



LEADERSHIP TIMES

*The newsletter of the Council on School Administration
of the Alberta Teachers' Association*

June 2009

President's Message

Garnet Goertzen

I am very encouraged by the formal release of two publications that will validate the important work of school administrators and highlight the realities and complexities of our roles. Education will be front and centre in the news over the next few months, and the management of schools will be central to much of the conversation.

You have recently received the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline*, released by Alberta Education (available at <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/resources.aspx>). This publication has been in development for several years, and the draft document has been in the hands of a wide range of stakeholder groups for review, feedback, consultation and ratification. The intention of those who have worked on the guideline is to raise its status to that of a standard.

In the last few months, I have been serving on a committee hosted by Alberta Education, to develop a framework to support

the implementation of the guideline and to bring it to the level of a standard equivalent to the Teaching Quality Standard in regulatory status. This is exciting committee work, mainly because Alberta Education recognizes the demands on school administrators. At the same time, the government's workforce planning committee is projecting a high number of principal retirements, which will jeopardize the collective administrative experience in Alberta schools at a time when the role holds less appeal for the next generation, because of the daunting workload responsibilities and the scarcity of resources. It is apparent that the ministry is well aware of the significance of our jobs and the benefits of highly qualified administrators to student learning.

The *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* provides us with the evidence and descriptors of our multifaceted job, and its immense demands and responsibilities. It could also serve as a lever in establishing manageable workload expectations and appropriate supports to ensure that principals can do their jobs effectively.

Leadership in Alberta Schools: The Experience of School Administrators, a research report by Ann Sherman and Paul Stevenson, is due to be released about the same time you receive this issue of *Leadership Times*. The report validates what school leaders have been saying in recent years. The fact that our concerns are affirmed by current Alberta research gives administrator issues more credibility. This research clarifies the good, the bad and the

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ugly of school administration, and will serve as a foundation for policy recommendations to the ATA, Alberta Education, school districts and university preparation programs.

In our work life, we are pulled in numerous directions with a force that does not allow us to fully complete a task before rushing into the next one. We might like to thoroughly document the issue we just solved, but instead we move to the next problem, hoping to pre-empt it before it consumes us. As we all know, being a school administrator can feel like being in the vortex of a black hole, a bottomless pit of responsibility from which we might never escape.

We became school administrators because we wanted to make a difference, to be involved in critical decisions and to make our schools the best they can be. We probably all went in blind to the immense responsibilities and the time required to be an advocate for students, parents and staff, as well as managing the day-to-day crises that drive how we spend most of our time. Educational leadership, teacher supervision and visionary leadership usually take a back seat to reactive decisions and our need to make everything run smoothly and to shelter our staff and students from the issues of the moment. But let's not forget why we became school administrators and what we love about our jobs.

The two above-noted publications and their perspectives will be integral to forming thoughts on and responses to the minister's upcoming initiative, *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans*. Share the research, share the job expectations and share the responsibility of shaping the future of education in Alberta.

From the Editor's Laptop

Kerry Coxen

With the start of the new school year, I had a new job: communications officer for the Council on School Administration. I entered this job not knowing what to expect and discovered that the council had high hopes for some changes.

First and foremost, the council was in need of a website. I am happy to announce that our website is now up and running at <http://csa.teachers.ab.ca>. It is still under construction, but I'd like to point out some features:

- The up-to-date events calendar contains upcoming events of interest to administrators, including conferences. If you forward information about an event to me, I will be happy to include it.
- Past issues of *Leadership Times* and *Leadership Update* are available in PDF.
- Under Connecting CSA Teachers are links to some useful sites. If you know of others, please forward them to me.

I encourage you to click around the rest of the site. Please visit often, as the site will continue to grow and become more useful for all of us.

Another of my responsibilities is this newsletter. I have not made any major changes to its format, but you will notice a report from Alberta Education in this issue. We hope to offer this update regularly. Also, we'd like to publish summaries of these or other papers written by our members, if they feel comfortable with that.

I am hopeful that the direction I am moving in meets with your approval. I look forward to continuing to grow in this position.

Report from Alberta Education

School leadership in Alberta has received a lot of attention of late, particularly as a ministry focus. Alberta Education's current initiative to examine the state of school leadership in Alberta and its inherent challenges has emanated from three ministry undertakings:

- Alberta's Commission on Learning report
- School Leadership Symposium report
- Workforce planning framework for action

In 2003, Alberta's Commission on Learning concluded that the research literature and ministry partners agree that principals require a broad repertoire of competencies to successfully fulfill their complex and critical roles within the education system. The commission recommended that a principal quality practice standard be developed. That standard would include clearly stated knowledge, skills and attributes for effective school leadership.

The April 7, 2008, School Leadership Symposium brought together delegates from within the education community (including a number of practising school leaders) and representatives from the public at large to focus on the expectations, roles and challenges of Alberta's school leaders. Delegates identified 20 suggestions, which were grouped into five key themes:

- The attraction, recruitment and retention of school leaders
- The evolving role of school leaders
- Accessible preparation programs for quality school leadership
- Ongoing professional development of school leaders
- A new vision for school leadership in the 21st century

Delegates acknowledged that school leaders require sophisticated and extensive knowledge, skills and attributes in order to

achieve their legislated responsibilities and to meet the expectations of their communities. Among their suggestions were the development of a school leadership framework to guide school leadership programs and policies, and the establishment of a provincial body to undertake research and foster support for and collaboration on school leadership.

The ministry's Workforce Planning Branch anticipates the province's education workforce needs on the basis of projected student populations. Historical trends and projected population rates provide data for predicting the number of school leaders that school authorities will require over the next 10 years. Projections clearly indicate challenges in recruiting and retaining school leaders. The workforce planning framework for action includes strategic policy directions to successfully address such workforce challenges.

The new *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* was announced this spring by Minister of Education Dave Hancock, in a letter to all Alberta principals. The guideline is the ministry-approved version of a draft document titled *Principal Quality Practice*, which has been in circulation across the province since 2006 and is already being used by many school authorities to inform their programs, policies and practices related to school leadership. The guideline is the culmination of a three-year effort by a committee of education stakeholder representatives that included a review of current school leadership research, consideration of principal standards in educational jurisdictions outside Alberta, and extensive consultation with Alberta school principals and other education stakeholders. The guideline defines the role of Alberta principals in the 21st century on the basis of seven dimensions of school leadership, and includes a number of descriptors of effective practices that education stakeholders can use to inform their policies and programs related to school leadership. Practising school leaders, and teachers who aspire to become

school leaders, may use it to identify their professional learning needs. The guideline and other resources for school leaders are available on the ministry website at <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/resources.aspx>.

The release of the guideline represents the first phase of the ministry's continued focus on school leadership. A ministry committee of representatives from Alberta's key education stakeholders (including the CSA) began meeting in December 2008 to develop a school leadership framework. The framework is intended to ensure that all Alberta schools are served by highly qualified educational leaders whose work focuses on the optimum learning and development of all students. It aims to enhance the public's confidence in and support of school leadership in Alberta.

Further information regarding the guideline and the framework is available from Bob Garneau, senior manager, Teacher Development and Certification Branch, Alberta Education, at Bob.Garneau@gov.ab.ca or 780-422-8233 (for toll-free access in Alberta, first dial 310-0000).

News from the Regionals

Peace Area

Rodney Lee

The major event for the Peace Area Regional is its fall conference, held annually in Grande Prairie. At the spring executive meeting on March 5, planning for the fall conference was the main topic of business. PARCSA 2009 will be held on September 14 and 15. The increasing number of new administrators and new teachers in the region led regional members and central office personnel to identify teacher growth, supervision and evaluation as an area of need. Konni deGoeij, CSA's ATA staff advisor, will be presenting the two-day workshop on teacher growth, supervision and evaluation. An evening speaker, to follow the banquet on the first night, has yet to be confirmed.

We joined with the three Grande Prairie-area locals to host a Real Learning First session on March 5. Approximately 60 school and central office administrators; school trustees from six jurisdictions; parents; and representatives from municipal government, the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses heard from Stephen Murgatroyd and Pasi Sahlberg.

A second Real Learning First session, held in Peace River on May 11, was organized by the ATA local, with support from our regional. Stephen Murgatroyd was the featured speaker.

We continue to award a \$500 scholarship each year to a deserving education student on behalf of our members.

The Peace Area Regional continues to be a strong supporter of the CSA. Communication is always a problem in the north, and we appreciate the efforts of our jurisdiction contacts to ensure that information reaches all current and potential members.

Southwest

Holly Godson

The Southwest Regional has been working conscientiously on providing school administrators in the southwest with PD opportunities that build leadership capacity within schools/jurisdictions, encouraging administrators to join the CSA, and working collaboratively with the southwestern ATA locals to promote the Real Learning First initiative.

Engaging in a Conversation: Real Learning First, cosponsored by the regional and the southwestern ATA locals, allowed southwestern Alberta's community education partners to participate in a conversation about what we truly value in our schools and to examine what we consider indicators of success. Stephen Murgatroyd challenged the education partners: "As Alberta enters its second century as a province, it requires imaginative, creative, skilled, focused people who work well across social and cultural boundaries and who can master complexity, engage in dialogue and create the conditions in which communities can thrive." He described international trends in education and outlined examples of Alberta schools attempting to broaden what it means to be educated.

Following the presentation, more than 130 education partners engaged in a conversation around three key questions:

- What do we want from and expect of our schools?
- How do we know if we are being successful in meeting these desires and expectations?
- What education policies and practices will support and encourage the kind of teaching and learning we will need in the next decade?

The evening was successful, and all participants enjoyed the humour and passionate message of Dr Murgatroyd, as well as the dialogue that followed. Business people and superintendents, high school students

and university practicum students, teachers and support staff, farmers and Chamber of Commerce representatives—all actively engaged in a conversation about real learning.

The Southwest Real Learning First Team met on March 23 to discuss and review notes from the evening and the conversations that took place, and to plan where to go next. The consensus was that the Southwest Regional and the ATA locals should maintain their efforts and that the Real Learning First Team should remain intact to continue to advocate for real learning first. The team is currently working on a legacy brochure, based on the conversations at the Engaging in a Conversation evening, to be mailed to all participants and shared with school councils, jurisdictions and community members. The goal is to keep Real Learning First information at the forefront. The team is also working on a series of podcasts and video vignettes of Real Learning First examples, which will be used to promote the initiative to staffs, school councils, administrators and so on. Last but not least, the team will be investigating the potential of bringing real learning to life in the south through a larger-scale PD activity.

Central Alberta

Dave Khatib

On November 20 in Red Deer, the Central Alberta Regional hosted a successful one-day workshop on classroom assessment and grading, with Thomas Guskey. This administrator-focused pre-session and the Central Alberta Regional Consortium's Leading and Learning Conference proved to be a winning partnership. As Guskey pointed out, to make a real difference for students, learning standards and performance assessments must become an integral part of the instructional process at the classroom level. He focused on ways for teachers to set clear learning goals, gather useful information on students' performance, and

document learning progress in the context of modern classrooms.

At the pre-session, we also presented the Distinguished Leadership Awards. It was great to see fellow administrators recognized by their peers. A short biography of each award winner will be included in the next update.

Like most regional specialist councils, we are struggling with getting representation from all school divisions in our area. We hope that this isn't a sign of something we are doing wrong but, rather, an indication of just how busy administrators are.

I would like to acknowledge this year's executive:

- Vice-president—Ian Wilson, Wolf Creek Public Schools
- Secretary—Sonja Dykslag, Wolf Creek Public Schools
- Treasurer—Pat Maschio, Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools
- Communications—Brent Galloway, Red Deer College
- Past president—Carol Johnson, Chinook's Edge School Division
- Member at large—Clint Saunders, Red Deer Public Schools

Central East

Morris Holota

Our highlight this term was Pasi Sahlberg's visit and presentation. Dr Sahlberg met with a small but enthusiastic group of teachers, administrators and parents in the St Paul Regional High School lecture theatre on February 25. He spoke about the differences between educational systems in Finland and Alberta. His audience was very impressed with the social position teachers have earned in Finland, where they are on par with other professionals, such as doctors. Teachers enjoy a reasonable time for collaboration and PD. The educational

bureaucracy there is much smaller than ours, and consequently teachers and parents have a greater say in what is being taught in schools. Overall, the evening was entertaining and informative. For more information about Pasi Sahlberg, please visit his website (www.pasisahlberg.com).

I have created an e-mail group that should reach all school administrators in the central east region, including the following boards: Aspen View Schools, Buffalo Trail Public Schools, East Central Alberta Catholic Schools, Conseil Scolaire Centre-Est, Lakeland Catholic Schools, Northern Lights School Division and St Paul Education Regional Division. I first used this e-mail group to forward information about the Banff Leadership Seminar, held March 26–28. If you did not receive that e-mail, please let me know so that the problem can be corrected. I can be contacted at morris_holota@sperd.ca.

Fort McMurray

Valerie Dyck

In January, we held a supper workshop that had been postponed from November due to the weather. Konni deGoeij, from the ATA, presented "Common and Emerging Issues for Administrators" at a supper meeting on January 20.

At the workshop, we presented Jeff Clow, principal of St Martha School, with our Principal of the Year award. We then nominated Jeff for the CSA's provincial Distinguished Leadership Award.

On March 2, we hosted a Real Learning First event at Keyano College. We had a cocktail/hors d'oeuvres hour for socializing, followed by Pasi Sahlberg's presentation. Approximately 40 people—including educators, school board trustees, local government officials and local business people—came to hear the presentation.



Council on School Administration (CSA)



The CSA advocates for school administrators and speaks on behalf of children through the Alberta Teachers' Association.

The CSA supports the professional development of its members through the creation and delivery of a variety of events and activities. A special program acknowledging contributions to the field of educational administration recognizes and rewards excellence among members at both the local and provincial levels. CSA develops and maintains national and international links with other school administrator organizations. In addition, the CSA promotes lifelong learning and strives to maintain and foster close relationships with the colleges and universities of Alberta. To foster knowledge and professionalism in the field of educational administration, the CSA encourages and supports both theoretical and practical research.

The annual WCEAC conference provides an excellent opportunity for networking and communication among members.

CSA Executive 2008/09

President and CAP Representative

Garnet Goertzen
Bus 780-459-3990
garnet.goertzen@sturgeon.ab.ca

Past President

Kathleen Murphy-House
Bus 780-799-5752
kmurphy@fmcsd.ab.ca

President-Elect

TBA

Secretary

Maureen Ference
Bus 780-826-3323
maureen.ference@nlsd.ab.ca

Treasurer

Eileen McClean
emcclean@telus.net

Banff Leadership

Seminar Director

Lorianne Tenove
Bus 403-253-1881
lorianne.tenove@cssd.ab.ca

WCEAC 2009 Director

Jennifer Lawley
Bus 780-448-5000
jennifer.lawley@epsb.ca

Communications Officer

Kerry Coxen
Bus 780-973-3111
kcoxen@sturgeon.ab.ca

Alberta Education Liaison

Bob Garneau
Bus 780-422-8233
bob.garneau@gov.ab.ca

PEC Liaison

Jim Black
Bus 403-793-2025
jim.black@teachers.ab.ca

ATA Staff Advisor

Konni deGoeij
Bus 780-447-9472
or 1-800-232-7208
konni.degoeij@ata.ab.ca

REGIONAL PRESIDENTS

Calgary

Lindy Arndt
Bus 403-274-6243
lindy.arndt@cssd.ab.ca

Central Alberta

Dave Khatib
Bus 403-346-8951
dkhatib@rdcrd.ab.ca

Central East

Morris Holota
Bus 780-366-3801
morris_holota@sperd.ca

Fort McMurray

Valerie Dyck
Bus 780-799-5752
vdyck@fmcsd.ab.ca

Greater Edmonton

Jeff Johnson
Bus 780-441-6045
johnsonj@ecsd.net

Peace Area

Rodney Lee
Bus 780-831-3061
rodneylee@pwsd76.ab.ca

Southeast

Therese Bullin
Bus 403-527-3730
tbullin@sd76.ab.ca

Southwest

Holly Godson
Bus 403-223-8971
holly.godson@horizon.ab.ca

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