activities identified included:

- leadership opportunities;
- volunteer programs;
- peer support programs;
- outdoor education; and
- global education.

Supportive environments

Schools identified the importance of creating supportive environments. They identified basic strategies, such as increasing teacher presence in the hallways, to more comprehensive strategies, such as implementing a Response to Intervention approach. Three schools reported collaborating with community partners to provide enhanced supports to students and their families.

> "To ensure that students are connected and supported if they struggle academically, socially or emotionally, we initiated a Collaborative Response process in which all adults in our building identify students who might be at risk and then use an identified pyramid of intervention to discuss strategies to support these students."

Connecting with families

Schools identified basic strategies for connecting to families, including orientation sessions, open houses and information nights, and teachers phoning parents to introduce themselves.

In one school, all teachers committed to initiating learning conversations with students and their parents.

Challenges to improving student engagement

Schools took a pragmatic and reflective approach to identifying challenges related to student engagement. In their identification of specific challenges, the majority of schools also identified their commitment to addressing these challenges.

The four main categories of identified challenges focused on:

- responding to diverse learning needs;
- learner readiness;
- collecting data; and
- changing practice.

Responding to diverse learning needs

The most frequently cited challenge related to student engagement was responding to the diversity of learning needs in the school, including integrating Grade 9 students into the redesign model. Different schools identified different learning needs as challenging. This ranged from supporting students learning English as an additional language, to providing rigour for those students who require academic challenge. Responding to cultural issues such as residential schools and social inequality was also identified as a challenge.

Responding to diverse learning needs requires building teachers' capacity. The two capacity-building areas that were identified as challenges were:

- building teachers' skills in helping readers who struggle; and
- responding to students' mental health needs, including those students who experience bullying, harassment or exclusion.

Student Engagement

Learner readiness

A number of schools identified learner readiness as a challenge. Student readiness for independent learning, time management, project based learning, study skills for mathematics and science, and preparing for diploma exams were all identified as challenges that needed to be addressed.

In addition, one school identified the challenge of engaging students who continue to exist on the fringe after many attempts to connect with them. Another school identified the challenge of balancing students' need for academic support while honouring their ability to make choices about their learning.

Schools also acknowledged that these challenges are a natural part of the high school redesign process, and that staff will need to continue to address these challenges in innovative and thoughtful ways.

Collecting data

Schools are committed to using data, but find that identifying accurate and meaningful measures of student engagement can be a challenge. Increasingly, schools are looking at using both quantitative and qualitative data to inform planning and measure their success.

Changing practice

The implementation of project based learning continued to be identified as a challenge, especially in terms of assessment.

Communication with parents about change was also identified as a challenge for some schools, particularly around the issue of new instructional and assessment practices, and personalizing learning.

Other challenges

Other challenges identified by individual schools included:
- coping with leadership turnover;
- addressing teachers' comfort level with technology;
- accessing online courses that align with foundational principles;
- providing sufficient work areas for students; and
- creating meaningful opportunities for parent participation.

Next steps to support student engagement

Based on their findings and evidence, schools were asked to outline their next steps related to student engagement and identify actions they will stop, start or continue over the next year.

The variety of actions identified reinforces how this grassroots initiative looks different at every school, and is evolving to respond directly to local contexts, priorities and resources.

What to stop

The student engagement outcome area, compared to the other two outcome areas, had the most activities identified as stop actions. The major categories for these actions were related to:
- classroom practices;
- learner readiness;
- rethinking strategies;
- school organization; and
- implementing high school redesign.

Classroom practices

Many of the stop actions described shifts in thinking around classroom practice. For example, schools identified their commitment to stop:
- allowing staff to work in isolation;
- implementing classroom practices that cause tension and endanger positive student teacher relationships;
- expecting students to 'fit the mold' and respond to a single mode of instruction;
- relying on textbooks as the primary teaching resource;
- relying on English teachers to be the only teachers of literacy; and
- prescribing everything students need to do.

Learner readiness

A number of the stop actions were related to learner readiness. For example, schools identified the need to stop:
- providing as much student choice at the start;
- allowing students to choose their study area without accountability; and
- assuming students know how to use free time.

Student Engagement

Rethinking strategies

Some of the stop actions were a result of schools' willingness to reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of new strategies. This reflective process helped individual schools make the decision to stop:

- providing unstructured flex time;
- investing time in the student portfolio system;
- over-relying on handheld devices as a learning tool; and
- providing large venues where there are no teacher-supported activities.

School organization

Other stop actions related to overall organization of the school. For example, schools committed to stop:

- tinkering with the timetable;
- having a course driven timetable;
- limiting access to specialized learning environments such as shop, art room and fitness centre; and
- trying to make students fit into the options available at the school when their interests lie elsewhere.

Implementing high school redesign

The last set of stop activities related to implementing this initiative. As they looked ahead to the next year, schools committed to stop:

- being worried about one-time failures;
- trying to implement too many changes at once;
- requiring unnecessary paperwork; and
- using irrelevant modes of communication.

What to continue

Almost all participating schools indicated that they intended to keep building on current strategies over the next year related to:

- teacher practice;
- relationship building; and
- expanding learning opportunities.

Enhancing teacher practice

Individual schools identified their commitment to continue:

- reviewing foundational principles with staff;
- supporting collaborative planning time;
- working toward a common understanding of sound assessment practices with both staff and students;
- focusing school wide professional learning on differentiated instruction;
- seeking meaningful sources of data, both qualitative and quantitative, to inform work;
- monitoring and responding to data from 45-day goals;
- ensuring decisions align with philosophy of school; and
- sharing learning with other schools, and learning from the experience of other schools.

Relationship building

Schools also recognized that relationship building requires ongoing effort. Individual schools identified the following strategies they want to continue:

- emphasizing the importance of building relationships with students as key to personal and academic success;
- engaging with students in hallways and extra-curricular activities;
- increasing opportunities for teachers and students to connect through the Teacher Advisory approach;
- inviting students and parents to be part of the discussions about what constitutes school improvement;
- expanding opportunities for student voice and choice in learning and school governance; and
- communicating with parents and increasing parent involvement.

"We want to continue engaging our school community as a learning conversation about valuing school outcomes and building a definition of what is a meaningful, relevant and engaging learning task."

Student Engagement

"We want to continue getting to know our students, treating each student with respect, and getting to know their individual stories."

Expanding learning opportunities

Individual schools identified a number of ways they want to build on their success by continuing to:

- explore ways to earn credits in flexible time slots;
- build out Career and Technology Studies (CTS) pathways and increase opportunities to offer specialized courses by collaborating with other schools;
- meet individual needs by creating personalized (versus individualized) programming;
- organize multi-grade sessions and opportunities;
- offer tutorials and dedicated help sessions;
- offer flex sessions with an emphasis on academics by creating opportunities in all subjects for catch-up, review and enrichment;
- schedule mandatory flex time every day;
- hold high expectations of students during flex blocks regarding participation and use of time;
- provide enhanced learning time for students learning English as an additional language;
- explore alternate ways of offering courses, including in the evening;
- link content with students' interests and future plans;
- use project based learning and educational technologies to enhance learning experience;
- offer course recovery opportunities;
- identify alternate course offerings within the community;
- use MyBlueprint.ca as a tool for students to explore and plan for their future; and
- involve students in the feedback loop to give them voice and to learn from their perspectives.

What to start

Most schools focused on one or two new key actions for the coming year. Some of the reported actions involved changing an approach or enhancing a specific strategy, such as these start action examples from different schools:

- develop new approach to Teacher Advisory;
- re-conceptualize Student Support Services to enable students to be more engaged in academic, career and personal planning;
- consider engagement through the lens of Comprehensive School Health;
- provide options to work in additional learning settings during flex time; and
- implement more projects that offer student choice.

Other actions involved social-emotional learning and engaging families.

Social-emotional learning

There appears to be a growing focus on addressing social emotional learning, including the development of resiliency and self-advocacy skills. One school proposed to use the Collaborative Response model as an opportunity to talk about the individual needs of students and identify solutions and supports. At least three schools identified service learning and encouraging students to serve others as a way to enhance students' social emotional learning and connection to the school community.

Engaging families

There also appears to be a growing recognition that student engagement is enhanced when the family is engaged in their child's education. Schools committed to finding more meaningful ways to engage parents, and to keep them informed of the educational options available to their children.

High Levels of Achievement

By focusing on increasing student engagement and quality teaching, the majority of reporting schools were able to increase levels of achievement.

Evidence of success related to high levels of achievement

Schools used a variety of quantitative data to capture their success, including course averages and diploma marks, although actual percentages were not always included as part of their report. Increases that were reported ranged from one per cent to 12 per cent over two years on specific diploma exams.

Strategies contributing to high levels of achievement

In their analysis of results, schools identified a number of strategies as contributing to high achievement, including strategies related to:
- organization and delivery of instruction;
- assessment practice;
- literacy;
- planning for the future;
- holistic supports; and
- professional learning.

Organization and delivery of instruction

Schools identified changes in how they organized and delivered instruction that contributed to student achievement, including:
- increasing opportunities for accelerated pacing;
- providing learning centres and dedicated workspaces for students to access teacher assistance ;
- offering tutorials for specific skills and concepts on an as-needed basis;
- increasing choices in course offerings;
- increasing integration of project based learning;
- developing strategy instruction related to behaviours of academic success such as persistence, communication skills, and self-regulation; and
- providing blended instruction within the classroom.

Assessment practices

The importance of balanced assessment was woven through all three outcomes in many school reports. Schools recognized that strong assessment practices inform and strengthen planning and instruction, and increase student accountability and learning.

High Levels of Achievement

The most frequently cited strategies involving assessment practices, included:

- tracking assignment completion and sharing this information with students;
- developing common assessments;
- offering credit recovery programs that include review and re teaching;
- collaborative analysis of assessment data;
- analyzing diploma exam results and developing goals to address needs identified;
- completing baseline assessments to identify gaps in reading proficiency; and
- organizing showcases of learning to support both assessment and professional learning.

Literacy

Two schools identified a focus on a whole school literacy strategy and enhanced reading instruction as contributing to high levels of achievement. One school had a learning interventionist to support literacy and numeracy skill remediation.

Planning for the future

Schools reported an increased focus on career and post-secondary planning, including:

- planning for transitions;
- goal-setting activities;
- students developing individual graduation or post secondary plans; and
- strengthening partnerships that will connect high school experiences with relevant business, community, and post secondary partners in science, technology, engineering, math and the humanities.

Holistic supports

Schools identified a number of key supports that had a positive impact on student achievement, including:

- implementing an advisor program;
- tracking student attendance and following up with at risk students;
- developing support plans to assist students in completing courses;
- developing a school policy related to academic improvement;
- implementing a Collaborative Response model or Response to Intervention approach; and
- collaborating with community partners to provide wrap-around services.

Professional learning

Schools identified professional learning as a major contributor to student achievement. Related strategies included:

- setting goals for each department;
- developing learning maps;
- sharing best practices;
- using the Teacher Effectiveness Framework;
- linking teacher growth plans to student learning;
- offering instructional coaching; and
- organizing learning walks.

Challenges related to high levels of achievement

Schools identified a number of challenges related to high levels of achievement through their reflections of unanticipated learning, including:

- difficulties related to assigning a fair grade for cross-curricular projects;
- difficulties students have transferring knowledge to real life;
- level of structure students require for successful self-directed learning;
- diversity of opinion among staff about what mastery learning looks like in each subject area and what 21st century competencies are.

In addition, schools identified challenges related to:

- learner readiness;
- changing assessment practice;
- access to appropriate learning resources; and
- escalating post-secondary eligibility requirements.

Learner readiness

Schools identified a number of challenges related to learner readiness, including difficulties:

- getting students to self-reflect and set high expectations for themselves;
- guiding students through the decision-making process;
- balancing the need to master challenging academic content with the student's need to pursue more personal interests;
- helping students see the relevance of high school, especially in Grade 11; and
- motivating disengaged students who are coping with overwhelming circumstances in their personal lives.

High Levels of Achievement

Changing assessment practices

The need to change assessment practices was identified as a key strategy across all three outcomes. Challenges related to changing assessment practices included:
- overcoming the idea of good enough and striving for standards of excellence for more students;
- overcoming deeply ingrained beliefs about assessment and resistance to the idea of credit recovery;
- reducing over reliance on one or two forms of assessment data;
- identifying relevant and effective literacy assessments that can inform instruction;
- identifying strategies for tracking student progress that are time efficient and create meaningful data;
- creating time for teachers to collaborate; and
- communicating with parents and the community about evolving assessment practices.

Access to appropriate learning resources

Schools noted that with the increased use of blended learning, accessing quality online resources was a challenge. Often, the quality and content of online learning options was not aligned with engaging instructional practices and critical thinking, nor was it accessible for students with learning challenges.

One school identified the challenge of accessing resources for students outside the mainstream, especially students taking Knowledge and Employability courses. This school also noted the challenge of finding relevant work placements to enhance learning.

Two schools noted that accessing resources and materials for project based learning was an ongoing challenge.

Escalating post-secondary eligibility requirements

Two schools noted that increased competition for post secondary admission is resulting in escalating admission requirements. This is creating both logistic challenges for schools and personal challenges for students as increasingly they have to upgrade courses to enter their program of choice, even though they may have demonstrated an acceptable standard or standard of excellence.

Next steps to support high levels of achievement

Based on their findings and evidence, schools were asked to outline their next steps related to high levels of achievement and identify actions they will stop, start or continue over the next year.

What to stop

Only one school identified an action they would discontinue. They committed to ensuring in the coming year that teachers and students in their school would stop working in isolation, and would instead focus on collaboration, sharing, and learning from one another.

What to continue

Actions to support high levels of achievement that individual schools committed to continue over the next year included:
- teaching time management strategies to students through the Teacher Advisory groups;
- offering exam prep sessions in January and June;
- focusing on differentiated instruction;
- exploring assessment and its impact on teaching practice and student learning;
- co-constructing assessment criteria with colleagues and students;
- providing alternate ways for students to demonstrate learning;
- ensuring all teachers know what excellence and rigour looks like in their respective courses;
- supporting new teachers;
- building out Career and Technology Studies (CTS) pathways;
- focusing on student mentorships; and
- challenging staff to make changes that will enhance student engagement and achievement.

What to start

Schools identified new actions in four categories:
- moving to a whole school approach;
- enhancing learner capacity;
- engaging community; and
- implementing high school redesign.

High Levels of Achievement

Moving to a whole school approach

Schools identified a number of whole school approaches they will be putting in place to better support students and academic achievement, including:

- exploring what literacy and numeracy looks like at the high school level;
- developing assessment policies;
- reviewing data about at risk students earlier in the school year;
- encouraging collaboration between different subject areas to discern where competencies and skill development are common;
- providing more targeted approach to tutorials;
- implementing explicit focus on literacy in all classes;
- identifying opportunities for cross-curricular learning;
- analyzing diploma results at a deeper level;
- developing teacher teams that review and interpret data for the purpose of improving achievement;
- creating dedicated space for guided study;
- using the Learning Commons in innovative ways; and
- strengthening transition processes from junior to senior high.

Enhancing learner capacity

A number of new actions involved providing opportunities and supports to increase learner readiness, including:

- supporting the development of soft skills;
- teaching students metacognitive skills so they can be more self directed in their learning, assess their own level of learning, and create their own action plans for improvement;
- providing more project based learning opportunities;
- using teacher collaboration time to discuss and plan for at risk students; and
- developing new interventions to support gaps in reading and literacy.

Community engagement

Three schools committed to increasing community engagement through the following actions:

- encouraging teachers to embrace the role of collaborator;
- putting checks in place to ensure communication between stakeholders is complete; and
- looking for opportunities to include community experts and the business community.

Implementing high school redesign

Schools shared a number of new actions they will be starting, including:

- implementing better measures to track the progress of initiatives;
- making time to regularly reflect on progress;
- pairing new teachers with mentor teachers; and
- sharing successes at the school, jurisdictional and provincial level.

Quality Teaching

Reporting schools linked increases in student engagement and achievement results directly to quality teaching. The three factors most frequently cited as supporting quality teaching included:

- collaborative planning and problem solving;
- school wide focus on improving assessment practices; and
- job embedded professional learning and sharing of best practices.

"We sometimes forget that the most valuable resources are within the walls of our own schools … because those who work within our schools are able to take their professional experiences and combine them with their deep understanding of the context within which they work. Context is central to how we implement the principles of high school redesign. We should, therefore, be taking the time to learn from our colleagues, not just informally, but also taking opportunities to formally observe their practice, understand their process, and offer constructive feedback. It is a mutually beneficial relationship."

Quality Teaching

Evidence of success related to quality teaching

Schools used anecdotal stories and school authority surveys to provide evidence of:

- increased levels of collaboration across departments, schools and school authorities;
- enhanced teacher confidence related to responding to the needs of all students in the school;
- greater teacher participation in decision making;
- expanded teacher leadership roles and responsibilities, including learning about the courses they do not teach;
- shift in staff meetings from dissemination of information to collaboration and professional learning; and
- improved teacher attendance.

Schools monitored how collaboration time was used, and this record became part of their evidence of increased collaboration. For example, schools reported that:

- teachers used given time to observe classes, team teach and implement cross curricular teaching practices; and
- teachers used 10 half-days of collaborative time to participate in action research and explore new teaching practices and classroom strategies with peers.

One school used the leadership team's analysis of the impact of reduced classroom time on teaching and learning as evidence to evaluate effectiveness of strategies and inform future planning.

At least one quarter of the reporting schools identified a school wide focus on assessment as a key driver for improving instruction. School leaders observed that when this focus is in place, teachers demonstrated a deeper understanding of formative assessment and there was an array of innovative and effective assessment strategies in place across the subject areas.

Other positive evidence of teachers' increased understanding of assessment included:

- an increase in the number of common rubrics, marking guides, and tasks collaboratively developed by teachers;
- common language used around assessment;
- collaborative strategies, including the creation of virtual folders to share assessments between teachers;
- diversity of assessment options available for students, including alternatives to multiple choice and written response;
- staff collaborating during professional learning time to develop new strategies for demonstrating learning and how to interpret and personalize assessment information; and
- willingness of teachers to share best practices.

Schools reported that year end sharing among staff demonstrated shifts in thinking about assessment and teaching strategies. Classroom observations confirmed shifts in how teachers taught and assessed.

Quality Teaching

Strategies to support quality teaching

Embedded collaboration time

The importance of collaborative planning time in contributing to quality teaching was acknowledged by over 50 per cent of reporting schools.

In 2014/2015, schools across the province reported increased collaboration among teachers within subject areas, between subject areas, and generally throughout the school. In 2015 2016, collaboration continued to be an important theme but schools reported more formalized processes, such as collaborative learning time embedded in the weekly timetable.

Schools continued to focus on data analysis as a collaborative effort. Staff engaged in data review sessions to identify students at risk and develop intervention and follow-up plans. Staff also analyzed diploma exam results and used this information to set goals.

A number of schools made changes to the structure of their leadership team in an effort to increase support for collaboration and job embedded professional learning. One school identified learning leaders in four key areas: literacy; assessment; meaningful relationships; and flexible learning environment/personalization.

Another school piloted alternative structures to the traditional high school department head model. At least three schools explored instructional coaching.

Schools also looked at collaboration opportunities beyond the immediate school environment. Two schools collaborated with feeder school to support transitions from Grade 9 to Grade 10. At least one reporting school partnered with another school to develop project and assessment tools. Another school hosted a professional learning day that allowed high school staff to connect with and share best practices with colleagues teaching at the elementary and junior high level.

Evolving assessment practices

As with the other two outcomes of student engagement and high levels of achievement, a major theme for quality teaching was assessment practices. Schools identified a number of actions and strategies including:

- reviewing and implementing school authority's principles of assessment;
- developing and implementing a school assessment plan (or reviewing and updating the school assessment plan);
- developing common language;
- creating grade book blueprints;
- sharing formative assessment practices;
- sharing student work at all professional learning community meetings;
- offering alternatives to multiple choice and written response for demonstrating learning;
- building common rubrics and tasks;
- using professional learning days to develop new methods for demonstrating learning and interpreting and personalizing assessment information; and
- using the Understanding By Design approach to support balanced assessment.

Robust professional learning opportunities

Professional learning continued to be a key driver for high school redesign. Increasingly, professional learning is job embedded, involves all staff or significant groupings of staff, is collaborative, and happens over time.

"Unlearning is our means of professional learning. That is, adjusting or abandoning dated practices that have become taken-for-granted aspects of traditional high school programming."

Quality Teaching

Strategies shared by reporting schools included creating time for teachers to observe other classes, team teach, and implement cross curricular teaching practices.

Professional learning often had a focus that was robust enough to address all three outcome areas, and be relevant to all subject areas. Schools reported professional learning sessions focused on:
- co operative learning;
- Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (for students learning English as another language);
- Understanding by Design; and
- Universal Design for Learning.

Professional learning communities continued to be a key strategy for supporting quality teaching. Examples of focus areas for these learning communities included:
- project based learning;
- teaching English as another language; and
- Google Classroom.

> "The ability to try an idea, then incorporate it, and then discuss it with others was invaluable."

> "Being able to try new approaches and learn with other staff made it easier to take these new learnings back to the classroom."

Challenges to quality instruction

The challenges schools identified around quality instruction tended to be about attitude and readiness for change. Schools acknowledged that evolving assessment practices continued to be a philosophic challenge for some teachers, students and parents. They also observed that some students have difficulty using feedback that is provided to them.

Identifying effective methods to measure growth in relation to student engagement and quality teaching was also identified as a challenge.

The final challenge identified was that of responding effectively to a diverse student population. Schools are committed to ensuring that students are supported in each and every classroom, and they acknowledge that this can be challenging.

> "Teachers need to be able to provide scaffolding for independence for students who are excelling in the curriculum, while providing structured support and guidance for those students who require remediation or targeted supports."

Quality Teaching

Next steps for supporting quality teaching

"Learning, teaching and leading continually evolves. As teachers and leaders, we are uniquely positioned to support the transformation of teaching in our school and district."

Schools were asked to outline their next steps related to quality teaching by identifying specific actions they will stop, start or continue over the next year.

What to stop

Schools committed to more collaborative and reflective practice by stopping the following:

- teaching in isolation;
- acknowledging only successes, and missing out on learning from mistakes, unanticipated learning, provocative questions, and challenging situations; and
- assuming that those "we've always done them" practices are contributing to student achievement.

What to continue

Actions that individual school committed to continue over the next year included:

- monitoring and responding to key achievement data and student feedback;
- supporting teachers through meaningful professional learning;
- focusing on improving assessment practices;
- supporting discussion in how to build relevance in Humanities and Mathematics curricula;
- leveraging expertise by using our own staff as presenter and coaches;
- supporting action research by providing relevant resources and supporting teachers in formulating clear questions that will help track progress; and
- rethinking staff meetings, growth plans, and how to get the most from classroom observations

What to start

Schools identified a number of new actions for the coming school year, including:

- explicitly linking school and school authority based professional development around the foundational principles and underlying philosophy of high school redesign and the Teacher Quality Standard;
- observing quality teaching at other schools;
- being more intentional around the collection and analysis of data from a variety of sources to guide and improve practice and inform decision making;
- sharing and analyzing data with whole staff;
- initiating planning;
- developing common department growth plans to guide and monitor the effective use of weekly collaborative time;
- supporting a whole-school literacy initiative;
- increasing visible learning in the classroom and around the school;
- developing a critical friends protocol to provide collegial feedback that supports ongoing and continuous improvement; and
- using in-house experts to provide professional learning.

In addition, the following topics were identified for future professional learning:

- mentoring;
- helping students set goals; and
- feedback techniques.

"We continue to work on creating a professional culture that harnesses collective expertise and ensures collective responsibility for learning. We see the value of developing trust within our school and the greater system so that teachers feel safe to take risks as their roles evolve---and that we can celebrate and learn from both successes and failures."

Foundational Principles

An extensive literature review identified nine foundational principles for school teams to consider as they developed and implemented redesign strategies to meet their schools' unique context. These interconnected principles include:

- Mastery Learning
- Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum
- Personalization
- Flexible Learning Environments
- Educator Roles and Professional Development
- Meaningful Relationships
- Home and Community Involvement
- Assessment
- Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe

As part of their reporting for 2014/2015, schools were asked to identify the specific foundational principles they used to support their work in each of the three key outcomes: student engagement, high achievement and quality teaching. This is helping to validate the relevance of the foundational principles to the ongoing work of high school redesign.

Engaged Students

Flexible Learning Environments was identified by the majority of respondents as a key foundational principle for increasing student engagement.

In addition, over half of the participating schools identified Personalization and Meaningful Relationships as supporting increased student engagement. The other six foundational principles were also cited, but to a lesser degree.

"We believe that students rise to the high expectations of teachers they trust."

"Personalization is underpinned by strong, authentic relationships between students, teachers and other school members."

Foundational Principles

High Levels of Achievement

Half of the schools reported that Mastery Learning was a key principle for supporting high achievement.

The principles of Flexible Learning Environments and Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum were also cited as key by almost half of the respondents. In addition, Personalization and Assessment was identified by over one quarter of participating schools. The other four foundational principles were also cited, but to a lesser degree.

> "Efforts are made by teachers to ensure that curriculum is enhanced through daily connections to authentic research, current events, and relevant social issues."

Quality Teaching

The foundational principle of Educator Roles and Professional Development was identified by over half the participating schools as key to supporting their work related to quality teaching.

> "We see ourselves at a tipping point. We can maintain the status quo or take a risk and conceptualize every facet of our school as a means to transform what high school might look like."

Assessment and Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum were identified by one-quarter of the participating schools. The other six foundational principles were also cited, but to a lesser degree.

Emerging Trends

This round of redesign stories revealed five emerging trends related to student engagement, high levels of achievement and quality teaching.

1. *Integrated planning:* High School Redesign is becoming an integrated component of school and school authority planning. Related strategies, actions and foundational principles are being embedded successfully in many three year education plans, and the work of redesign supports and aligns with other key initiatives at the school, school authority and provincial level.

2. *Connecting to life and work:* Schools are creating more opportunities for students to explore career options, plan for post secondary, and connect with the community. There is a growing awareness that when students have the end in mind, day to day school experiences becomes more meaningful and motivating.

3. *Responding to learner diversity:* Many schools are beginning to proactively address the issue of learner readiness. Rather than perceiving diversity as a barrier to programming, schools are providing a range of supports, from time management tutorials to increased structure during flex time, to ensure all students are successful.

4. *Honouring student voice:* Schools are increasingly recognizing the importance of trusting student voice and are creating authentic ways for students to share their experiences, perspectives, suggestions and feedback. Schools are also committing to letting students know how their feedback was used to inform school planning and decision making.

5. *Building understanding:* Schools are relying more on building positive relationships with students and collecting local data to inform instructional planning and educational decision making. Focusing on local data creates opportunities to get to know students as learners and identify results in a timely manner. This increased understanding is creating learning environments and experiences that are more student-centred.

The High School Redesign initiative is an ongoing process. As new schools join each year, they have an opportunity to build on the collective understanding and experience highlighted in this report.

The results and learning from High School Redesign are also informing provincial policy development and program planning. This will ensure the evolution of Alberta's education system more effectively supports students in achieving their full potential.

Conversation Guide

Student Engagement (pp. 7 to 16)

- What reported evidence has the most resonance for you?
- Was there any type of evidence that surprised you or that you had not considered before?
- What ideas in the Strategies section validate what your school or school authority is currently doing?
- What strategies in this section could potentially be a new direction for your school or school authority? Why?
- What strategies would you like to know more about?
- Which of the identified challenges has your school or school authority also experienced? What did you do to overcome this challenge?
- Which of the next step actions do you think have the most potential to make a positive difference? Why?

High Levels of Achievement (pp. 17 to 22)

- What reported evidence has the most resonance for you?
- Was there any type of evidence that surprised you or that you had not considered before?
- What ideas in the High Levels of Achievement section validate what your school or school authority is currently doing?
- What strategies in this section could potentially be a new direction for your school or school authority? Why?
- What strategies would you like to know more about?
- Which of the identified challenges has your school or school authority also experienced? What did you do to overcome this challenge?
- Which of the next step actions do you think have the most potential to make a positive difference? Why?

Quality Teaching (pp. 23 to 28)

- What reported evidence has the most resonance for you?
- Was there any type of evidence that surprised you or that you had not considered before?
- What ideas in the Quality Teaching section validate what your school or school authority is currently doing?
- What strategies in this section could potentially be a new direction for your school or school authority? Why?
- What strategies would you like to know more about?
- Which of the identified challenges has your school or school authority also experienced? What did you do to overcome this challenge?
- Which of the next step actions do you think have the most potential to make a positive difference? Why?