

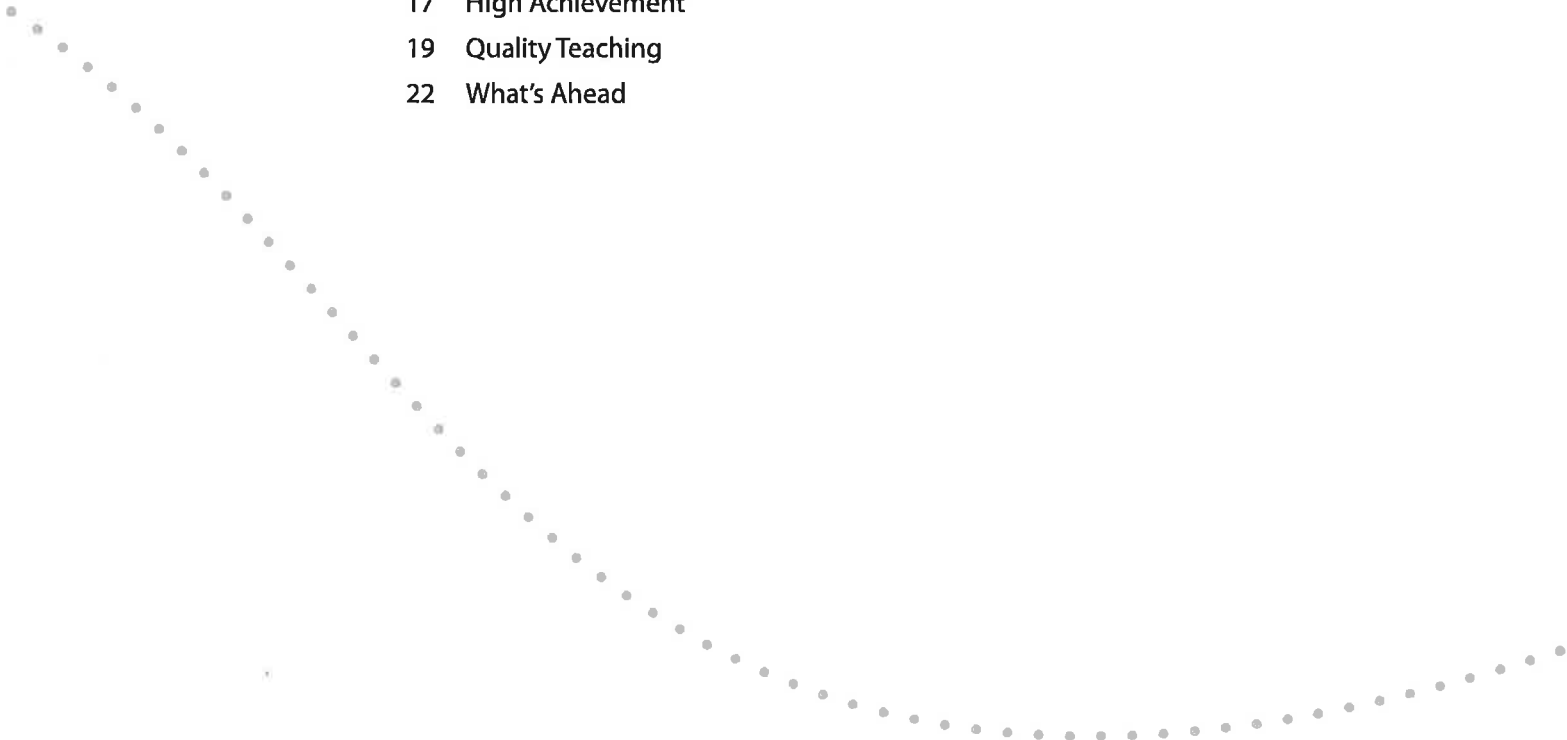


MOVING FORWARD WITH HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN

FALL 2015

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# HIGHLIGHTS

47%

- Since 2013, more than 150 high schools across Alberta have engaged with the Moving Forward with High School Redesign initiative. This report shares insight from the 71 schools that joined in 2013–2014.
- Key outcomes of high school redesign include engaged students, high levels of achievement and quality teaching.
- Making student engagement a priority is seen as a driver of school change.
- Shifts in instructional practice designed to increase student engagement were noted. Of the shifts identified, project-based learning was the most frequently cited promising practice.
- Professional development opportunities are an important part of the redesign process. Schools are moving toward an intentional approach to professional development that involves all staff, builds shared understanding and is job-embedded.
- Getting to know students better reduces discipline issues and increases awareness of the need for mental health supports.
- Led by teachers, schools are empowering students to take ownership for their own learning and they are exploring ways to support this evolution.
- Effectively communicating to students and parents about how and why teaching and learning is changing is seen as essential and ongoing.

# CONTEXT

This report summarizes progress-to-date in Moving Forward with High School Redesign—an innovative, grassroots initiative designed to focus on creating responsive, student-centred approaches to 21st century learning, including core competencies such as collaboration, communication, innovation, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving.

The purpose of the report is to share the learnings, insights and strategies that are resulting from the initiative and making a difference for students and teachers across the province.

Moving Forward with High School Redesign is built on work done by 27 schools in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project. This 2008–2013 project focused on increasing learning options for high school students by eliminating the mandated requirement for 25 hours of instruction per credit.

The results of the project were encouraging, and school leaders across Alberta expressed support for increased flexibility and autonomy. They noted that the initiative should move ahead intentionally, encouraging both shared learning and accountability.

As a result, Moving Forward with High School Redesign is about shifting our mindsets to focus on learning as the driver and determiner of student success. It is about creating space for teachers to be innovative and focus on designing learning opportunities centred on students rather than seeing learning parsed into definable outcomes (courses) to be managed by a teacher for a specific group of students in a specific amount of time.

The shift to a more student-centred approach happens as a number of key practices are put in place, including personalized learning, intentionally developing meaningful relationships, creating rigorous and relevant learning opportunities, and supporting mastery learning.

In spring 2013, each of the 67 schools joining Moving Forward with High School Redesign created a redesign plan focused on three outcomes: engaged students, high levels of achievement and quality teaching. Individual project plans reflect the fact that while schools share common goals, high school redesign is based on local needs and priorities.

For the 2013–2014 school year, 67 schools participating for the first time were asked to reflect on each of the key outcomes to identify successes, unanticipated learnings and next steps. By sharing their stories, schools are not only documenting their progress, they are creating opportunities for others to benefit from their experience and insights.

Throughout the Moving Forward with High School Redesign initiative, Alberta Education is working alongside jurisdictions and schools in a coaching model designed to support continuous improvement in each school. Results from the initiative will also inform the work of the ministry in the area of policy recommendations.

The following are the nine **foundational principles** school teams considered as they developed and implemented redesign strategies to meet their schools' unique contexts.

- 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



# ENGAGED STUDENTS

Although student engagement, high levels of achievement, and quality teaching are inter-related and mutually supportive, preliminary data from participating schools show that making student engagement the key focus has a number of benefits.

When schools begin with increased student engagement, they are more likely to use achievement data to make more informed student-centred decisions on everything from scheduling and course offerings to service learning projects and instructional strategies.

Committing to increased student engagement is also a powerful driver for changing teacher practice.

Student engagement begins 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 nonacademic activities, strive to meet formal requirements of schooling and make serious personal investments in learning.

Alberta Education High School Completion Strategic Framework

**Student voice:** Student voice through any engagement activity is about supporting students by providing multiple ways to share their experience, opinions, and ideas. It can be featured in all aspects of their class work, from students participating in small group conversations to students joining in on developing school policy. We know that student achievement and engagement will increase when students have more ownership of their school community and of their learning.

—Engagement Branch, Alberta Education

## Honouring student voice

At least one quarter of schools that contributed to this report are focusing on student voice as a starting point for enhancing student engagement. The Tell Them From Me (TTFM) survey is the most commonly used tool by these schools to gather student input. In some cases, schools are involving students in reviewing the TTFM data and collaborating on plans based on the analysis. A number of schools are also using (or planning to use) Google surveys to collect additional and ongoing feedback from students.

Additional strategies to increase student voice include focus groups and advisory groups. For example, one school has an advisory group in which five teams (each comprised of a teacher, a student advisor and two administrators) meet on a weekly basis to discuss the attendance, academic and nonacademic needs of students.

Schools recognize that the better they know their students, the more they know their students' real needs and strengths. They also report that, when given the opportunity, students are eager to be more involved in school decision making, including determining topics for flex days, choosing the focus of service learning projects, and providing ideas for how to better structure personalized learning time. For example, one school noted high levels of participation in focus groups and believed this was a result of students feeling listened to and empowered.



As a result of tapping into student voice, schools note a number of successes related to increased student engagement, including:

- students being better able to advocate for their own learning; and
- students and teachers describing school culture as more welcoming and positive.

### **NEXT STEPS** for honouring student voice

The majority of schools identify at least one next step for incorporating more student voice to inform the redesign process in their school.

Strategies include:

- using Tell Them From Me surveys to get feedback on recent work in specific areas such as Flexible Learning Environments, Mastery Learning and Personalization;
- inviting student leaders to facilitate focus groups to create deeper dialogue with students on key school issues;
- exploring new process models, including online collaborative tools, to deepen conversations on what needs to change in high school;
- meeting with students in grade-level focus groups;
- scheduling regular student surveys (e.g., twice a year);
- exploring advisory groups; and
- involving students in repurposing of Teacher Advisory groupings and planning for better use of this time.

“ Student survey results improved from last year in most categories, which is not surprising considering how often we asked for their feedback and acted on their recommendations and encouraged them to take on leadership roles in and around the school. ”

## Using flex blocks to increase learning opportunities

### Flex block:

a block of time in the school day or school week when students have the opportunity to make decisions to guide their learning in areas of need or interest.

The majority of participating schools are using some form of a flex block. These flex blocks vary in duration and frequency, as well as purpose. The goals differ from school to school but most often include the following: enhancing relationships, expanding course options, improving diploma and final exam results, and reducing student stress.

Schools acknowledge the importance of the language used to describe the flex blocks. Over the school year, new names evolved to better reflect the specific purposes of flex time.

*For example:*

- Self-Directed Learning to Personalized Blended Learning
- Teacher Advisory time to Student Engagement time
- Flex Friday to Focus Friday.

Regularly scheduled (i.e., one-to-five times per week) flex blocks tend to focus on building relationships with Teacher Advisors, success planning, and providing time for additional academic support, targeted tutorials, or assignment completion. Half-day sessions tend to focus on Career and Technology Studies (CTS) modules.

Some schools organize one-day events that offer students a variety of options. These alternate learning days are usually scheduled one-to-three times during a school year.

Schools use a number of different schemas to organize the activities in these one-day events. For example, one school organizes around the three focus areas:

- remedial learning;
- emergent learning; and
- divergent learning.

Another school uses these descriptors:

- recovery;
- enrichment; and
- inspiration/innovation.

Activities during full-day flex time typically include a combination of opportunities, such as project-based learning, exam rewrites, intensive study sessions, peer tutoring, unit-specific make-up teaching and CTS modules.

At least one quarter of participating schools report that when flexible opportunities are made available, many students know what they need to enhance their learning.

Evidence of this includes:

- students asking for specific sessions (e.g., study skills, test taking, essay writing);
- students taking on additional courses or projects during spares;
- students using individual learning time to access support services; and
- high levels of voluntary participation for personal learning time.



### NEXT STEPS for flex blocks

All schools using flex blocks identify at least one aspect they will be refining over the next year. Many of these refinements involve logistics, such as adjusting the timing, duration or focus of blocks, as well as refining the purpose, communicating more intentionally with students and parents about the purpose, and building in accountability measures that students will understand and respond to positively.

Individual schools are also looking at:

- moving to multi-grade groupings;
- finding activities that are more engaging for English language learners; and
- working to expand student perceptions of flex time as opportunities to go deeper, rather than only for remediation or catch-up.

Schools using full-day conference-type flex times are exploring ways to:

- reduce logistical challenges (including more effective use of software programs to streamline registration);
- improve student participation rates; and
- gather and use student feedback to improve events.



## Creating connections through Teacher Advisory models

“Our school tracks every student and a Teacher Advisor meets each week with all students—with the goal that no students will fall through the cracks and simply fail or disappear.”

“A significant percentage of our students identified that they didn’t have a personal connection with at least one adult in our building. This result was surprising to our teaching team. So, we are looking at re-purposing our Teacher Advisory (TA) groupings for the coming year—involving students in that process, and designing more purposeful TA time.”

About one quarter of participating schools are using a Teacher Advisory model to strengthen positive relationships between teachers and students. Typically each staff member is assigned a cohort (ranging from 14 to 30 students), and they meet regularly—either individually or in small groups. Dedicated meeting time ranges from 30 minutes every day to an informal check-in once a week.

The role descriptions for Teacher Advisors (also called Success Teachers or Graduation Coaches) vary from school to school. All participating schools describe the focus of this professional mentoring relationship as planning for success. In three schools, portfolio planning is a focus through the use of digital tools such as the website Learning Clicks or the digital portfolio *My BluePrint*.

Teacher Advisors may monitor attendance and academic performance (including assignment completion), and communicate with parents. Some Teacher Advisors also teach a Learning Strategies course to their advisory group.

One important observation made by a number of schools is that as students develop more open and trusting relationships with teachers, the need for mental health supports becomes more obvious. As a result of this, more schools are looking at how they can better support students with mental health issues and how they can partner with community services and agencies to better support students and their families.

Schools report that the Teacher Advisory model increases student ownership of their learning. It creates opportunities for students to participate in creating their own learning plans, developing self-advocacy skills, and setting goals.

A number of schools reported that students are also more involved in developing their own Individual Program Plan (IPP) goals. For example, one school described how all students with IPPs meet with each of their teachers to discuss their needs and accommodations.

### NEXT STEPS for Teacher Advisory models

All schools currently using Teacher Advisory models are committing to refining this relationship-building strategy by:

- clarifying the role of the Teacher Advisor; and
- identifying tools to support student planning such as *My Blueprint*.

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## Providing additional academic supports

The majority of schools are focusing on providing additional academic supports to targeted groups of students. Schools are also offering students a choice in the kinds of supports, including:

- small group instruction;
- tutorials;
- one-to-one tutoring;
- peer supports; and
- additional time for assignment completion.

One school is using strategic scheduling of tutorial times (i.e., 30 minutes at the beginning and end of the school day) to create a culture of arriving early or staying later to seek assistance.

« *Students and parents noted improvement in quality of life at home because students are getting work done at school and are able to access the help they need, when they need it.* »

At least one quarter of participating schools are offering one-to-four blocks a week where students can seek individualized help. One school noted that scheduling this support time during regular instruction time allows students to use breaks between class for refocusing and connecting with other students.

The number of students who voluntarily access extra support vary from school to school, ranging from 32 to 92 per cent of the student body. Different schools have different perspectives on these numbers: some schools express concern and want 100 per cent uptake. Other schools see participation as an option and are satisfied with the current rates.

### Flexible dismissals

One school described how having flexible dismissals creates opportunities for additional support. Students who master the outcome can leave class early and the remaining small group receives targeted tutoring.

### Response to Intervention:

Response to Intervention is a multi-tier approach to early identification of students with learning and behaviour needs.

–RTI Action Network

### Response to Intervention

At least four schools use a Pyramid Response/Response to Intervention approach to structure how and what sessions they offer for additional academic support.

### Prep sessions

At least three schools are exploring the value of offering preparation sessions for diploma courses, particularly for mathematics.

**Credit recovery:** an opportunity for students to continue their progress in a particular course beyond the scheduled semester, rather than giving them a failing grade and having them retake the course.

**Collaborative Response:** The Collaborative Response Model outlines how schools can utilize collaborative team meetings, assessments and a pyramid of interventions to respond to the needs of students.

–Jigsaw Learning

### Credit recovery

At least one quarter of participating schools identify the availability of credit recovery (also called credit rescue, course recovery or continuous learning) as a successful strategy for engaging (and re-engaging) students who might otherwise be disengaged, stressed or discouraged by academic failure. Creating supportive opportunities to retake part of a course (or redo an assignment) or have additional instruction before rewriting an exam, is a source of encouragement for many students.

### NEXT STEPS for providing additional academic support

At least one quarter of participating schools identify the need to focus on increasing student ownership of learning. Examples of strategies proposed as next steps include:

- each student developing an individual plan mapping out his or her high school and post-secondary options so he or she has a direction and a purpose for learning;
- promoting the development of self-advocacy skills
- helping students understand their personal learning strengths and strategies; and
- developing intervention plans for students who do not engage well during flex time.

At least four schools expressed an interest in exploring how a Response to Intervention or Collaborative Response model could be used to encourage students to take increased ownership for their own learning.

School teams also report that increased academic engagement and supports are decreasing disciplinary issues.

“ Student conduct issues in classrooms have been reduced to essentially zero. In the past two years we have not had a single student sent from class for misbehaviour. We knew that students would be more engaged, but we did not anticipate this level of improvement. ”



## Increasing Career and Technology Studies learning opportunities

About half of the participating schools used flexible scheduling specifically to increase the number and range of Career and Technology Studies (CTS) course options available to students.

Schools are using a number of strategies to do this, including:

- collaborating with neighbouring schools;
- making flexible half-day blocks available for CTS/Work Experience credits;
- organizing day-long intensives for a variety of subjects including Cooking, Woodshop, and Personal Health and Safety; and
- creating opportunities to complete CTS modules outside of regular school hours.

### Linking learning to career options

In addition to expanding CTS offerings, schools are also looking at new ways to introduce students to potential career options. The goal is that students will be better able to make connections to future careers and begin linking their learning to the real world.

Examples of strategies schools are using to do this include:

- expanding Work Experience opportunities;
- supporting participation in the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP); and
- providing opportunities to participate in field trips to industries and businesses.

### **NEXT STEPS** for linking learning to career options

Over half the schools identify the importance of strengthening the school-career connection and they are proposing a number of new strategies to do this, including:

- regular visits to post-secondary open houses and local career fairs;
- school visits from post-secondary staff to speak to students and answer questions; and
- connecting students with professionals in various fields, including faculty from local colleges and universities, to participate in hands-on experiences and professional conversations.

## Making course offerings more flexible

The majority of schools report more flexible course offerings. Successful examples include alternative delivery strategies, such as:

- course work completed over the summer with face-to-face instruction the week before school officially begins;
- flexible completion options so students can accelerate course completion or have extended time to complete courses;
- course work offered through Google+;
- course work organized around the flipped classroom concept (a form of blended learning in which students learn content online by watching video lectures on their own, with face-to-face class time used for discussion and problem solving); and
- bundling outcomes from two grade levels into one course with one teacher.

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### Flipped classroom:

Flipped Learning is a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter.

–Flipped Learning Network

School leaders report that these kinds of alternative course structures allow teachers to build relationships with students over a longer period of time and give teachers an opportunity to create more connected learning experiences for students.

At least one quarter of participating schools report increased opportunities for blended learning. This often involves collaboration with outreach services or online learning providers in their region. Schools report that these types of collaborations offer students more support (i.e., the flexibility of a self-paced course paired with access to in-school instruction on an as-needed basis) and the number of registrations for these courses has increased greatly. A number of students are accessing these alternative opportunities during their spares and in addition to full course loads.

One school observed that alternate delivery enables student success because, in their experience, students considered at risk of failure and dropping out tend to be more engaged by alternative delivery strategies.

### Cross-curricular planning

The majority of schools identified that course offerings are more varied and engaging as a result of cross-curricular planning.

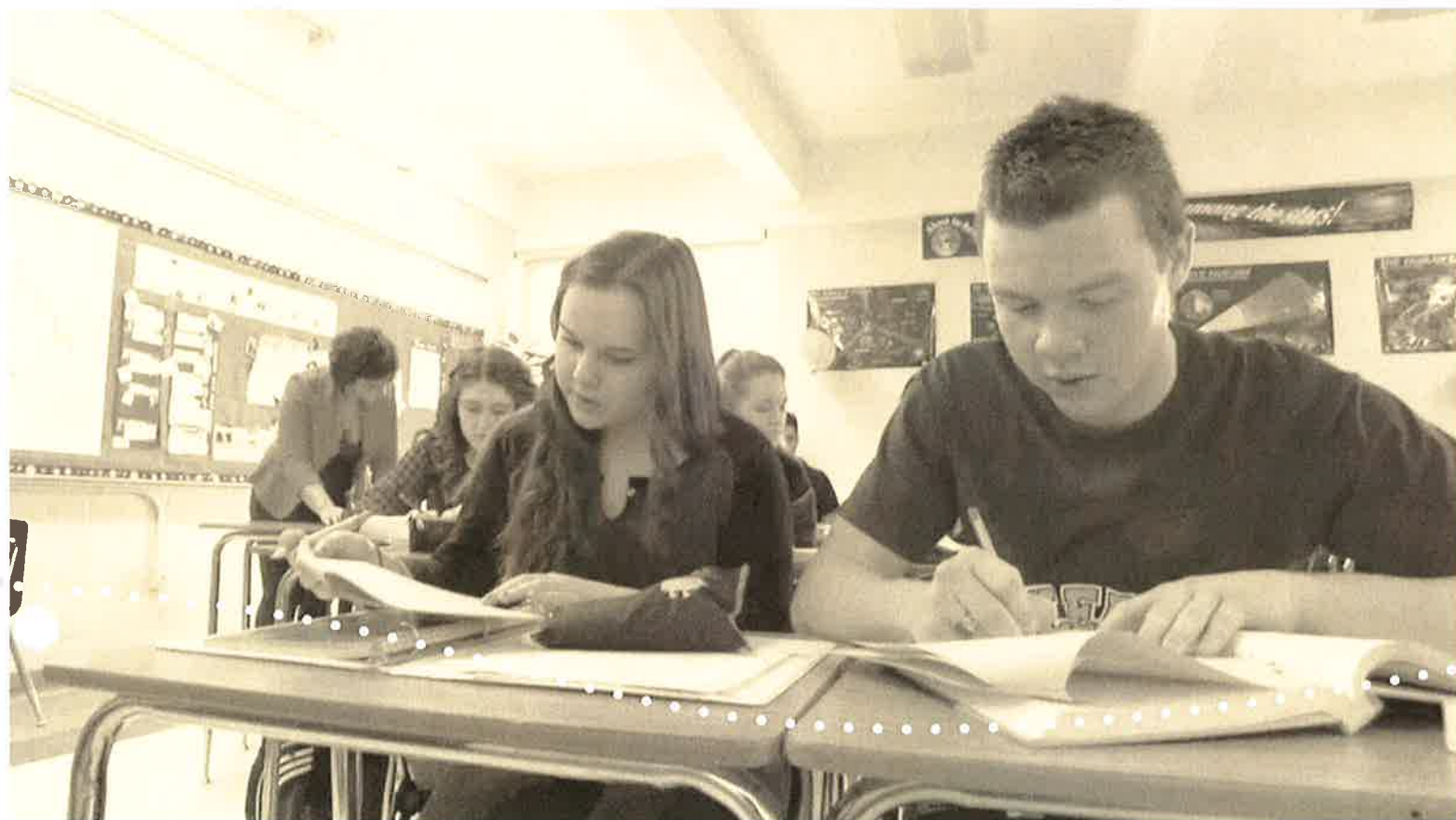
Examples of successes include:

- Tourism/Cosmetology course collaboration;
- Agriculture, Foods, Food Preparation, Construction and Design Studies teachers collaborating with the Eco Vision Club and community members to run a green house, with a culminating trip to Costa Rica; and
- Electro Technology and Design Studies offered as an extra-curricular club opportunity to earn credits in both courses.

### **NEXT STEPS** for making course offerings more flexible

Almost every participating school identified the need to continue increasing the range of learning opportunities for students. Specific strategies that will be explored include:

- offering a broader range of off-campus experiences to spark interest and expand possibilities;
- increasing student access to technology;
- increasing the number of CTS courses offered; and
- exploring dual credit options.



## Facilitating co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities

At least one quarter of participating schools are using co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities to create positive connections and diversify learning opportunities. These schools report high levels of engagement in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as positive indicators of student engagement. Activities range from regular TED TALK screenings (focused on health and wellness) to cooking clubs and fitness activities.

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In at least one school, students identified that the challenge of managing their day-to-day workload at school and part-time jobs prevents them from participating in school clubs. A number of schools are using flexible scheduling to create opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular activities during regular school hours. This increase in participation is an example of how students personalize their high school experience and create positive connections with other students and adults in the school.

Schools note that students who are involved in extra-curricular activities are more likely to have success in the classroom.

### Service learning

Schools report service learning as a successful strategy for engaging students and promoting ethical citizenship. At least two schools partnered with The Centre for Global Education to provide opportunities for students to develop both voice and agency with respect to local, national and global issues.

### NEXT STEPS in facilitating extra-curricular and co-curricular opportunities

A number of the schools who are focused on extra-curricular and co-curricular opportunities are also committing to increasing student voice and choice in developing new offerings.



## Shifting instructional practice to increase student engagement

Schools note that as teachers get to know their students as learners, they are more likely to make shifts in instructional practice to increase engagement.

The following types of instructional shifts, linked to increased student engagement, were noted across schools:

- availability of different text formats (e.g., novels, graphic novels, digital books) to better address students' learning preferences and needs;
- increased opportunities for personal choice of project topic and demonstration of learning;
- more opportunities for discussion and self-reflection; and
- increase in the number of active learning activities, such as science labs and social justice projects.

“Both teachers and students participated in gallery walks where projects are presented and discussed. Through the sharing of these projects both teachers and students learn from one another.”

“Students recognized how access to quality technology supported their learning both in and out of the classroom. These results reinforce the success of moving to a one-to-one learning environment and the efforts of our teachers to make their courses and learning supports available in Moodle and other web-based platforms.”

### Project-based learning

Project-based learning was the most frequently-cited instructional practice for increasing student engagement. At least one quarter of participating schools also identify this as something they will be exploring further over the next year.

Schools describe a number of project-based related strategies that enhance student engagement, including:

- providing student choice;
- creating cross-grade groupings;
- providing engaging knowledge-building opportunities, such as field trips and presentations from community experts, including universities; and
- incorporating challenges and competitions, such as science fairs or students working in small groups to create an innovative product or solution, as culmination activities.

### Using technology for learning

Schools identify the use of technology for learning as contributing to increased student engagement. They report that students are showing greater interest in using technology to enhance their own learning and as a collaboration tool.

School leaders also note that many teachers are using technology in new and more engaging ways to enhance their instruction and support students doing online learning. For example, using the Google Apps for Education suite enables teachers to give timely feedback on student work.

### Changing assessment practices

At least one quarter of participating schools report that changes in formative assessment practices are leading to an increase in student engagement.

Changes in practice include:

- increasing student participation in assessment of their own learning; and
- ensuring students have a deeper understanding of the purpose of assessment.

For example, in one school, students demonstrated understanding of assessment by giving presentations to parents and the school council.

At least three schools identify more flexible assessment practices as leading to more positive relationships with teachers. These improved relationships resulted in more opportunities for formative feedback and a reduction of behaviour issues.

### Increased staff collaboration

The majority of schools identify staff collaboration as a significant factor that leads to increased student engagement.

For example, one school describes how staff work together to clearly identify what engagement could look like in a classroom (e.g., asking questions, showing perseverance when working on a project, attending student-directed time when needed).

Other schools report teachers working in collaborative teams to plan and teach courses. Advantages include:

- collegial support for differentiated instruction;
- deeper understanding of individual student needs; and
- deeper understanding of a broad range of curricular outcomes.

### NEXT STEPS for shifting instructional practice

A recurring theme for schools, particularly schools that are focusing on assessment, is the importance of communicating these changes in philosophy and practice to students, parents and the community.



# HIGH ACHIEVEMENT

Although Moving Forward with High School Redesign is focused on Grades 10-12, a number of participating schools have various grade configurations, including K-12, 7-12 and 9-12. Many of these schools are using the redesign strategies across the grade levels and are noting improvements in Provincial Achievement Tests for Grade 9. At least two schools noted the advantage of having elementary teachers on their school team to share their expertise with differentiated instruction with their high school colleagues.

By focusing on increasing student engagement and quality teaching, the majority of participating schools were able to gather convincing evidence of high achievement.

The types of data gathered, analyzed and reported included:

- increases in the number of students successfully completing:
  - o higher stream courses
  - o dual credit courses
- increases in the number of students eligible for:
  - o Rutherford Scholarships
  - o awards
- improvements in diploma exam results (and Provincial Achievement Tests for schools with Grade 9 students).

A number of schools included comparisons of diploma exam results from the previous year, noting no change or minor increases. Other schools felt it was too early in the redesign process to see a change in achievement results. No schools reported decreases in achievement.

As schools gather more data, it may lead them to rethink what success means and recognize that they cannot rely on single numbers to tell the whole story.

Although it was not necessarily a goal of redesign, several schools note that, overall, students are earning more credits.

School leaders also identify reductions in:

- mid-term data identifying students at risk;
- course failures; and
- dropout rates.

In their analysis of results, schools link a number of actions and strategies as contributing to high achievement, including:

- graduation/success coach models supporting more students in accessing needed supports;
- credit recovery;
- targeted small group tutorials;
- more opportunities for 1:1 assistance;
- shifts in assessment strategies;
- student goal-setting and tracking plans;
- teachers' willingness to differentiate instruction; and
- shifts in assessment strategies, including the increased use of formative assessment and descriptive feedback.

“ More students are able to pursue academic streams. These students do not necessarily achieve the high academic standings so school average is lowered—success is about successes, not averages. ”

Executive function is a set of mental processes that “... give us the ability to set goals; plan how to complete a project; prioritize tasks; organize time, materials and information; hold and manipulate information in working memory; and to monitor our own progress.”

Meltzer, L. in *Promoting Executive Function in the Classroom*, 2010.

## NEXT STEPS for supporting high achievement

Schools identify the need to continue monitoring and responding to key achievement data, including diploma exam results, Accountability Pillar results, and student feedback from Tell Them From Me surveys. Schools are also committing to using this data to inform planning for future professional learning.

Schools note that executive functioning skills pose a barrier to high achievement for some students, particularly in the areas of time management, using study skills effectively and self-directed learning. Three schools identified the need for professional learning that will build teachers' capacity to foster students' executive functioning skills.

Three schools reflected on the challenge of shifting student and parent perceptions of academic success from less focus on course completion and marks to more focus on mastery learning and fulfilment of personal and career-related goals.

One school noted the need to develop an alternate lens for measuring success that considers the diverse needs of students in the school, particularly when a large percentage of students may have special needs or are experiencing barriers to learning.

Schools also identified that they need to work on helping students and parents better understand and appreciate key concepts around high school redesign and achievement, including:

- high expectations;
- formative assessment;
- second chances (i.e., credit recovery); and
- role of personal and career goal-setting.

Schools recognize the value of additional academic support and at least three schools are committing to finding ways to increase students' access to academic tutoring on an as-needed basis.

One school will be exploring how dedicated literacy blocks can allow students to focus on building skills without the restrictions of assignments.

Schools are also continuing to explore how project-based learning is both a support to and evidence of high academic achievement. School leaders note that having students participate in high-level projects where they generate and analyze their own data creates more rigorous and relevant learning experiences.



# QUALITY TEACHING

“The formation of a Student Centric Learning Team comprised of students, parents, teachers, administrators, school trustees, community and corporate members led to an almost seamless implementation of year one of high school redesign. This group reviewed the research, created a literature review, and participated in the planning, development and implementation of the design. Students, teachers and parents were ready and supportive of the current shifts in education. This resulted in greater engagement of the stakeholders in student learning and an increase in intentional collaboration amongst teachers.”

Participating schools are focusing on increases in student engagement and achievement results as evidence of quality teaching. Student feedback is also gathered through surveys, focus groups and conversations to document how students perceive the impact of changing instructional practices on their learning and engagement.

School leaders across the province report increased collaboration among teachers within subject areas, between subject areas and generally throughout the school.

In addition, school leaders describe a number of changes in behaviour and professional conversations that they consider evidence of (or contributing to) quality teaching. Examples include observations of how teachers are:

- having professional conversations that are more student-centred;
- learning about courses they do not teach;
- better able to work with any student in the school; and
- receptive to mobile and web-based technology implementation.

School leaders also consider the number of presentations done by staff at meetings, schools, conventions, specialist councils and other professional learning events as evidence of quality teaching and increased understanding of instructional practices.

School leaders note that teachers are actively using research to improve their practice. Many staff meetings and professional learning activities are now focusing on sharing and analyzing research and related data.

In their analysis of results, school leaders link a number of actions and strategies to high-quality teaching, including:

- increased access to and use of regularly-scheduled collaborative planning time;
- increased cross-curriculum planning;
- increased use of:
  - o learner profiles;
  - o differentiated instruction strategies;
  - o targeted and flexible grouping of students;
  - o project-based learning;
  - o student-teacher conferencing;
  - o peer tutoring;
  - o English as a Second Language (ESL) benchmarks to inform instruction for students learning English as another language;
  - o strategies to better support First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners; and
  - o technology as a tool for learning, innovation and collaboration.

At least one quarter of the participating schools identify a school-wide focus on assessment as a key driver for improved instructional practice. School leaders observe that when this focus is in place, teachers demonstrate a deeper understanding of formative assessment and there are an array of innovative and effective assessment strategies in place across the subject areas.

Other positive evidence of teachers' understanding of assessment includes:

- an increase in the number of common rubrics and tasks collaboratively developed by teachers;
- common language used around assessment; and
- collaborative strategies, including the creation of virtual folders to share assessments between teachers.

School leaders also note that staff members developed capacity through partnerships. Examples of learning partners include The Centre for Global Education, The Buck Institute and Alberta Health Services.

### Challenges

School leaders emphasized that common instructional planning time, although logistically challenging to schedule, is essential for collaboration.

Three schools note that school leaders must be sensitive to teacher wellness, and that changing expectations can be a potential source of teacher stress.

## NEXT STEPS for supporting quality teaching

Schools identify the need to continue monitoring and responding to key achievement data and student feedback.

At least one quarter of participating schools credit visits and talking with other schools on the high school redesign journey as helpful professional learning. An equal number of school leaders committed to creating opportunities for their staff to collaborate with other schools over the coming year.

Examples of other next steps include:

- continuing to build common assessments and better assessment practices;
- expanding use of English as a Second Language (ESL) Benchmarks;
- making transitions easier and more seamless between semesters for students;
- increasing visible learning (e.g., posting big idea questions for each unit, displaying infographics illustrating scope and sequence of curriculum); and
- beginning or expanding project-based learning.

Examples of topics for future professional learning:

- restorative practices;
- universal supports for all learners;
- differentiated instruction;
- project-based learning;
- positive behaviour supports;
- diverse learners; and
- teacher wellness.

# WHAT'S AHEAD

As a grassroots initiative that encourages shared learning and accountability, high school redesign is providing compelling evidence that the high school experience in Alberta is evolving; not only for students, but for the teachers, school leaders, and the communities that support them.

The stories of high school redesign reflect five emerging trends related to student engagement, high achievement and quality teaching.

- 1. Collaboration**—between teachers, students, schools and communities—is resulting in more responsive and supportive learning experiences for students.
- 2. Many students** are experiencing school as a more welcoming, caring and purposeful learning environment.
- 3. School staff** are demonstrating a stronger commitment to reaching all learners.
- 4. School staff** are seeking out and using data and research to monitor progress and inform decision making and instructional practice.
- 5. There is a deeper and growing understanding and implementation of formative assessment practices** that make a positive difference for students.

High school redesign is a continuous process. Schools are continuing to learn from their own experience, and learn from one another. This report is also a learning opportunity to spark professional conversations and inspire action.

The reflections in this report are evidence of a growing commitment to higher levels of student achievement and innovation in high schools across the province. The evolution continues.







Alberta   
Government