The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Alberta

By Pamela Osmond-Johnson, Ken Zeichner, and Carol Campbell

learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

*learning*forward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Authors and affiliations

University of Regina

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Pamela Osmond-Johnson,
University of Regina

Ken Zeichner,
University of Washington

Carol Campbell,
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE),
University of Toronto

Acknowledgments:

Citation for this work:

Find more reports related to this study at **www.learningforward.org/Canadastudy**

SERIES INTRODUCTION

The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada

Globally, there is a focus on the importance of developing teachers as crucial for supporting students' learning and achievement. Canada has been recognized as a country with high educational performance and there is interest in knowing the approaches to educators' professional learning in Canada. However, there is limited Pan-Canadian data and research available. The *State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada* study (Campbell et al., 2016; 2017) was funded by Learning Forward to address this gap in available research. There are differences in details between and within provinces and territories, between and among different professional groups, across locations and contexts, and for individual educator's needs and their students' needs. Nevertheless, there are commonalities within Canada linked to features of effective professional learning: the importance of combining evidence, inquiry and professional judgement to inform professional learning; the priority of developing teachers' knowledge and practices to support diverse learners' needs; the valuing of a broad range of student and professional learning outcomes; the need for relevant, practical and collaborative learning experiences within and beyond school walls differentiated to professionals' needs; and the role of system and school leaders in engaging in their own learning and supporting teacher and student learning. There are also common challenges: time for professional learning integrated within the work day; inequities in access to, and funding, for professional learning; and contentions in the balance between system-directed and/or self-selected professional learning for teachers. Where there are persisting challenges, inequities and issues, further dialogue and action are required across Canada to raise these priorities and seek solutions. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that Canada's educators and students have access to, and engagement in, the highest quality learning opportunities and experiences. The Alberta case study is an important contribution to the *State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada* study. Thank you to all involved in contributing to the Alberta case study. I hope this report will stimulate further dialogue and actions.

Carol Campbell

Associate professor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Campbell, C., Osmond-Johnson, P., Faubert, B., & Hobbs-Johnson, A. with Brown, S., DaCosta, P., Hales, A., Kuehn, L., Sohn, J. & Steffensen, K. (2017). *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada.* Learning Forward. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward

The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Alberta

From its history of school-led improvement through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) to its consistent high performing status on international measures of student achievement, education in the province of Alberta, Canada, has undoubtedly been the subject of much international attention over the past decade. Featured alongside Singapore, Finland, and Ontario, Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) situate Alberta as one of the world's first fourth-way reformers in innovation and improvement. More recently, Darling-Hammond and Burns (2017) included the province as part of their "Empowered Educators," identifying Alberta as a jurisdiction with a heavy focus on both teacher learning and supporting teacher leadership. Indeed, Alberta has become a system to watch amongst the international educational community. Indeed, within this context, a detailed look at the province of Alberta within the study of teacher professional learning in Canada (Campbell et al., 2016; 2017) is important.

This case explores the experiences of Alberta teachers as we attempt to identify promising practices of professional learning (commonly referred to in Alberta as professional development or PD) and the enabling conditions that sustain them. We focus on the voices of teachers and the school administrators who engage in and support professional learning in their own schools and across school districts. Drawing on a host of publicly available documents and interviews with key informants including representatives from the Ministry and the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA), these experiences are supported by an exploration of the socio-political, historical, and reform contexts that have shaped education in Alberta both in the past and in current times. Here, teacher professional learning takes center stage, a core feature of a new era of curriculum and system reform in the province that began in 2010. As the case demonstrates, professional learning in Alberta has been heavily influenced by more than a decade of government-funded teacher action research under the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI), which has been highly regarded as a successful approach to system-wide school improvement (Hargreaves et al., 2009). Ending in 2014, districts and schools across the province are building on AISI's momentum and facilitating the next generation of collaborative, teacher-led professional learning in Alberta.

In Table 1, we summarize the main findings from the case in relation to the key findings of the overall study of educators' professional learning in Canada (Campbell et al. 2016; 2017)

Table 1:
Summary of Alberta Findings

Key Components and Features of Effective Professional Learning Identified in the Research Literature	Key Findings from the Study of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada	Key Findings from the Alberta Case Study
Quality Content	Evidence, inquiry, and professional judgement are informing professional learning policies and practices.	Evidence and inquiry features prominently in existing frameworks for developing professional learning and in the learning activities of teachers.
	The priority area identified by teachers for developing their knowledge and practices is how to support diverse learners' needs.	Supporting the needs of diverse learners is a priority area in Alberta, alongside an overarching goal of developing great schools for all students.
	A focus on a broad range of students' and professionals' learning outcomes is important.	Student learning is at the heart of teacher professional learning in Alberta; the needs of students drive teachers' learning needs
	The appropriate balance of system-directed and self-directed professional development for teachers is complex and contested.	Teachers in Alberta generally perceive a reduction in their autonomy in directing their own learning over the last number of years.
Learning Design and Implementation	There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to professional learning; teachers are engaging in multiple opportunities for professional learning and inquiry with differentiation for their professional needs.	Opportunities for teacher professional development in Alberta varies considerably with a combination of district-led, school-based and teacher-selected learning experiences.
	Collaborative learning experiences are highly valued and prevalent within and across schools and wider professional networks.	Collaboration is a prominent feature of professional learning in Alberta, both within and across schools and school divisions, as well as on an international level.
	Teachers value professional learning that is relevant and practical for their work; "'job-embedded" should not mean school-based exclusively as opportunities to engage with external colleagues and learning opportunities matter also.	Various forms of "job-embedded" learning both in and beyond the school are developing. Learning alongside students and peers to work on practical problems of practice is highly valued.
Support and Sustainability	Inequitable variations in access to funding for teachers' self- selected professional development are problematic.	High quality professional learning is happening across Alberta, however not every teacher has access to similar quality experiences
	Time for sustained, cumulative professional learning integrated within educators' work lives requires attention.	Teacher workload has challenged educators' ability to find time to participate in professional learning; although some districts and schools are creatively attempting to schedule time for professional learning
	System and school leaders have important roles in supporting professional learning for teachers and for themselves.	The end of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement has further increased the need for system and school leaders to support quality professional learning

The Education System in Alberta

DEMOGRAPHICS

As Canada's fourth most populated province, Alberta is a multilingual and ethnically diverse province with a population of 4.1 million people. Most of Alberta's population is concentrated in its cities and their surrounding suburbs. Much of the population resides in the southern half of the province while the north remains largely rural, and includes many First Nation communities. The provincial capital is Edmonton, Alberta's second largest city with a population of 899,447 in the 2016 city census and Canada's fifth largest city (City of Edmonton, 2016). An entry point to industry and higher education within Alberta, Edmonton is also the sixth most popular city for all immigrants to Canada. The number of immigrants residing in Edmonton more than doubled from 2000 to 2010, prompted primarily by an economic boom, an increasing foreign student population, and humanitarian immigrants.

According to Alberta Education (2016a), as of the 2015-16 school year, 690,844 students attend Alberta's 2,388 publicly funded schools. This represents 97% of the provinces total student population. In 2012, province-wide, the ESL student population comprised about 10% of the total student population (Alberta Education, 2013, p. 10), though this percentage is higher in large metropolitan areas and has recently increased with the influx of Syrian refugees (CBC, 2015). First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) students make up about 9% of Alberta's school aged population (Alberta Education, 2013, p. 10).

Even though Alberta has a strong system of social supports, certain populations and groups of students – FNMI, refugee, and some immigrant children in particular – often exist on the margins of education. They have higher dropout rates, and there is great concern for these students. Mirroring the inequities in the broader society (e.g., in access to jobs that pay a living wage), there are some inequities within the education system between FNMI students, some immigrant and refugee populations, and the rest of the student population, particularly with respect to access to experienced teachers. To attract and retain more teachers in First Nations communities, the government funds an aboriginal teacher education program at the University of Alberta as well as a rural practicum for teacher candidates to experience the rural north. Financial incentives are also available to teachers who agree to teach for a specified number of years in some northern districts. Overall, there has been a strong focus on increasing equity across the system to better service Alberta's increasingly diverse student population.

GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

In Alberta, children can attend public, separate schools (created by a religious minority, either Protestant or Roman Catholic but publicly funded), private or charter schools. Education for First Nations students on reserves, on the other hand, is the responsibility of the Federal government. Roughly 97% of the student population is enrolled in one of the publicly funded schools (either public boards or separate boards).

Public education in Alberta is governed by the School Act, the policy document which establishes and regulates Alberta's K-12 system. The system is overseen by the provincial Ministry of Education, known as Alberta Education. As is the case in all Canadian jurisdictions, the head of Alberta Education is the Minister of Education, an elected official who has been appointed to the education portfolio by the Premier, who is the leader of the governing party. The Ministry is responsible for developing curriculum, overseeing assessment, and setting the policy direction for education across the province, including making provisions for the funding of public education

(which comes from a combination of municipal and provincial taxes). Due to the fluctuating nature of oil prices, which is the province's primary industry, educational funding in Alberta is impacted by the price of oil and gas (in what is referred to as a "boom and bust economy"), with funding for schools varying with the condition of the economy.

Local governance of schools is the responsibility of school districts (also called school authorities or districts). In total, there are 63 publicly funded school authorities: 42 public boards, 17 separate boards, and 4 francophone boards (based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms minority language rights provisions) (Alberta Education, 2016b). Boards are responsible for setting direction across the district through the process of strategic planning, monitoring the implementation of provincial curriculum, evaluating and reporting student progress, and distributing and monitoring financial resources. Boards are governed by a publicly elected board of trustees, who serve as liaisons between the local public interest and government. Trustees hire a Superintendent of Schools to oversee the operational tasks of the board. The superintendent, with assistance from other board employees such as curriculum consultants and instructional coaches, works with schools and the community to ensure that each student can reach their full potential.

All of the approximately 40,000 teachers and administrators employed by school boards in Alberta are required to become members of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), the only teacher organization in the province. Established in 1917, the ATA is responsible for representing its members during the collective bargaining process, in which working conditions, salary, and benefits are negotiated with both the Ministry and the local school board. However, in almost 100 years since its inauguration, the ATA has evolved as a teacher organization to encompass a professional agenda that focuses on partnerships, research, professional learning, and member engagement (Bascia & Osmond, 2013).

For most of Alberta's history, the ATA has had a good relationship with Alberta Education and the Alberta School Boards Association, a byproduct of more than four decades of sustained commitment to education and educational progress under the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party of Alberta. According to other work we have completed in Alberta, we have learned that there also tends to be a lot of lateral movement of staff across schools, districts, administration, the union, and the ministry, which has given individuals experience in different parts of the education infrastructure and has further contributed to the culture of collaboration among different education stakeholders (Bascia & Osmond, 2013; Zeichner, Hollar, & Pisani, 2017).

By 2013, increasing fiscal cuts led to tensions between the ATA and government over several issues, including the Task Force on Teacher Excellence (2014), which was charged with operationalizing policy shifts in education previously outlined though a collaborative consultation process known as *Inspiring Education* (Alberta Education, 2010). A more detailed account of Inspiring Education and the Task Force for Teacher Excellence are the focus of the section below

INSPIRING EDUCATION

In 2008, premier Ed Stelmach commissioned *Inspiring Education*, a collaborative vision-building process to re-imagine education in Alberta through to the year 2030. Utilizing a range of public engagement forums including community meetings, focus groups, online conversations, and a provincial forum, over the course of one year, over 4000 Albertans offered their perspectives on the future of education in Alberta. Overseen by Minister Ed Hancock and drawing on expertise from a working committee from across the education sector, a 22-member steering committee released their final report

in April of 2010 (Alberta Education, 2010) that laid out the 3E's, a new vision for how educated Albertans would describe themselves in 2030: engaged thinker, ethical citizen, and entrepreneurial spirit.

Figure 1:
Alberta's Framework for Student Learning

Source, Alberta Education, 2010

From 2010 to 2014, the Progressive Conservative government partnered with stakeholders from across the province to actualize *Inspiring Education* through a variety of reform initiatives. This included a Ministerial Order on Student Learning to decree the new vision, an ongoing regulatory review of the Education Act, changes to provincial student assessments to increase teacher autonomy, the establishment of Blue Ribbon Panel on inclusive education, and the launching of a dual credit strategy where students can earn post-secondary credits during high school.

Stemming from Inspiring Education, in August of 2013, the government began the massive process of redesigning the entire provincial curriculum to incorporate 21st century competencies such as critical thinking and citizenship (Alberta Education, 2014). A collaborative prototyping process was adopted with the education partners to develop drafts of new curriculum outcomes, assessment activities, and teaching resources in each of six subject areas (Arts, Language Arts, Science, Math, Wellness, Social Studies). Insights from municipalities, business and industry, and FNMI partners were also being considered.

Another initiative was high school re-design, a pilot project with 100 schools engaged in transforming the high school experience for teachers and students through changes in structure, culture, pedagogy, and leadership. One key feature of this redesign was the incorporation of flex blocks into the school day where students and teachers work together to develop alternative learning opportunities based on student interest. The intention was to engage students in a curriculum that is flexible, allowing students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways.

Formed in 2013 by Minister Jeff Johnson, the Task Force for Teaching Excellence (2014) was to outline what the new vision would mean for the future of the province's teaching profession. Comprised of 16 members including parents, teachers, academics, and elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA's), the Task Force released their final report in May of 2014. Specific recommendations included updating the provincial teaching standards, increasing the length of teacher education practicums, overhauling teacher and administrator evaluation processes, implementing province-wide mentoring and induction programs, removal of administrators from the ATA and changes to the ways in which issues of teacher competence and conduct where managed – the last two of which were met with considerable opposition from the ATA. Furthermore, concerns about the pace at

which educational change in the province was occurring were being raised by parents, students, and teachers alike and, leading in to the election of 2015, government paused both curriculum renewal and efforts to address the Task Force recommendations.

On the heels of the massive overhaul in education and a struggling economy, the New Democratic Party (NDP) succeeded the Progressive Conservative party in the fall of 2015, forming the first new government in Alberta in over 40 years. With a new Minister, David Eggen, the NDP announced the Teaching and Leadership Excellence in Alberta (TLEA) initiative that would be charged with beginning to act on some of the Task Force recommendations around teaching and leadership practice standards. A joint-project of the education partners, in March of 2016, the TLEA released drafts of an updated *Teacher Quality Standards* (TQS) (Alberta Education, 2016c) in addition to new documents around practice standards for school leaders and school authority leaders (Alberta Education, 2016d). Currently under review by the education partners, it is suggested that the new standards will come into effect in 2017. It is expected that, once adopted, the new standards will serve to inform the supervision and evaluation processes, with the expectation that teachers and school leaders demonstrate proficiency in the competencies related to their specific roles. There is, however, much more of a focus in Alberta on

teacher development and professional learning then there is on the punitive forms of teacher evaluation that are found in some international jurisdictions.

In June of 2016, Minister Eggen announced that the government would once again begin the process of curriculum renewal, outlining a six-year time frame during which the changes are to occur (French, 2016). Recognizing the need for capacity building to carry out this work, the Ministry and the ATA signed a memorandum on understanding in September of 2016 to formalize a partnership between the Association and Alberta Education to co-lead on curriculum renewal going forward. A framework document to guide the design and implementation of the new provincial program of study has been recently released (Alberta Education, 2016e), outlining the common principles and standards that will inform the development of new curricula. Localized development and implementation of the various initiatives will undoubtedly require opportunities for teachers and school leaders to collaborate and learn together as they go about achieving the broad goals of *Inspiring Education* into action across Alberta schools. This was also noted in the recommendations of the Task Force for Teacher Excellence. The current status of teacher professional learning in the province is the focus of the section that follows.

Teacher Professional Learning in Alberta

Consistent with its emphasis on student learning, Alberta maintains a strong focus on career-long learning for teachers and school leaders. While there is no minimum number of required professional learning hours, both the current and revised quality standards for teachers and school leaders list engagement in and support of continuous professional learning as core competencies.

With respect to teachers, there is an expectation that they take an active role in determining their own learning needs, seeking out opportunities to collaborate with other teachers to build their collective accountability and individual capacities. Consistent with other changes under Inspiring Education, the draft of the new *Teacher Quality Standards* does place emphasis on professional learning that focuses on the use of technology to enhance teaching, learning, and inclusive education, particularly around FNMI education. For school leaders, the new standards emphasize the important role administrators play in leading a learning community and supporting professional learning by "enabling meaningful, collaborative learning opportunities for teachers and support staff" (Alberta Education, 2016f, p. 5).

Like most Canadian jurisdictions (Campbell et al., 2016; 2017), opportunities for teacher professional learning in Alberta varies considerably; a combination of district-led, school-based and teacher-selected learning experiences. Professional learning under each of these categories is guided by as set of planning processes. At the district level, each district is required to submit a three-year strategic plan to Alberta Education. This plan outlines the major goals of the district and, as such, district-led professional learning typically serves to aid the district in meeting these goals. Similarly, schools must submit yearly improvement plans to the district which guide the content of school-based professional learning.

The *Teacher Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation Policy* (Alberta Education, 2015a) requires all employed teachers in the province to complete an annual growth plan (see Appendix K for a sample) that outlines learning goals and activities the teacher intends to engage in over the next year. The teacher may identify a combination of district, school-based, and self-selected learning experiences to facilitate the plan. The plan must be approved by school principals at the beginning of each year and is reviewed for progress at year's end, serving as the driver for that teacher's professional learning for the year.

While there is room within the teacher growth plan and the school improvement plan to identify specific learning goals that are not related to the district plan, alignment across the systems makes for more a comprehensive approach to professional learning. In many instances, district goals are broad so that schools and individual teachers have some autonomy in choosing learning opportunities that meet their specific needs while still falling under the vision of the district. As we discuss further later, the ATA has raised some concerns around the erosion of teacher autonomy in choosing professional learning over the past few years (ATA, 2014).

For many years, teacher growth plans and school-level professional learning were often connected to the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI), a multi-stakeholder project that encouraged teachers and local communities to collaborate and develop projects aimed at improving student learning. Beginning in 2000 and ending in 2014, collaborative groups of teachers were encouraged to develop school-based action research projects that would address local needs and lead to improved student learning (Parsons and Beauchamp, 2012). Teachers were responsible for all aspects of their projects including design, collection and analysis of data, sharing of findings as well as fiscal accountability.

Partners in AISI included Alberta universities, Alberta Education, and Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) as well as other stakeholders such as the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA). With each 3-year cycle meant to build upon the successes of the previous cycle, AISI supported over 1,800 teacher-led professional learning projects that were guided by the values of collaboration and connection. Although participation was voluntary, 95% of schools took part in the project and, according to Sahlberg (2009) it would be "difficult to find anywhere a comparable change effort that would be of the scale and overall magnitude of AISI" (p.87). Described as a "Learning Mosaic" by Hargreaves and associates (2009) in their comprehensive evaluation of the project, at its core AISI was a variety of teacher led action-research projects aimed at improving student learning at the local level. It was job-embedded, collaborative, engaged teachers in collecting and analyzing data, and was heavily supported with allocated time and other monetary resources.

The success of AISI was measured from several perspectives. One obvious measure was based on student achievement, which increased across the province, most notably with the students considered to be at risk (Parsons, McRae, & Taylor, 2006). Other success included the development of curricular resources, improved understandings of pedagogy, an increased focus on student outcomes, and the emergence of teachers as leaders in Alberta's education system (Gunn et al., 2010; Hargreaves et al., 2009; Parsons and Beauchamp, 2012; Parsons et al., 2006). According to Shirley & McEwan (2009), it was the movement away from a conservative and traditional route of professional growth through individualism and a "more collective understanding of peer learning" (p. 55) that made the AISI model so successful.

Despite these successes, after a series of budget cuts to education, money to support AISI was ended in 2014. In other research we completed in Alberta (Zeichner, Hollar, & Pisani, 2017), a representative from ATA described what they referred to as the "projecit-itis" resulting from AISI:

> The initiatives would start and then they would stop after the three-year cycle and then we would start running into difficulties because it was difficult not only to scale the work across the province, but also because it became difficult to sustain the initiatives after the funding was moved to another project or another focus area. And so over time we had a number of key school leaders who became frustrated and thought it would be far better just to have the money, the AISI money, rolled into general operating funds and that way there would be more local flexibility to do the work.

However, on the heels of 14 years of school-based, teacher-led learning practices, many of the commitments and ideas that were associated with the project live on in the current system in other ways. Overall, the collective sum has been a change in thinking about how professional learning is conceived and delivered to its teachers (Alberta Education, 2012).

Early in cycles 1 and 2, those participating in AISI projects began to recognize the role that collaborative learning practices could have in changing how curriculum was taught in Alberta. Teaching is historically seen as a solitary endeavor with teachers working by themselves to plan and deliver curriculum. However, many of the AISI projects identified community building among school staff as key outcomes in their proposals. "Teachers morale, skills, and sense of professionalism improved as they worked in teams to plan lessons, integrate technology into curriculum, develop assessment tools, share teaching strategies, and implement school improvement initiatives" (University of Alberta, 2004, p. 12).

Building on the insights gained from AISI, The ATA (2010) developed a framework for professional development that identified three components that should be present in all professional learning opportunities:

1. **Process** – professional development should encourage teachers to explore, reflect critically on their practice and take risks in the planning and delivery of curriculum.

2. **Content** – professional development should utilize current research highlighting effective teaching and learning strategies

3. **Context** – regardless of the professional development activity, a teacher's professionalism is recognized as well as their judgment in determining their needs.

The ATA also partnered with Alberta Education, the ARPDC, the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA), the College of Alberta School Superintendents and Alberta Universities to develop the document *A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning* (2006). The importance of developing a shared understanding of the goals of professional learning is emphasized to ensure that it is meeting the "needs of all parties and addresses unique contextual issues of the classroom, school, and jurisdiction" (Education Partners, 2006, p. 2). The document goes on to outline the process of implementing an evidence-informed planning cycle where continuous formative data collection serves to inform the professional learning planning process.

Figure 1:
Alberta's Professional Development Planning Cycle
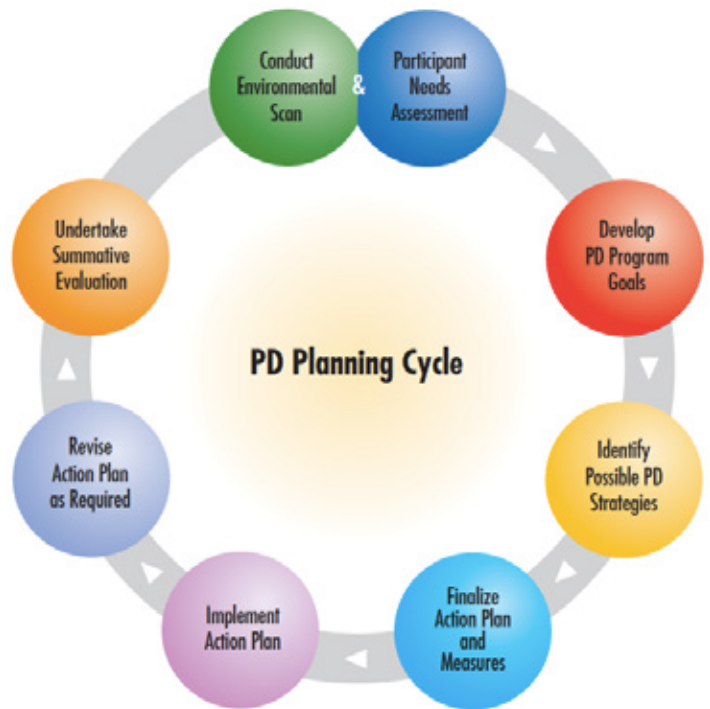
Source: Education Partners, (2006)

The education partners also stress that planning for professional learning should encompass a broad range of activities that balance the needs of the individual, the school, and the district. To achieve the above, professional learning in Alberta takes many forms: action research, classroom observation, mentoring, coaching, study groups, conferences, curriculum development, post-secondary courses, workshops, seminars, and collaborative learning experiences. Details about the prevalence and nature of various kinds of professional learning are provided in the next section.

Access & Provisions to Professional Learning

In many districts, access to a minimum number of paid professional learning days is guaranteed through the collective bargaining process at the local level. These days are typically a combination of district-led and school-based initiatives. Some collective bargaining agreements also allow professional leaves for study purposes at a university. Individual teachers in many ATA locals can also apply also for monetary assistance to partake in conferences, workshops, seminars, or other self-selected professional learning through staff development funds financed by the district. A summary of the professional learning clauses in a sample of school districts if provided below:

Table 1:

Examples of Allocated Professional Learning Time Noted in Collective Agreements

|	
Calgary School District No 19 (2007-2012	Professional improvement fellowship fund for academic studies or to conduct research projects.
	Staff development fund totalling $1,150,000 administered by the local ATA branch. Teachers can apply to this fund for financial assistance to support self-selected PD.
	Two non-teaching organizational days to be determined by school staff and three non-teaching professional activity days to be determined by school staff.
Calgary RCSSD No 1 (2012-2016)	A professional growth subsidy of 400 substitute days for PD, with the option for schools to buy up to an additional 225 days.
	A fund of $300,000 to be jointly administered by the Professional Growth Subsidy Committee and the Superintendent. Teachers can apply to fund for monetary support for PD initiatives.
Edmonton Public School District (2012-2016)	Professional Improvement Leaves may be granted to individual teachers.
	The district calendar includes three school-based and two district-based professional development days per school year to enable classroom teachers to collaborate with their colleagues in a professional learning community setting to benefit student learning and mitigate teacher workload and to address the goals of their Personal Professional Growth Plan.
	A staff-development fund of $500,000 shall be provided to the local ATA to enable teachers or groups of teachers to access funds to support costs incurred in professional development activities.
Edmonton CSSD No 7 (2012-2016)	Professional Improvement Leaves may be granted to individual teachers but no specific designation for PD days in the CBA.
Fort McMurray School District No 2833 (2012-2016)	The Superintendent or designate may approve leave with full pay to attend conferences, conventions, or other meetings and to visit other schools.
Red Deer School District No 104 (2012-2016)	Professional Improvement Leaves may be granted to individual teachers. A staff-development fund of $300,000 shall be provided to the local ATA to enable teachers or groups of teachers to access funds to support costs incurred in professional development activities.
Red Deer CRD No 39 (2012-2016)	The board will pay up to 75% of tuition for university based programs. Teachers can receive a $525.00 subsidy to partake in personal professional development. Teachers are given two days per year to take as PD days and the PD must adhere to the Professional Growth Plan.
Grand Yellowhead Public School Division No 77 (2012-2016)	The Employer shall annually contribute:
	a. 35% (thirty-five percent) of 3.5 times the fourth year maximum of the salary grid as of September 1 of each year of this agreement; plus
	b. 65% (sixty-five percent) of 3.5 times the fourth year maximum of the salary grid as of September 1 of each year of this agreement times Total FTE as of September 30th of each year of this agreement times 0.331% (three hundred and thirty-one thousandth percent), to a professional growth fund

Outside of the days allocated in collective agreements, some districts have established their own professional learning polices, re-organizing the school calendar to create additional time for job-embedded teacher collaboration through early-release of students or whole days where students are not attending school. For instance, since 2011, Fort McMurray Catholic Schools have modified their school day to provide teachers with two professional learning days per month to form self-selected study groups or teams to work on problems of practice or investigate new approaches to teaching (Fort McMurray Catholic Schools, 2013). The modified calendar does not reduce instructional time for students but provides time during the regular school day for teachers to collaborate and engage in dialogue with their colleagues, with the goal of improving outcomes for students. As we highlight in our promising practices, beginning in 2015, Fort McMurray Public schools has followed suit, scheduling 14 professional learning Fridays into the regular school calendar, 9 of which are reserved for school-based professional learning.

Utilizing a different approach, Black Gold School Division has partnered with the local branch of the ATA to form a joint committee on professional learning. Together they have developed a framework for professional learning that combines school division, school-based, and teacher-led professional development over a series of 8 days throughout the school year (Black Gold Teachers' Local #8 and Black Gold Regional Division No. 18, n.d). Four of these days are school based, two are self-directed, and two are days where district, school, and teacher-led activities are combined.

Figure 3:
Black Gold Professional Development Framework
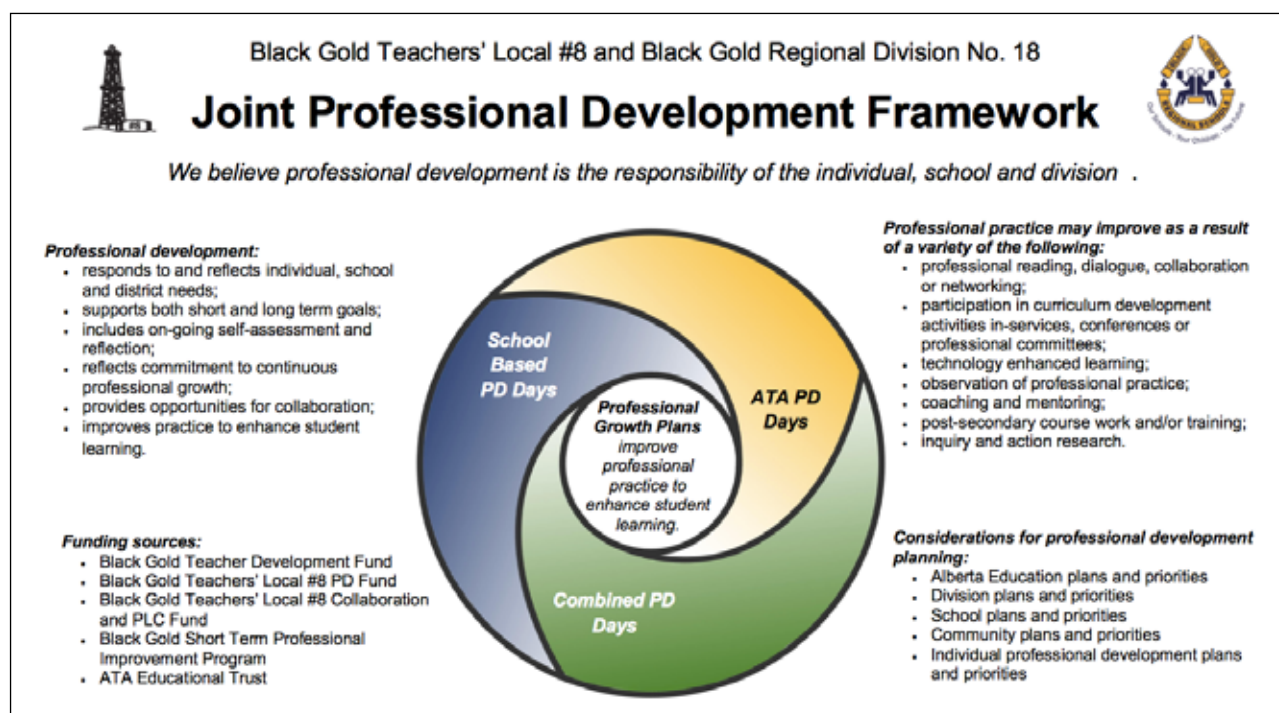
Source: Black Gold Teachers' Local #8 and Black Gold Regional Division No. 18 (n.d).

Each school in the district is required to develop a learning plan to outline their goals and how the school-based days are to be used to work towards these goals. Likewise, teachers (or groups of teachers) submit plans to their principals to outline the self-directed learning they will be engaging in a minimum of 5 days prior to the activity. Moreover, individual schools in other boards have worked with the district to develop similar opportunities for teacher-led collaborations, even when there is no board-wide policy in place.

Teachers can also choose to participate in self-selected teacher professional learning opportunities provided by the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (ARPDC), which were established in 1997 to serve as hubs for professional learning services at the local, regional, and provincial level. Each of the six consortia is governed by a board of directors, comprised of representatives from the ATA, the Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta Education, and other stakeholders. While much of the work of the consortia is to develop and deliver mandated professional learning on behalf of the Ministry, as an Executive Director explained, the work of the Consortia is multi-faceted:

> We help to bring that provincial mandate to life but we are also charged with being responsive to our regional needs. So I need to know and understand in my zone what is important in their learning agendas that I can also help and support. So it might be something that sits outside of government priority areas or it might be something that is more deep around one of the priority areas. It's really about supporting professional learning at multiple levels. (Executive Director).

Teachers choosing to attend learning opportunities outside of those funded by the Ministry can apply for substitute coverage through the Staff Development Fund (or comparable provision) with their local ATA or their school board. Some opportunities are

shorter in length, but most are ongoing in duration:

> One of the things that we really know about teacher learning and its impact on student learning is that the shot in the arm doesn't really do it. It might give them exposure to new ideas but if we want it to become deeply embedded in practice the more we learn together over time the greater our abilities to think about impacting actual practices and student learning in classrooms. So we've started designing more of our learning opportunities for teachers with that notion in mind. So we've designed collaborative communities and so it's the teachers coming together, cross-jurisdictional, because it's that collaborative time together, where we can know and understand some of the best of the best around whatever the theme or topic is for our collaborative. (Executive Director, ARPDC).

The ATA is another source for teacher professional learning in the province, with the majority of revenues derived from members' fees allocated to supporting professional learning. Aligning with their strong focus on member engagement, a representative from the ATA explained that part of the role of the federation is to support the learning of their members:

> The ATA's commitment to professional learning simply reflects the belief that teachers are expected to be lifelong learners. We're expected to grow in our practice. As the body for the profession, we should be helping our members do that and assisting many in that, and it's important for teachers to undertake individually and collectively professional learning to both enhance their own professional practice and to contribute to the profession. (ATA representative 2).

According to the teachers and school leaders we interviewed, the ATA is an advocate for teacher-led professional learning and a strong source for self-selected learning opportunities that had a built-in collaborative component. This sentiment was also echoed by the ATA representative,

who noted that the underlying principle of all professional learning at the ATA is the belief that teachers are in the best position to know their own learning needs and should be in control of their own professional learning.

Publishing a long list of professional learning workshops for individuals, administrators, and schools in a document entitled *Professional Development Programs and Services Guide* (ATA, 2016a), the ATA also holds annual teachers' conventions for all the province's teachers, organizes a host of specialist workshops and conferences, runs mentoring programs for beginning teachers and administrators, and hosts online webinars and school-based workshops. Some opportunities are short-term, one or two days in length, and others are more longitudinal, with teachers working together over the course of a full school year or even longer. As we will detail in our promising practices section, the ATA has also formed partnerships with Finland and Norway where teachers and students participate in short-term exchanges to collaborate on mutual learning focused around teaching and learning at the classroom level. Teachers additionally have many opportunities to engage in teacher leadership though participation in a variety of ATA committees and programs at both the provincial and the local level. Some of these committees, such as the Economic Policy Committee (EPC), focus on bargaining and teaching conditions while others, such as the Convention Committee and the Instructors Corps, afford members the opportunity to deliver professional learning for other teachers.

Experiences of Professional Learning

Although there have been some criticisms that teacher professional learning has been increasingly determined by those other than the teachers themselves, in our experiences with Alberta teachers, there is recognition across the province that teachers are in the best position to determine their learning needs. Hence, we have observed that, in many schools and districts, control over professional learning is increasingly becoming the purview of teachers themselves. For instance, a teacher in one of our previous studies around policies and practices to support the teaching profession (Zeichner, Hollar, & Pisani, 2017) commented:

> It's very much teacher driven. You won't see very many experts anymore leading sessions where teachers sit back and listen and take it in…. You get to pick what you want…. There are many opportunities online and at the district level and at the school level where you can become more informed about literacy or assessment or feedback. I'm very happy with our professional learning because I can choose how I want to learn and where I want to learn and I kind of go about it at my own pace.

Likewise, teachers and school principals interviewed for this project noted that more and more opportunities for teacher-led, collaborative learning were being created:

> I think we are shifting into doing a lot more things collaboratively with our catchments, and different communities of practice are coming up. There's a technology education community of practice now that's been going for several years and so technology leads are together a number of times over the course of the year and they work together and collaborate and go back and share in their schools. Our First Nations, Métis and Inuit unit has identified lead teachers in all the schools and so they come together and they work with the unit a number of times over the

course of the year to discuss and to learn and then go back and be those lead people in their school. With our Career Pathways work that we are starting on now and a change to a career and technology foundations curriculum from grades 5 to 9, now there's a community practice with that. So people that are teaching that, they come together over time, share their work and they develop share sites and that kind of thing too. More and more collaboration all the time. (Teacher)

> In general, I think there's a cultural shift happening to more collaboration and more ownership, not people waiting for things to be done to them, but people taking responsibility and ownership for their own learning and to making it happen. My Assistant Principals right now is co-leading a group of Assistant Principals that they created to bring Assistant Principals together from across the District. They have a plan for the year. It aligns with District goals and school goals and challenges and they have made that happen. So it's really meeting their needs, it's not the District central big guys doing it to them. (Principal)

According to a representative from the ATA, the movement away from top-down teacher learning is partially a result of the latest collective agreement, which "mandated that school jurisdictions had to provide time for teachers to fulfill their own professional goals and to reduce workload."

Yet, the degree to which teachers have professional autonomy to develop and meet the learning goals in their growth plans does vary across the system. For instance, data collected by the ATA's bi-annual survey of professional development chairs from 2010 to 2014 suggests that some teachers continue to struggle for autonomy with respect to directing their own professional learning (ATA, 2015a).

Table 2:

Teacher perceptions of the degree of autonomy in choosing professional learning

	2014 (%)	2012 (%)	2010 (%)
High degree of autonomy	47.22	33.3	44.4
Some degree of autonomy	41.67	64.4	48.9
Little autonomy	11.11	2.2	6.7

Source: ATA (2015a)

According to the ATA (2015a), the most noticeable erosion occurred between 2010 and 2012. Responses in 2014 demonstrate that the number of teachers who perceive a high degree of autonomy regarding their own growth goals has returned to approximately 2010 levels, but with a noticeable increase in the number of respondents who indicated 'little autonomy'. Consistently, fewer than 50% of respondents feel that teachers enjoy a high degree of autonomy (p.25). Similar results were obtained by the ATA's 2016 member engagement survey, where approximately 30% of the over 800 respondents indicated that that they disagree (22.49%) or strongly disagree (7.65%) that their school district recognizes their need to determine their own professional growth priorities (ATA, 2016b).

Likewise, teacher experiences with respect to collaborative learning are also variable, both across districts and within them. For instance, while just over 40% of respondents in 2014 indicated that time for professional learning communities was provided during designated professional learning days, almost 20% indicated

that no time official time was provided, up from 12.8% in 2012. Likewise, those reporting PLC time during the regular instructional day (while students were dismissed early) dropped from 17.0% in 2012 to 12.8% in 2014. On the other hand, those reporting time during the day (common prep periods, etc.) increased slightly from 14.9% in 2012 to 20.5% in 2014. Overall, the number of respondents reporting an increase in their ability to participate in professional learning communities dropped from 27.7% in 2010 to 15.4% in 2014 (ATA, 2015a).

Relatedly, dedicated professional learning days and the extent to which they are teacher-led vary widely across districts and to some extent within districts depending upon the vision of school principals. With respect to total number of days, data from 2012 and 2014 show a noticeable increase both in those reporting 0-4 days (2.1% to 12.8% respectively) and those reporting 14-16 days (4.3% to 12.8% respectively). This suggests that while some districts are providing increased time for professional learning, other districts have reduced the allocated time.

Table 3:
Comparison of total professional learning days reported by teachers from 2012 and 2014

	2014 (%)	2012 (%)
0–4 days	12.82	2.1
5–7 days	17.95	21.3
8–10 days	25.64	29.8
11–13 days	23.08	31.9
14–16 days	12.82	4.3
More than 16 days	7.69	10.6

Source: ATA (2015a)

There was however an increase across much of the data with respect to the number of days allocated for school-based professional learning and a decrease in the number of days allocated for district-led initiatives. This further supports the trend we have found in our data which suggests that many divisions are moving towards de-centralizing professional learning. For instance, beginning in 2015, Elk Island school district now allots all five collectively bargained days for school-based professional learning. Likewise, schools in Fort McMurray Public now have 14 embedded professional learning days, 9 of which are at the school-level. As we detail in our promising practices section, in both these of districts school-based teacher learning is primarily self-directed with teachers engaging collaboratively with their colleagues to partake in a host of learning experiences:

> *In our District, we've seen a shift from Division days where we all meet at the same site and sessions are offered to teachers and they go to them, and now we have our staff taking ownership and responsibility for their professional learning….so it's an absolute shift in that, before, the ownership was on the District to provide for and teachers to attend. Now the ownership is on the teachers to really drive their learning forward.* (principal).

Qualitative data from the ATA's 2014 survey does suggest that in some districts, professional learning opportunities for individual teachers based on their unique teaching contexts and goals established in their professional growth plans continue to compete with external professional learning mandates. The inconsistency between districts with regards to access to teacher-directed learning was also echoed by several of our focus group participants, many of whom had worked in other districts where professional learning was much more system-directed. For instance, one participant commented:

> *I was with several different Districts and so PD is quite different. In some boards the PD is very prescribed. Teachers don't have a lot of choice on their school based PD days, they are pretty much determined by the District and set. So some boards still haven't moved to giving schools the choice or the freedom that we have (Principal).*

A representative from the ATA also cautioned that the collective agreement that requires divisions to provide teachers with opportunities for self-directed professional learning will eventually run out, noting "I don't think that danger has passed for teachers" (ATA representative 2).

Experiences with professional learning are also impacted by teacher workload, an issue that has become an increasingly a hot-button topic in Alberta over the past number of years. An analysis of the work of Alberta's teachers shows that recent reductions in teaching positions and budget have led to an increased workload for the remaining teachers. For instance, a study

sponsored by the ATA (2012) of the work lives of 20 beginning teachers in Calgary highlighted an intensification in teachers' work, with participants reporting a work week that is 50-55 hours in length. Of these hours, approximately 80% were reported as being dedicated to such core instructional activities as teaching, planning, assessing and reporting. In the 2013 TALIS survey (OECD, 2014), lower secondary teachers in Alberta report working 48.2 hours per week, just behind Japan, who came in first with 53.9 hours. The average number of total working hours in a week for the 35 participating countries was 38.44, with teachers in the U.S. and the U.K. coming in at 44.8 and 45.9 hour, respectively. Alberta's lower secondary teachers reported working the second highest number of hours per week behind Japanese teachers who reported that they work 53.9 hour per week. Of the 48.2 working hours per week reported by Alberta teachers, the teachers reported that 26.4 hours is spent on classroom instruction, 7.5 hours on individual planning or preparation of lessons at home or at school, and 3.0 hours on team work and dialogues with colleagues within the school.

Concerns about workload and class size became hot button topics during the latest round of collective bargaining. After an extended stalemate over contract negotiations, the Progressive Conservative government legislated a new contract in 2013, with the condition that a workplace study would be commissioned to examine the issue more thoroughly. Gathering data from over 3300 teachers and 300 principals over a course of 44 weeks, analysis of self-recorded day-logs revealed an average work week of approximately 48 hours for teachers and 50 hours for principals (Alberta Education, 2015b). Consistent with other studies, teacher reported spending over 80% of their school day either

instructing (59%) or preparing and planning to instruct (22%). In other work we have conducted (Zeichner, Hollar, & Pisani, 2017), teachers interviewed in March and June 2014 generally confirmed the intense nature of their workday and the lack of time for collaboration with colleagues:

> The reality is that the vast majority of our time in school is spent with kids. There is not very much prep time given. When it comes to collaboration time, there is very little that is built in, very little. We do have PD days that are built into the year.

> I would say that in the 8am- 4pm day there is not a moment that I am not doing something school related or curriculum related. There's no amount on any given day… I would say that whatever the closest thing to nothing would be what I would view as collaboration time.

Consequently, despite all the different professional learning opportunities, teachers in that study reported that they aren't always able to take advantage of what is available because of the intensity of their work lives:

> To be completely honest, most teachers don't take advantage of them because they don't have the time. They are so swamped with marking and prepping and then the fact that they have this outside life with families and kids.

Similar sentiments about the lack of time were discussed by teachers interviewed for this study as well:

> If you're teaching a new course, if you're teaching courses you've taught before, all of those come into play, I would say. And at the end of the day, just prepping to teach and marking…. The regular work load of a teacher doesn't go away even though you are trying to create a better system. (Teacher).

There's all those extra pressures too. If we've got another version of our report card coming in or a new program...this year it's power schools, last year it was teacher logic. That's a whole other form of stress. We can support each other but it adds to it. So if you are working on something to do with social studies with somebody else, it might be fragmented a bit because you are more concerned about trying to learn about the new teacher logic program. (Teacher).

Data from the ATA's 2016 annual member survey illustrates that access to professional learning has eroded for many members, with almost 15% of the over 800 respondents indicating that access to professional learning had either somewhat worsened (11.89%) or significantly worsened (3.54%) over the past year – a pattern that only contained slight variation from the 2015 survey (ATA, 2016b). As we noted earlier, some districts have attempted to alleviate the time-pressures associated with accessing professional learning by re-organizing their school calendar to directly embedded collaborative time into the regular daily schedule. We will re-visit how this is unfolding in practice a little later in our promising practices section, however it is worthwhile to note that not all districts or schools operate in this manner. When speaking to a representative from the professional development division of the ATA, they reiterated that increased workloads and time constraints continue to be to be a barrier to professional learning for a significant proportion of Alberta's teaching profession: "Ultimately the short and the long of it is that workload means, from my perspective, that teachers are willing to sacrifice their own learning to make sure they can attend to the other needs of their job."

Principles and Conditions of Professional Learning

Professional learning in Alberta appears to be largely up to the discretion of the district, the school, and lastly, individual teachers and there is variation both within and across districts in the professional learning that is provided. Overall, teachers have some opportunities to choose what learning opportunities they engage in, nested within both district-led and school-based professional learning. But how well do these opportunities align with the principles of effective professional learning outlined in our literature review? To assess this, we utilized data from the ATA's 2014 professional development survey which compared data from 2010, 2012, and 2014 on the following two questions:

1. *In your context, to what extent are the following principles evident in implementing effective professional development planning practices?"; and*

2. *"In your context, how evident are the following essential conditions for effective professional development?".*

Both questions were rated on a four-point scale, from rarely or not evident (1) to consistently evident (4). Compiling the possible answers from both questions, in the table on the following page summarizes the responses to these questions as they align with the 10 principles we outlined earlier.

Table 4:

Alignment between the research informed principles and practices for effective professional learning and the conditions and principles of professional learning as reported on the ATA's 2014 Professional Development survey

Principles and Practices for Effective Professional Learning	Aligning Conditions and Principles on ATA professional development survey	2014	2012	2010
Subject-specific and pedagogical content knowledge	No aligning question			
A focus on student outcomes	Professional development supports school improvement goals	2.83	3.09	3.30
A balance of teacher voice and system coherence	Professional development planning respects the professional judgment of teachers and the unique circumstances in which they teach.	2.58	2.47	3.59
	Professional development is systemic, systematically planned and sustained.	2.57	2.49	3.49
	Professional development is supported by a shared vision.	2.46	2.34	3.30
	Professional development supports professional growth plans	2.66	2.87	3.00
	Professional development is selected by the teacher	2.53	2.51	2.83
	Professional development utilizes local teacher expertise	2.50	2.61	2.96
Evidence-informed	Professional development planning is evidence- informed and research-based.	2.50	2.60	3.78
Active and variable learning	Professional development is available through a variety of media (video conferencing, self-paced modules, workshops, etc)	2.51	2.59	2.83
Collaborative learning experiences	Professional development contributes to collaborative learning cultures.	2.78	2.81	3.86
	Professional development promotes collaboration at the school level	2.50	2.47	2.94
	Professional development enhances opportunities for networking	2.78	2.65	3.04
	Professional development sustains formal and informal learning communities	2.50	2.38	2.85
Job-embedded learning	Professional development is interactive, continuous and reflective and part of the day-to-day life of teachers.	2.32	2.21	3.28
	Professional development is embedded in the work day	2.19	2.20	2.72
Ongoing in duration & supported with resources	Professional development is supported by adequate resources, including time and funding.	2.38	2.55	3.45
	Professional development is offered at a variety of times	2.28	2.50	2.70
External support and facilitation	Professional development is supported by employers	2.69	2.98	3.28
Supportive and engaged leadership	Professional development is organized collaboratively among stakeholders	2.08	2.33	2.64

Although the 2014 averages indicate that respondents felt that most conditions for and principles of quality professional learning were evident somewhere between "sometimes" (2) and "often" (3), looking across the data, there had been a steady decline over the four years spanning data collection. More specifically, the extent to which teacher professional learning is job-embedded and supported by stakeholders across the system seems be of utmost importance, having received the lowest scores.

Based on this data and its longstanding policies on professional learning, the ATA (2015a, p.32-33) recommended the following seven actions:

1. Ensure sufficient time is given to teachers when students are not in attendance, to

   a) collaborate with their colleagues in a professional learning community setting to benefit student learning and mitigate teacher workload, and

   b) address the goals of their personal professional growth plan;

2. Engage in deliberate teacher workload reduction strategies with an aim to creating time, space, and resources that will encourage teachers to engage purposefully and effectively in skill renewal;

3. Enable local efforts to develop policy or secure provisions for teachers that support individually directed professional learning;

4. Reduce the number, variety and intensity of jurisdictional professional development initiatives to allow for sustained and focused teacher learning;

5. Promote a culture that values and invests in the development of contextually relevant and local teacher expertise;

6. Respect the autonomous development of professional growth plans by eliminating the use of mandated templates or externally derived, pre-determined teacher learning goals; and

7. Dismantle structures that bias the distribution of resources to support district and school goals over individually identified professional growth needs.

According to the interviews and focus groups that we conducted in May and June of 2016, it is apparent that the extent to which these recommendations have been implemented continues to vary between districts and even between schools. Nevertheless, we found several instances of promising practices at both the school and district level, which we profile in further detail below.

Promising Practices for Professional Learning

As we have already discussed, establishing and maintaining quality practices for teacher professional learning is no easy feat. Like most jurisdictions, the ever-expanding role of the school and decline in resources connected to the price of oil has significantly increased teacher workload in Alberta and propelled the province into a cycle of educational reform that has sometimes compromised access to the kinds of professional learning that research shows to be impactful on teacher and student learning. Within this context, however, we would argue that access to high-quality professional learning experiences becomes even more imperative as teachers and school leaders grapple with the increasing complexity that we find in today's schools. Also, as Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) point out, individual talent will only have small-scale impacts on teaching and learning. Rather, it is the collective ability of teachers working together to make informed decisions about student learning that will enable Alberta to achieve its system-wide goal of "a great school for all" (ATA, 2015b). It is this belief in the importance of meaningful professional learning to fuel the professional capital of teachers that propelled us to engage in this study in the first place.

In the sections that follow, we highlight some of the promising practices supporting the development of teachers' professional capital in Alberta. Historically, teaching has been an isolating profession with little opportunity for teachers to work and learn together. Acknowledging the wealth of teacher expertise that exists in schools, however, there is now widespread recognition that teachers learn best from other teachers. For instance, in a recent study the ATA conducted on professional learning and self-efficacy, 80% of respondents reported their best professional learning as "collaboration with colleagues" (Beauchamp, et al., 2014). In the stories we share here, principals, schools, districts and other education partners are creating the structures and conditions to encourage job-embedded professional learning through a variety of learning networks that include in-school, inter-school, and even international collaborations. In each instance, teachers and school leaders have embarked on a learning and leadership journey that is building the professional capital of the teaching profession and the collective efficacy of both teachers and students.

Inside-out Teacher Leadership: Jasper Place High School

It is important to note, however, that each promising practice is contextual and born out of specific circumstances. Moreover, the intention behind each practice is purposeful, and highlights a commitment towards professional learning by teachers, for teachers. While we are not advocating that any of these practices could simply be transported and super-imposed in another jurisdiction, the sentiments behind these promising practices undoubtedly transcends borders. We also note that our examples are not an exhaustive list of the kinds of quality learning experiences Alberta teachers are engaged in but offer them as examples of such opportunities that have been supported in diverse ways.

Building on the success of AISI, it is evident that teachers in Alberta continue to have access to professional learning experiences that align with the research principals of high quality professional learning. However, no longer a provincially supported venture, access and availability does appear to be dependent on the extent to which district and school leaders value collaborative, job-embedded, teacher-led professional learning as an integral part of school improvement and student learning.

A large comprehensive high school with a diverse student population of over 1200 students (about 25% of which identify as FNMI), Jasper place was not always the buzz of shared teacher learning that it is now. In our interview, Jean noted that when she first became principal, the school was quite traditional in its approach to teaching. Teachers operated in silos and there was very little collective ownership over students. In an article for Educational Leadership, Stiles (2013) noted:

> When I arrived in 2007, the school had an excellent reputation based on the diversity of its programming. However, a number of our students fell through the cracks and

dropped out. Jasper Place was traditional in its approach to teaching, learning, and staff collaboration. Teachers cared about the students, but they generally taught a homogeneous group of kids. There was a sentiment among many that if certain students didn't want to participate in the learning process, little could be achieved ("I can't teach them if they aren't in my class"). Teachers took little ownership for students who were faltering…Professional and personal relationships between teachers at Jasper Place were fostered primarily within their departments. Teachers taught independently; traditional monthly staff and department meetings were the main places they connected. Some departments shared practices like establishing standards and exemplars for writing, but there was no consistent shared instruction or planning throughout the school. Our learning with one another happened mostly on three professional development days.

Together with the department chairs, the leadership team decided that teachers needed more time to interact with each other, to learn from each other, and to collaborate on learning issues to reach all students. After eliciting feedback from the staff, it was decided that the regular monthly staff meeting would be replaced with weekly, 50-minute professional learning meetings before school. The leadership team also provided time for teachers to visit other classrooms both in their own school and in other schools so they could better understand what student engagement looked like. In the focus group we conducted with Jean and five of her staff, she noted:

> *They actually didn't know what the learning looked like in other classes, and so one of the first things that happened was we opened the*

doors and basically said we're going to just see how engaged students are, where they might look more engaged than others; we're going to check each other's teaching out. We did it in an open way and just asked people to reflect on what they saw and how it might impact their practice. (Jean)

Slowly teachers began to embrace this renewed focus on student engagement and welcomed the additional time allotted for professional learning, opening the door for further collaborative learning and emerging teacher leadership:

What ended up happening was there was an opening of the campus and at that stage we could start to incrementally move forward, and it was some subtle things at first around "these are all of our kids." So everyone took on an "at promise" student that they worked with and then we moved forward to saying, every teacher would take on two individual program and plans for special needs kids, so it's not just one special needs coordinator, every teacher has two and every year we would layer on one or two things that really started to allow us to learn alongside of each other. So even if I was someone who had never seen what it took to look after a special needs kid, we now had a community where we were all doing it and we were just doing it in little pieces. So it's this notion of we can all learn together and it's okay not to know, but we'll take on small things that are doable. (Jean).

Today, teachers at Jasper Place are involved in several professional learning and leadership opportunities both in their own school and at the international level. As focus group participants described, everyone at the school is a member of a cross-curricular team that is teacher-led. Teachers also work on self-directed action-research projects, either in teams or individually. Time is provided during the regular school-day for teachers to engage in this work in conjunction with "alternative learning opportunities" or ALO's for students. Part of

high-school re-design, ALO's are flexible learning experiences co-designed and delivered by teachers and students on topics of mutual interest. Jean explained:

We took five days out of the regular scheduled time and built in five days that we call alternative learning days. There's two aspects to it. One was to free up teachers, because they never have the flexibility to do the work that they want to do, that is self-directed, that's job imbedded and is really around their own learning and the other half is that we really want kids to have the opportunity to have choice or to be able to either come in and build some enrichment if they need it and to have a say in what that might look like.... So teachers get a half day that you are on and your department is responsible for putting on these kinds of alternative learning days. The other half you are free to do what you need for your professional learning. So essentially, we have built five half days for teachers to start to really do this kind of work, to say pursue your learning, pursue your action research projects - you can do that alone, you can do it with a team, and the end of it, will be a presentation of that to share what has been done with the whole staff.

According to the teachers in our focus group, because of these varied opportunities, collaboration across the school comes in many forms. For instance, one teacher talked about the variety in her learning:

When I was Athletic Director, and that was at the time Jean came into our school, we had a process where it wasn't very equitable, I would say in terms of athletics. We had our major sports that got the money, the attention, the status....so that was one of my big pushes, was to recognize the small successes of our minor sports as well, because students felt there was a need for that and the coaches did, as well, who are all volunteer coaches in our school. So people just felt that their opinion wasn't valued,

especially in our minor sports, so that was kind of my first dip into professional learning. From there I started working with some "at promise" students, where I got to collaborate with staff and students on getting those students connected to school and looking at some of the underlying reasons as to why they are not attending or not connected to school…And I'm also looking at technology right now, as well, and how students access technology within our school. I'm part of a different community there. That one is called the Learning Technology Policy Framework and we are looking at how students access technology within our school and how staff access technology within our school, as well. To collaborate for that, because I'm teaching and I don't have time in my schedule specifically for leadership, we use our alternative learning days a lot of the time to collaborate and discuss that.

Another talked about how collaboration had become embedded in the planning of ALO's:

When we're thinking about professional learning, we're talking about that half-day that teachers have for their own professional learning, but I think that the other piece, that other half day where teachers are creating sessions for students, I see a ton of collaboration cross curricular. I might team up with a social studies teacher to put on something or … it's happening all over the school.

The same teacher went on to note that collaborative learning had spilled over to students, who were now partnering with teachers to develop ALO sessions:

More and more we have students coming forward saying "I would like to run this session" and often what's interesting too is they come to me and I say "okay, these are your first steps, you go out and find a staff member who can be your mentor for this. If you can't find one, I will help you find one." I have not had to help a student find a teacher or staff member this year.

Students are able to go to their teachers. There's work that's done around that and it's something that that student sees as "no, I could get people interested in this." Or "this is something that I think would be a benefit to the school." And so even within that, we're teaching, but we're collaborating, we're learning from one another and we're involving students in that process, as well. So they are really powerful days.

The collaborative nature of professional learning in the school has been powerful in other ways as well. One teacher, who has become the go-to person for planning ALO's, noted that, having built some confidence in their leadership, they have applied to begin a Master's degree. Others commented on the autonomy gained from being in control of their own learning is leading to a greater sense of self-efficacy:

This is the first school that I have ever worked at where I have felt a level of trust in my professional judgement and the opportunity to pursue something that I am passionate about without strict boundaries and guidelines in place. It's been a very, very freeing experience for me and the fact that if I can make a connection with somebody that I have the freedom to follow up and to see where it goes is pretty powerful and it has changed my practice with kids and my collaboration…. I'm trying new things with kids. I'm talking to kids more. I'm more open to change. Where I am in my head versus when I came three years ago, night and day.

You're in charge of your own learning basically and you can take that in any direction that you want to go, with support, which I know doesn't happen at every school. And even for me, who was in a formal leadership role and now informal, I still feel like I'm a leader in the school which is important. You always feel that you have a voice, whether you're a teacher, whether you're a student, whether you're an

administrator. Everybody is working for the same cause, to create a great school for all. A great working environment, great learning environment, for not only students, but also teachers and staff, learning how we all work together to get the best out of our students.

At the heart of everything happening at Jasper Place is the overarching theme of "putting students at the centre and really listening to the students" (Jean). Teachers commented that engaging in action research projects and collaborative learning has created a space for open conversations with students around what they need to be successful, something that is modeled with teachers by the "inside-out" leadership approach:

So we ask the kids what they would like and we see what we can do to make that happen, and I think that comes right down from the top that we are also asked what we would like, and it's, I feel at least, that it's encouraged for us to explore that and how can we make that happen. So I think that it's reflected all the way through every part.

According to the teachers, principal leadership has been integral to the success of teacher learning and leadership at Jasper Place:

Jean's leadership of being able to say "yes, go for it, do this thing and try it out." And I can't speak enough for how that has been able to shift the entire school culture to this idea of "let's try it. Why not?" So one of the things that I am really seeing is just that on the staff level and on the student level, there's really this embracing of being able to take risks and being comfortable with messy.

Jean notes, however, that it's taken a long time to establish a culture of trust and risk-taking around professional learning and teacher leadership:

You don't walk in and just start that way, it's taken years for us to get to a place that we do have a community that has trust, and that's not perfect, for sure, but that really centres a lot of what we are doing collaboratively with one another.

De-privatizing Practice: Dr. Donald Massey School

Dr. Donald Massey School is a mid-size k-9 school in Edmonton Public that opened in 2010 to accommodate the growing population of the northeast corner of the city. Like the strong principal leadership supporting teacher learning at Jasper place, former Principal Jennifer Allen decided very early on that opening a new school was a unique opportunity to develop a common vision around learning and a deep sense of ownership with the staff and the larger community:

I was really committed to making sure that it wasn't about my vision for the school as Principal. It was about the vision of the community and about the vision of the staff that were there. So first of all I did a focus group with community and parents in the community to find out what was important for them in a school, and I used a lot of the feedback that I got from them then to formulate interview questions and so on and to choose staff that I thought would really align with what I was thinking, what the community was thinking. So it would give us a bit of a foot up as we started. As we got together with staff, we did a lot of co-creating; what's important in a good school? How can we set that up? And we're starting from the ground floor literally, and so we needed to figure that out. I wasn't going to tell everybody what they needed to do, it was going to be about what's important for our community.

This distributed approach to leadership opened the door for what would eventually become a thriving community of learners where de-privatizing practice and sharing between staff is the norm. In the beginning, teachers worked as a whole staff to help articulate the strengths of the school and identify areas for growth. From there, a "design team" of teachers and administrators utilized a distributed model of leadership to work through all the things that needed to be in place in order to have a high functioning school:

We had sort of key areas that we were working on and we'd have a group of teachers, may two or three on our design team, that were really going to become the experts in that area. So we had a little team that was going to be the expert on coaching and they were going to help set up the coaching model. We had another team that was going to be really expert on assessment, and they sort of learned so much about assessment and they were the leaders in our school and we did professional learning together on assessments. (Jennifer).

Through the process, the notions of collaboration and the continued learning of teachers dominated, setting the foundation for the establishment of small groups of teachers across the whole staff who would work together on self-identified problems of practice to "make the best learning environment for students" (teacher). The school time-table was organized to accommodate teacher collaboration through the early dismissal of students every Thursday.

Over the past six years, teacher collaboration at Donald Massey has morphed several times. A second member of the administrative team noted that, after about two years, teachers decided that they wanted to adopt a coaching model to assist one another in improving instruction. The focus was "how do we all get better" rather than an evaluation of peers, further contributing to a culture of learning within the staff:

So it was teachers coaching teachers, not in an evaluative way, but you have some expertise, I'm going to come help you kind of see ... you want me to coach you on whatever it was and teachers decided what they wanted to do and then they debriefed it and it became this culture of "we're all a whole bunch of risk takers. We're a bunch of learners. We're teachers, but we're learners first." And that coaching bond, from an administrator's point of view, it was kind of beautiful to watch these organic conversations go that were deeper and deeper. (school leader).

Together, the peer mentors would decide which classes they were going to observe each other teach and what kinds of practices they wanted to be coached on. Pairs were intentionally cross-graded to eliminate the feeling of being judged by someone teaching the same grade level. Teachers were paired throughout the whole year and the administration supported the project by providing release time for the classroom visits and post-visit debriefing sessions. According to one teacher, having other teachers in your classroom created an atmosphere of trust and learning amongst the staff that spilled over into other relationships:

> We would have the opportunity to watch each other teach, to coach, to debrief, to talk about how we were going to further that teaching and learning in our classroom and we built great relationships where we could go to other staff members and say, "hey, this is going on in my classroom, can you come and have a look?" It was that open door policy that you weren't afraid to say, "oooh, we had a really bad day or a really bad lesson, or something is happening and I need some support" and you could turn to anyone in the school…. it really allowed us to work together with the whole school, get to know that whole staff of 40 people in one year and be comfortable being a risk taker and admitting that we didn't know everything. (Teacher)

Classroom visits were also videotaped so teachers could watch and reflect on their lesson with the critical friendship of their mentoring partner. Initially teachers were somewhat hesitant about the videotaping but, as one teacher noted, the initial focus on relationship building was an enabling component of the kinds of collaboration and risk-taking that followed:

> As a teacher coming into a new school, it just was so authentic. "We've hired you because you have these strengths" and there was so much time put into building relationships, which was so important because it set the whole groundwork for the collaborative piece and the coaching and being able to take risks and stuff. I think from a teacher perspective, coming in, it just seemed like what was distributive leadership and collaboration was just "we want everyone to contribute and we want this to be our school." It just seemed so authentic. (Teacher).

As an administrator explained, wanting to engage in larger conversations, the focus later expanded from one-on-one mentoring to larger team collaboration:

> It's gone beyond mentoring now, because the conversations from coach to coach were deep and were good, but then, we have a large school so there are four grade 2 teachers. Well, if I'm doing this in my classroom the other four teachers need to collaborate as well, because we are all doing the same thing. So, it's moved to grade groups collaborating to deepen their practice. So we've moved away from the coaching, the teacher to teacher coaching, because the conversations just needed to get bigger. (school leader).

They went on to explain that, for the next school year, the teams would be shifting again, this time focusing across subject-areas and grade levels to broaden teacher's frame of reference and expose them to what learning looks like across the school. Regardless of the form that the collaboration is taking, teachers at Donald Massey have the capacity to determine their own professional learning needs and the expertise to facilitate and nurture the continued learning of their peers.

Current school leaders talked openly about the sense of collective ownership over student learning that has emerged because of the transparency in teaching practices, "the feeling that it's not just my little group of 25, it's my group of 900 students" (school leader). Jennifer

also noted that this sense of ownership has moved even beyond the school since the district mandated two professional learning catchment days with groups of neighbouring schools. She noted that at first, teachers didn't think they could learn much from other schools who did not have the same kinds of structures in place for job-embedded professional learning, but eventually saw the meetings as having another purpose – collectively working together to create great schools for even more students:

> *It was interesting because we had a lot of go-getters, and so they got to the point where they really liked collaborating together, but then when they started to collaborate with some of the other schools, that maybe hadn't had the opportunities to collaborate in the same way, they were coming away thinking why are we going there, what are we getting from there, at first, but over time, we really tried to stress, "you know what, this is our responsibility. It's one time a month. We're going to go collaborate. Maybe there's some things we can learn. If not, we're going to help them to get better, and so we started looking at beyond … first the teacher looks at the kids in my classroom, they're my students. And then we got to the point, all the students in our school are students, and then it finally became, in the catchment, they're all our students. And so we are responsible for helping those other teachers. "I'm working with them to make it better for everybody."*

Even the students have embraced the idea that their teachers learning alongside them:

> *Kids got used to having other adults in the room, and kids knew that there was coaching … they didn't say it was coaching, but they knew that teacher to teacher collaboration was going on and it was a learning environment. Teachers are still learning and they could see that and when we would have 40 people coming through and our kids were able to carry on with learning and articulate their learning even though the teacher is also learning at the same time. So that culture of learning … were a teaching school, like a teaching hospital, we're a teaching school.* (Jennifer).

Likewise, Jennifer noted, "I think the kids felt too that they had this wrap around service of a whole bunch of adults that cared about them; 'I love my team of teachers.'"

Commitment to job-embedded professional learning was sometimes a challenge, however. Jennifer noted that scheduling common release time has been difficult and was one of the reasons for moving away from the one-on-one coaching model. A current school leader also noted that a considerable amount of their school budget is used for release time for teachers who are engaging in professional learning, whether that is part of the in-school teams or other opportunities outside the school that teachers choose to participate in. However, Jennifer noted that supporting professional learning of teachers is simply a choice that the school's leadership team has made: "We always thought of this is a priority and we're making it a priority, we have to put the resources there. So it's not just saying it and not doing things to support, we had to do that."

School Networks: Edmonton Public's West 6

In the heart of Edmonton's west end, teachers and administrators from six schools are working together to improve teaching and learning for high needs students. Originally a project funded through AISI, the West 6 network of schools originated 8 years ago as community collaboration project. Finding themselves facing similar issues regarding poverty, transience and ESL learners, the schools felt they needed more time for teachers to work together. One principal explained:

> Some of the schools are quite small and they only have one grade, where some of our larger schools have two of every grade. In those schools you can always walk down the hall and talk to another teacher, whereas in the other schools, you may have a lot more combined grades. So we wanted to be able to provide learning opportunities for teachers to be able to get together so they would have more of a network of same grade teachers.

Another principal framed the initial collaboration as a way to build relationships across schools, especially since students in the area often move from one school to another.

Once AISI ended, the group approached the district and asked to continue their collaboration, something the district fully supported. As one principal noted, the group has become somewhat of a trailblazer for collaboration in the district, who is now beginning to schedule professional learning days and principal meetings in catchment groups:

> I think that the District has really looked at the work that we are doing and also looking at the results of our students and again because we have a challenging student population ... the gains might be small, but we are certainly making steady gains.

To facilitate learning across the schools, time is embedded into the regular school day, which has been re-organized to facilitate a 1pm dismissal every Thursday. One Thursday a month is used for school staff meetings and two others are used for School Specific Learning (SSL). SSL's could be used for individual school-based learning but they can also involve teams of schools. This past year, for instance, the schools gathered in two groups of three to engage in learning around Response Abilities Pathways, a strengths-based strategy for responding to the needs of at-risk children and youth.

Once a month, teachers also gather to work in inter-school teams called Planning and Sharing Networks or PSN's. In the beginning the groups were arranged by grade level or subject area but have since moved to cross-curricular topics of teacher interest that are decided upon by the teachers themselves. Teachers choose a particular focus area and commit to learning as a part of that group for the entire school year. Each school year teachers can choose to remain in the same group or join a different group. New groups form and other groups lapse as student needs and teacher interest change over time. A principal is assigned to oversee and support each PSN and a lead teacher is designated by each group to communicate with the principal and keep them informed of group plans and any extra supports they may need to meet their learning goals. For instance, one principal shared:

> I work directly with two different groups. One of the groups is a cross curricular Division 1 group that have really embraced the whole concept of inquiry based learning and so with that specific group, they were looking for some models at other schools and what it could look like. So I was able to help facilitate a school visit for a number of the teachers from the

group, and then I was also able to facilitate having Galileo Educational Network provide some Skype support to those teachers so they were able to network and get some questions responded to from an authority in the area of inquiry based learning. (Principal).

The focus of other PSN's include best practices for students with Autism, improving student writing practices, and the use of art across the curriculum. Teachers engage in a variety of learning activities within the groups including book study, the creation of resources and assessment tools, shared assessment of student work, visits to other schools, and collaborative action research.

Teachers in West 6 schools also gather to examine student writing in relation to the Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT), a reading and writing proficiency exam written by all Edmonton Public students from grades 1-9. The test is written in April of each year and graded by groups of teachers within their own schools. Following this, in West 6, teachers from the various schools meet in grade-level teams in May to share samples of student writing and establish common expectations for student work going into the next year. Teachers have found this practice to be very useful in terms of setting standards for assessing student work, particularly those teaching in small schools and who do not have a grade-level partner to regularly consult with. For instance, one principal relayed a conversation she had with a teacher after the most recent HLAT marking session:

Just the opportunity to come together to have colleagues review the writing of your students really, for a lot of our teachers and for one of the teachers I spoke to specifically, it really helped her to realize that she may have been evaluating students a little harder than what other colleagues might have. And I think sometimes when you're in front of your students all the time, maybe you're assessing students

too hard, your assessing students too low, your expectations aren't enough. So she was a staff member new to West Six this year and came to me very grateful for that opportunity, because here she was thinking she wasn't doing "as good a job" – those were her words, with her students but to have colleagues from other schools look at their writing and go "Wow! This student is very proficient," was really eye opening.

According to the principals of West 6 schools that we interviewed, in addition to extending collaborative learning beyond that of the individual school, networking between the schools has also served as the platform for enhanced teacher leadership, creating an additional source of collective expertise that all the schools draw upon. They explained that in the beginning, the district would often bring in specialists and outside experts to facilitate their SSLs and PLNs. While external facilitators are still brought in from time to time, West 6 is relying more and more on the teacher expertise within their own buildings groups to lead the planning and sharing networks:

If we would ask for consultancy services to come out, or if we did require a literacy consultant, numeracy they are available… but we're also wanting our teachers to take that step forward and to really own their professional development, as well.

The opportunity to foster teacher leadership and learn from a wider network of peers was also noted by a teaching principal who works in a small school:

There was access to information that I would never have access to just within the confines of my building as a split grade teacher, and having participated in PSNs it creates networking that we wouldn't have access to otherwise. I know more grade 5/6 teachers out of this network that I would ever have if we didn't do this kind of thing. It has opened up avenues for leadership, as well, because we are able to access our

internal leadership by having people lead both the PSNs and SSLs; teachers leading teachers in technology, teachers leading teachers into other areas and it really has, for me, it's been dynamic in building both my leadership capacity as well as my ability to work with my kids on an everyday basis.

Interviewees commented that teachers and school leaders welcomed the networking structure for teacher-led professional learning in West 6, noting that there had been very little staff turnover within the schools since beginning the initiative. Teachers valued the ability to work on projects of personal interest with their peers and appreciated that professional learning was being done during the regular school day rather than as an add-on to their already busy work life:

In other schools you're doing PD by yourself, at school, at night, or coming in on weekends. This way it's collaborative, so you are coming out with a better product, whether it's an assessment tool or whether it's a year plan. There's more voices at the table, and I think most teachers value the cooperation and would prefer to be sitting down with one or two others as opposed to sitting in their classroom with their door closed, trying to figure out how to make something work better.

Overall, the consensus was that the shift in focus around the delivery and content of professional learning had created a more autonomous system, with increased access to meaningful learning experiences:

In my past experiences, professional development was predominantly top down. It was presented on PD days at your school. You may or may not have been given an opportunity for input around that would look like, and aside from going to the ATA convention, you really weren't given a lot of choice regarding PD that you wanted for yourself. If it was offered, you were either at the mercy of being able to try to get some time to attend it during the day, which is a dollar issue for a lot of schools or it was after school as an add on. I know in the time I've been involved with West Six, I have received more professional development and exposure to issues facing kids than I have probably in the previous 15 to 20 years in my career.

As we explore in the next two promising practices, these same values and ideals around quality professional learning are also being implemented across whole districts.

Teachers Leading Teachers: Elk Island School Division

Elk Island Public Schools is a large, geographically diverse school division servicing communities located to the east of the city of Edmonton. As was the case in West 6, professional learning in Elk Island Public Schools was traditionally externally driven and teachers did not have much autonomy to direct their own learning. However, as one principal explained, over the past few years, a shift in thinking has occurred within the district around the kinds of professional learning that have impact on classroom practices:

> *Even five years ago, PD was very directed. The principal was responsible for planning the entire day - this is what we are doing, this is who's coming in, this is what we are learning and it was a one size fits all kind of thing. But what do you do with your music teachers, your special ed. teachers? The PD that principals were creating didn't meet those teachers' needs. It didn't even meet some of the classroom teachers' needs, those who are experts in their fields already. They didn't need what I was trying to provide. It just wasn't working because they're all at different places. But now we're using our teacher experts to help teach the rest of the staff and I find that the teachers are by far more interested in what another teacher has to say rather than anything I have ever had to say.* (Principal).

Rather than controlling professional learning for teachers, principals now see themselves as supporting teachers in identifying their own learning needs and providing access to time and other required resources. As one principal framed it:

> *I see myself as a facilitator and an encourager. So I facilitate the access to professional development for my teachers. If they come to me with ideas, I like to make those opportunities possible for them, and so it's kind of opening the pathways to opportunity. I also am the encourager because I plant seeds of ideas of things that I wish for them to explore. I can bring in experts that can provide them with new opportunities or new insights and give them time to talk to each other, to collaborate, to share ideas so that they can kind of discover those things on their own.*

While principals acknowledged that they like to see teachers work on professional learning that is related to the school's strategic plan, there is room for teachers to decide the direction that might take in addition to pursing other initiatives they feel are worthwhile:

> *As for professional development, I facilitate what's important to the teachers. Our school goals with numeracy and literacy are often reflected in the professional development. There is a lot of latitude though in what they want to learn about within those areas and they create the PD that they are interested. Sometimes there has to be prescribed PD. We have new report cards that have been developed and there's PD that has to happen so that they understand that. We're doing some early reading intervention with the LLI program, so there has to be some PD so teachers know how to use these new resources. But I try to let them come up with their own PD based around our school goals and if they have other interests, we can also incorporate that if we think that it is really going to be something that impacts student learning.*

In one school the principal has created a teacher-led professional learning committee to collaborate with other teachers and lead professional learning across the school. The principal noted that they lead the group for the first year but that it would be led by teachers going forward.

Among interviewees there was widespread acknowledgment that teachers learned best when they were learning and sharing with other teachers and that the biggest impact on practice occurred when they were pursing interests based on the specific needs of their own students:

> *Part of my intention is to allow them to focus on something and develop expertise in it and then also to share among staff. So, for example, last year I applied for some money to allow 6 staff members to attend a three-day conference and then when they got back they were required to run the next PD day so that they could share what they had learned with staff. This was based in technology. So part of the purpose is building up skills in areas where you can see there's maybe some need, but also giving them the onus to "okay, now it's up to you to share that with everybody else." They also have that excitement because they have learned and they're the experts.* (Principal)

> *For me it's about staff engagement and them being engaged in their own professional learning. I think if teachers are engaged in what they're learning, they are more inclined to actually bring it back to the classroom and engage the students. So if teachers are engaged, students are engaged. If it's something they want to learn about, if it's something that they really feel passionate, that will change their practice. I have very caring teachers. They want their kids to do their very best, but they have to be given PD that's meaningful for them to be*

able to help the children so that the kids become engaged in their learning, as well. So for me, a lot of what has driven me is really about engagement with staff and taking ownership of their own learning. (Principal)

For one principal, teachers taking ownership of their own learning was a natural progression within the context of high-school redesign, which encourages students to be more actively engaged in their own learning:

> *With high school redesign, you are freed up from hours and you are looking more at self-directed learning from students and students having more flexibility and choice in what they learn and how they learn. So for us, what we were hoping to accomplish was that students would be more self-directed in their learning and that and as a result of that, we've seen a change in practice where teachers have become more self-directed in their learning, because they have had to change practice over the last two years to reflect the change in the way students work.*

In many instance, networking opportunities are also built into professional learning experiences, with teachers collaborating across schools:

> *Our science teachers collaborated with some science teachers from another high school and they were talking about chemistry for the day, looking through exams and blueprinting and talking about specific outcomes for that. I had our special ed. teacher connected with two other special ed. teachers in the District and they talked about their specific program and the things that they are doing and learning from the program. I had a construction teacher lead a construction hub. So he was a lead of professional development and teachers came from across the district.*

Interviewees also commented on a variety of impacts the self-directed nature of professional learning was having on both staff and students. They noted that teachers were beginning to take more risks and try new things both in the classroom and in terms of seeking out their own learning experiences. One principal relayed that seeing other teachers embrace this new model of learning had inspired other teachers to do the same:

> *You get those excited teachers and they're the ones who bring it to the staff and say, "we've got to try this." So I had some teachers that were very keen about going with "Empowering Writers," and they got the staff engaged in that, and I've noticed the kids' writing has improved, and so now the teachers are doing collaborative writing assessments, so they can make sure that they are all teaching the same things, that kids are learning the same skills for writing, so that when they go to the next grade, the teachers know what to expect and they know what they've already learned and it's been really quite exciting.*

As in the other practices we've highlighted, ensuring access to teacher-led professional learning in Elk Island schools has not been without it's challenges. One principal noted the tensions that exist between trying to support the individual learning needs of teachers while ensuring that everyone is working towards achieving the broader goals of the school and the district:

> *I think a challenge is ensuring that we are still on the same page, because even though we are meeting every person's needs, which is great, I think that a challenge is going to be showing that we are still moving in the same direction towards our school, district, and provincial goals and all those kinds of things. I think that can get lost a little bit, but I think that challenge is not a huge one, it's just an awareness of.*

Another principal noted the financial onus on schools since budgets are decentralized and teacher release time to support additional professional learning is the responsibility of the school. The local ATA's professional learning fund, which allocates up to $1200 annually to individual teachers to support professional learning was acknowledged, however, as another means by which to support teacher learning in the district. Interviewees also commented that, while they appreciated the district's decision to allocate all five collectively bargained day to school-level collaborations, more time is needed to facilitate meaningful learning that results in changed classroom practice. Overall there was consensus from the group that restructuring teachers' work day to regularly embed time for professional learning during school day was the "key to moving professional development forward" (principal).

Professional Learning Fridays: Fort McMurray Public Schools

Fort McMurray is a mid-size town of about 90,000 people located about 500km north of the city of Edmonton. With the oil sands as its primary industry, much of population has found work in oil or oil related industries, making the availability of substitute teachers problematic. In the past, the lack of substitute teachers has been a barrier to traditional forms of teacher professional learning, which primarily take place while students are in school and necessitate the use of substitutes to cover teaching duties. According to representatives from the ATA, this remains a problem in many remote and northern regions of the province where substitute teachers are in sparse supply.

To facilitate easier access to teacher professional learning, Fort McMurray public schools now incorporate Professional Learning Fridays (PLF's) into the district calendar; 14 full-days where teachers gather together to collaborate and learn with and from one another. To accommodate this, the remaining school days have been lengthened so there is no reduction in instructional time, which was a concern when PLF's were first being discussed.

Of the 14 days, five are led by the district and the remaining nine are allocated to be used at the school-level. Often, the district days are used to support the work that teachers are doing at the school-level. As one teacher explained:

> Within those 14 days that the School Board sets up, they've designed a skeleton schedule, so to speak. They show the cycle of the 14 days throughout the year and they've provided a framework where you may be wanting to work on certain things at certain points in the year. For example, in the Fall, identifying school issues, data analysis from the previous year so you can determine where to start with your existing current year students and so it gives an opportunity for staff to do that, to delve into the data, to look at issues and needs of the students in the particular classes and it provides a starting point for how teachers will plan their PLFs for the duration of the year.

The school-based days may take a variety of forms and are often a mix of whole-school and small-group based learning activities. Whole-school activities often revolve around school improvement plans or district initiatives that the school is participating in. Small-group activities, however, are entirely teacher-led, sometimes involving teachers from multiple schools:

> The morning might be structured where it is school based. So it might be a school/District initiative, something that you are working on based on the data that you studied at the beginning of the year. And then the networked afternoon, could be ... well, maybe the grade 2 teachers in the District all get together. They have some sort of set up themselves, but they could be looking at something with digital learning or something with literacy or numeracy. So they sort of set it so that it's a bit more of an outside, beyond the school driven capacity there and we encourage the teachers to lead.

Interviewees noted that priority areas for networked afternoons are driven by student needs and are based on analysis of a variety of student work and achievement results at both the school and district level. Based on their interest in these needs, teachers collaboratively work on self-identified issues around student learning for the remainder of the year, including co-constructing new assessment tools, assessing gaps in student skills and learning objectives, and addressing mental health issues and student wellness. Some groups are cross-curricular and some are more subject-based.

Regardless of the topic teachers choose to investigate, the process is evidence-informed and collaborative:

Very early in the school year, we used data from the previous year as grade groups, as divisional groups and then later as the school, to identify areas of need for those different levels and really spend some time planning on how we can target improvements for those areas. We did a sticky note activity where we decided in grade groups and then division then as a whole school, what the different goals would be, and then we had lots of time to collaborate, come up with some strategies that we can do long term, short term, medium term and look at how we're doing throughout the year. Are we achieving those goals, do we need to change things?

There is no requirement of the groups to set out a learning plan from the onset; rather the work of the group evolves naturally as they assess student needs and brainstorm and test out different approaches for improvement. This structure supports the autonomy of teachers to move in various directions:

I think, that is giving respect to us. What are your needs? If we were to plan everything in September, then I don't think it would give enough credence to the fact that everything is ever changing. I don't know what it's going to look like? I have no clue what the needs of my students are going to look like. So with this liberty, it makes it real, bottom up. (Teacher).

As instructional leaders, the principals oversee the work of the various groups and provide resources to facilitate the success of the learning groups. Consequently, after each networking session, teachers submit a report to their principal that summarizes the groups progress thus far, sets goals for the next session, and outlines any support they need. As one principal noted, some goals are long-term and others are short-term:

Maybe that goal only took two weeks, maybe it took a month. And they have a chance to reflect on. They can say "I don't think we've met this goal yet, maybe this is the reason why, and

this is the support I need." And that's where we would step in and say "how can we help you? Do we need to bring in somebody who has an expertise in numeracy?" So we were always trying to support them. So we wanted the goal to be meaningful and measurable and that kind of thing and then if they felt that they achieved that goal then they could go on to the next goal depending what the kids are needing from whatever grade.

Both teachers and administrators are quick to point out that learning is not limited to Fridays. Rather, since the learning is embedded in their daily work with students, teachers informally chat about their goals and their progress on a continuous basis:

So these PLF sessions … I just want to make it clear that, especially at our school, and I'm sure at everyone else's here, that it's not the end all and be all, because that's at the jump off point, because when you see someone in the hallway, like "hey, I tried that, this is what my feedback is," and so you are always shaping. It's very malleable and it's ongoing and so you don't have to wait for the next PLF to report. It just gives you that opportunity. The discussion is happening constantly. So that is also what I really appreciate. (Teacher).

Outside of the 14 PLF's teachers in Fort McMurray Public schools also have access to a variety of additional learning activities. For instance, a district mentorship program supporting the specific learning needs of beginning teachers and learning communities has been created to serve as networks for vice-principals and aspiring leaders. Like teachers in Elk Island, teachers in Fort McMurray Public schools can also access a professional learning fund from the local ATA. Valued at $500 per teacher, they can use the funds to pay for additional release time and travel costs to support their own learning needs. Recently the

school division also began to offer teachers $300 each year to support self-identified professional learning opportunities. As one teacher noted, the district openly encourages and supports teacher-led learning:

> What I really want to voice, is that with our district it's not just lip service in terms of our PD, it's really giving us the opportunity and saying "hey, what are you guys doing? What can we be doing?" So it's really putting, at least from where I'm standing, putting their money with their mouth is. (Teacher).

Interviewees commented that since this was the first year that the division has decided 14 days to evidence-based, localized, professional learning focused on student needs, it was too soon to assess whether the various group projects had been having a significant impact on student achievement levels. However, one teacher noted that seeing their teachers as learners and knowing that teachers were learning together on Fridays was setting a good precedence around the importance of collaboration and continued learning:

> I think it helps in terms of direct impact with the students to see that we believe in collaboration. We tell them in our classroom, "it's really important to work together, to understand each other," … and they're like "oh, Miss, what did you guys do on Friday?" And you're like, "hey, this is what I learned" and you're bringing back to the classroom. For example, we had Clara Hughes come up and we're looking at mental health awareness and advocacy and opening up that dialogue and I know many of us took it back to the school because were tweeting and our kids are following us and their parents are following us and all of a sudden you are putting things into perspective and so it's … you're able to not just

speak to it, but then you are able to live it and to breathe and then they, our kids, are "okay, if Miss is doing it, then I should do it too." We are definitely model principles of good learning; I would say. (Teacher).

From the teachers' perspective, one principal commented on how much teachers valued the opportunity to work with their colleagues. According to the principal, collaborating in this way has had the dual outcome of building relationships across the staff and encouraging teachers to take risks and try new things with the support of a team:

> Some of the comments that we would hear from the teachers were "ahh! This is good because I'm getting time to sit with my colleagues and talk about what I'm seeing." If it was mental math in grade 6, then what are you noticing, what are the strategies you're going to … let's work on this together, let's debrief, did that work for this student, no, do you have any other ideas and it was that opportunity to have the dialogue and collaborate and support each other if it didn't work or if it did work.

Relatedly, a teacher framed the collaborative nature of the professional learning as tending to the well-being of teachers by valuing autonomy, honouring teacher expertise, and supporting collective-efficacy:

> So I think another impact, from the teacher perspective, has been the well-being element, because we are being heard, which makes us feel like we matter and that what we do matters and therefore it encourages us to be our best self and it motivates us and we motivate each other, because then it's synergy. Not just "what are you doing?" and "what are you doing?" But how can we work together to make it better for everyone.

As in every conversation we had with Alberta teachers and school leaders, interviewees also noted challenges around teacher-led professional learning, including workload:

> *The usual challenge is just the regular constraints of your classroom. If you've got report cards or other things going on, you get busy, so sometimes it's harder to gain that support, only because of what is happening in your own life. You need to find that balance in trying to get that support or that extra demand. There's all those extra pressures too. If we've got another version of our report card coming in or a new … we have power schools now. Last year it was teacher logic. That's a whole other form of stress. We can support each other no matter what in what capacity, but it adds to it. So if you are working on something to do with social studies or with somebody else in another department, it might be fragmented a bit because you are more concerned about trying to learn about the new teacher logic program*

Related to workload, the issue of competing interests between district, school, and teacher-driven initiatives was also discussed. Interviewees commented that, even though nine days were set aside for school-based learning, there was a tension between wanting to work toward district goals and wanting to tend to the individual needs of teachers. According to one principal, this made their role as instructional leaders as somewhat of balancing act:

> *There's two sort of masters that we are being accountable to. Teachers and their needs and then marrying of the needs of the teachers with the School District. The district has some things that they want us to accomplish too. So we're kind of like how do you address both needs? We're still on that navigation, that route.*

International Partnerships for School Improvement: FINAL & NORCAN

In addition to the school and district based collaborations that are happening in various locales across the province, there is a recognition in Alberta that teachers, school leaders, and students might also benefit from learning alongside their colleagues from international jurisdictions. Hence, in two of its most recent ventures, the ATA has formed international partnerships with Finland and Norway to facilitate teacher and student exchange programs focused on collaborative, inquiry-based learning. Jurisdictions that share common interests and issues, but differing perspectives, the partnership has been an attempt to combine an examination of macro level issues of educational reform with the on-the-ground realities faced by educators daily.

Launched in 2011, the FINAL partnership between Alberta and Finland is a joint venture of the ATA, Alberta Education, and the Ministry of Education in Finland. Focusing on the overarching question of "what makes a good school," the project was conceived as a way for teachers and school administrators to gain cross-cultural learning experiences with the purpose of generating transformational educational reform from the bottom-up (Lam & Shirley, 2012). The project partners Alberta schools with schools in Finland. Expanded in 2015 to accommodate a larger number of participants, grants of $2000 per participant, up to a maximum of $10,000 per school are provided by the ATA to offset travel costs. Some school boards, such as Edmonton Public are also providing funding for groups of teachers and students participate in the exchange.

As of 2014, 5 high schools in Alberta and 7 in Finland had taken part in short-term exchanges to work on collaborative projects focused on specific school goals.

An internal review by the ATA (2014) of the first four years found FINAL to be a beneficial learning experience for all those involved. Principals and school administrators were asked to re-think their roles as learning leaders and to encourage, enable, and support innovation from teachers and students alike. According to the report, FINAL also represented "a unique learning and development opportunity – a chance to work with excellent schools and teachers and their students and a chance to compare and contrast, adopt and adapt" (p.9). This sentiment was also echoed by FINAL teacher participants whom we interviewed. One teacher who we spoke with has participated in the project for three years and is working on a collaborative project around student engagement. She specifically spoke of the collaboration that occurred across the contexts:

> *In terms of the international work with Finland, I've been doing some work with one school in particular and we've really been looking at the diversity of our schools and how to get the voices of students that aren't being heard necessarily. It kind of originally last year started with looking at sexual and gender minority students but now it's morphed a little bit…Some students are now looking more at a consultation process with how to get those voices in our school, which is large, and we're going to go to Finland and look at that some more as well. We find teachers in Finland to collaborate with, we learn from one another and we stay connected throughout the school year.* (Teacher).

She went on to note that the exchange also solidified relationships with students, a key component of her engagement project:

> *What has been really interesting is still being connected to those students that have gone and seeing where they are at now. Lots of them have graduated and moved on, but that concept of voice and being able to initiate changes and being able to take those risks. We really do see students continuing on that path.* (Teacher).

Another teacher we spoke to is currently engaged in the Career Pathways Learning module. She spoke of an upcoming trip to Finland and the impact of international collaboration on student development:

> *Where we're going to Finland, we're going to be seeing the skills competition and seeing all the interdisciplinary learning that is happening, but also the team and the sense of community that is generated by students working on a skill set together. In terms of the work happening back in Edmonton, we're really focusing on how can we have students work on projects that are meaningful to the community. So can they be producing work and see their work in the community as something that is meaningful and has purpose in the community.* (Teacher).

Both commented that the Finland exchange program was a powerful learning experience, particularly since they were learning with students as well as other teachers and school leaders. Broadening their frame of reference and getting to see what is happening in schools around the world was viewed as an amazing growth opportunity for that would not be possible without the partnership:

> *What is really interesting in terms of our professional learning, like with our Finland partnership, for example, is that we can then look beyond what we are doing and see what another school/country is doing with their education and we can really look at it and pick out those pieces that we think, "yeah, that would actually fit within and to create more and more work that is benefiting us and matches our focus." It's just a way to see another really successful learning environment in the system and be able to compare and pick and choose and find something that might work even better* (teacher).

Building on the success of FINAL, the Alberta Teachers' Association recently embarked on a second international partnership program with Norway and Ontario. Focusing on identifying obstacles to student learning in math, NORCAN connects principals, teachers and students from each of the three locations to jointly work on action research projects broadly focused on improving equity and engagement. Nine schools are currently involved in the program (4 in Alberta, 3 in Norway, and 2 in Ontario, with plans for additional schools to join in the coming years. Each school has developed a project plan that outlines their main research focus and the professional learning goals of those participating. Schools share their plans and, like FINAL, partner up with other schools who are working on related goals. Discussion on progress, strategies, and future planning are facilitated through an online community as well as international exchanges and learning conferences. Over the past year, three reciprocal exchanges have taken place – one in each jurisdiction – with a second round of visits beginning in Norway in the fall of 2016.

Initial assessment of NORCAN by the ATA suggests that, like FINAL, participating in the program has been an invaluable experience for principals, teachers, and students. Featured in a recent issue of ATA Magazine (ATA, 2016c) for instance, one principal reflected on the eye-opening impact of NORCAN on understandings of big picture items like conditions of practice:

Spending time in Norwegian schools offers an Alberta teacher a stark dose of a new reality about what we mean by conditions of practice. Full-time teachers in Norway teach about half the instructional load that we do in Alberta, with the rest of their time used for collaboration. Classes were smaller than classes in Alberta, and the teachers I met seemed content and healthy. But Norway is not a nirvana built on oil money. I was reminded that teachers there had to go on strike a few years ago to maintain control of their professional time — pushing back government efforts to have them report to local school authorities what they were doing with their professional development time. Nor are Norwegian schools funded by the rollercoaster revenues of off-shore oil. As many know, until this past year their Sovereign Fund (now $810 billion U.S.) was not seen as a cash machine to fund public services. Instead, Norwegians, like many Nordic citizens, see public spending on health care and education not as an expense but as an investment.

Likewise, the two teachers we interviewed who were involved in the NORCAN project spoke highly of the opportunity to collaborate with their international counterparts and were particularly pleased at the way their NORCAN projects and resulting collaborations had become embedded in their daily practice. They also spoke of the value of learning alongside their students who they viewed as having unique perspectives and skills that added something new to ongoing conversations around success in math.

Looking across the data we collected, along with testimonials from several articles and documents pertaining to the projects (ATA, 2014; 2016c; Couture, 2016), both FINAL and NORCAN serve as platforms for the development of social and decisional capital for those who are involved. Teachers, principals, and students alike work together, crossing national and international borders to collaborate, learn, and influence educational policy. According to Couture (2016), "the enduring purpose remains to advance the aspirations of teachers leading positive change in Alberta's increasingly complex and diverse schools to ensure our communities flourish as vibrant places where all students have a great public education" – the very essence of professional capital.

Implications for the Future of Professional Learning in Alberta

As highlighted in the previous section, promising practices of high-quality teacher professional learning exist in a variety of contexts across the province of Alberta. However, as noted earlier, data from this study, along with our previous work (Zeichner, Hollar, & Pisani, 2017), suggest that these sorts of learning experiences are not necessarily the norm for all teachers. Hence, in this section we summarize the implications for the future of teacher professional learning in Alberta, as voiced by the participants in our study. The themes we report here are well aligned with the findings on the status of teacher professional learning in Canada outlined in our summary report of data from across all jurisdictions (Campbell, Osmond-Johnson, Faubert, Zeichner, Hobbs-Johnson, 2016; 2017). While these findings are evidenced in the Alberta case, we focus in this case on those that were the most relevant and profound for our Alberta participants. More specifically, participants asserted that, going forward, there needed to be more opportunities for teacher-directed professional learning that was job-embedded, collaborative in nature, and actively engaged teachers in variable, "messy" kinds of learning.

Table 5:

Features of Professional Learning and Key Findings from *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada* study

Key Components and Features of Effective Professional Learning Identified in Review of Research Literature		Key Findings from Study of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada
Quality Content	Evidence-informed	Evidence, inquiry, and professional judgement are informing professional learning policies and practices
	Subject-specific and pedagogical content knowledge	The priority area identified by teachers for developing their knowledge and practices is how to support diverse learners' needs
	A focus on student outcomes	A focus on a broad range of students' and professionals' learning outcomes is important
	A balance of teacher voice and system coherence	The appropriate balance of system-directed and self-directed professional development for teachers is complex and contested
Learning Design and Implementation	Active and variable learning	There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to professional learning; teachers are engaging in multiple opportunities for professional learning and inquiry with differentiation for their professional needs
	Collaborative learning experiences	Collaborative learning experiences are highly valued and prevalent within and across schools and wider professional networks
	Job-embedded learning	Teachers value professional learning that is relevant and practical for their work; "'job-embedded" should not mean school-based exclusively as opportunities to engage with external colleagues and learning opportunities matter also
Support and Sustainability	Ongoing in duration	Time for sustained, cumulative professional learning integrated within educators' work lives requires attention
	Resources	Inequitable variations in access to funding for teachers' self-selected professional development are problematic
	Supportive and engaged leadership	System and school leaders have important roles in supporting professional learning for teachers and for themselves

Source: Campbell et al. (2016; 2017).

A BALANCE OF TEACHER-DIRECTED AND SYSTEMS-LED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Almost all teachers and principals whom we spoke with discussed the importance of teacher autonomy in choosing and leading their own learning experiences. Having all experienced this kind of autonomy, albeit to varying degrees, the consensus was that professional learning of the future needed to further acknowledge the power of self-selected opportunities to impact practice. This sentiment was perhaps best summed up by one teacher who had recently completed a self-directed action research project through the ATA. Noting that most professional learning in her board was mandated, she asserted:

> We are a very highly skilled, highly educated group of professionals that are often told what to do, and I think giving us a little bit of autonomy, as a profession and as professionals would go a long way, and I think we would take proper advantage of that, because we haven't really had it before, and I think that the majority of teachers would say "this is fantastic. I want to do this. I'm willing to put in the time and the effort, because this is something that I am personally interested in or this is something that I know is going to impact my students in their day to day learning.

Advocating for increased teacher autonomy, however, does not mean that participants did not see the importance of system-led professional learning. Rather, many noted that system-led and mandated forms of professional learning in many instances dominated teacher learning opportunities, arguing for a more balanced approach that allowed for additional teacher-led learning experiences, nested within system-led initiatives. For instance, when talking about systems-led and teacher-led professional learning, two teachers reflected:

> Teacher 1: One without the other is just set up for failure. We need that balance, looking at all aspects of that pie and how we can all bring something to the table. So whether it's our

Principals or our V.P.s or officers, our teachers on the front lines, everyone needs something, and if we are only addressing the issues and the needs of one, then everyone else is falling by the wayside and that is problematic.

> Teacher 2: It's the marrying of the needs of the teachers with the School District. They have some things that they want us to accomplish too. For example, the big three that we talked about in our board. So we're kind of how do you address both needs and make them align. We're still on that navigation, that route.

Another participant from a different district spoke in a similar manner regarding the tension between top-down and bottom-up initiatives and the need for both perspectives:

> So I have my own personal professional learning that I like to do where I take classes or read books or I talk to colleagues and then I also see as what is directed by the District and there is kind of that conflict almost that occurs, because we have to be moving forward in the same direction in some ways. But I feel that I need that direction and so I look forward to having those opportunities that are provided by the District. We just did the blanket exercise as a leadership group and I would never have sought that out myself, but it was so meaningful to me. So I was so grateful that I had that opportunity to take part in that. So I see that both kinds of PD are needed and are important for myself (Principal).

ACTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Regardless of whether professional learning was system-led or directed by teachers' themselves, participants wanted to be actively engaged in the learning process. One teacher stated:

> I feel that the kids that we teach, you can't just talk at them for an hour and expect them to retain stuff. You talk for 20 minutes and then they practice. And so we need that time

as professionals to take whatever the speaker is talking about and turning it into practice and synthesizing that information within our own heads, and understanding and developing a way to make it our own and really internalize it.

Likewise, other participants noted that they wanted opportunities to be "challenged to do the work." rather than a stand-and-deliver type of service. One principal put it this way:

I think that some districts are still stuck in the one shot "sit and get" parameter and it has to be much more than that. Yes, there has to be some theories, some knowledge, maybe some research, some reading and learning around things, but then you have to keep sustaining that learning. Give people the opportunity to talk about it with each other, to practice it together, to observe it in practice, because just that one session of one hour or one day of going to do a Google classroom isn't going to get you to use your Google classroom in your classroom. So it has to be much more than the standard "okay, we are going to sign up for PD today."

Extending this notion, one participant proposed the idea of a "flipped classroom" model for professional learning where materials would be provided ahead of time so that time together could be used to engage in deeper understandings:

The structure that I would say that I would love to see is a flip classroom model for PD… Give us the notes, give us the slides, give us the stuff, we'll look at it before, and then we'll come and that entire day we are collaborating and we're working towards our school goal, our school mission. This is what we are doing as a team. This is what I've done. This is what you've done. That's the day. Flip the classroom for teacher PD. I would love that.

Flanking the need for active and engaging forms of professional learning, participants acknowledged that they also needed time to reflect on these experiences, something that, given all the competing interests in both their personal and professional lives, they felt was best done during the regular-school day. The job-embedded nature of their vision for the future of professional learning is discussed further in the next section.

JOB-EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

It is no surprise that participants in our study spoke of the challenge of workload and job demands with respect to engaging in meaningful and effective professional learning. As we have noted earlier in this case, teachers in Alberta spend more time on instruction than many of their OECD counterparts, with workload becoming an increasing concern across the profession. This invariably impacts the time teachers can spend on their own learning. As a representative from the ATA noted:

How would you expect teachers to rank their professional development in relation to the importance of those other day to day tasks that make up a teacher's work life. If I've got a stack of marking that's 18 hours deep, I've got report cards coming, I've got five outstanding parental inquiries, I have discipline issues that I need to follow up on, I've got an attendance issues that I need to follow up on, I've got an assessment I want to give and I need to polish that for this particular class. The list goes on and on and on. Of course, those things are to do with my students, kids I see every day and I feel a deep, deep commitment to. Is it easy for me to shelve my own professional learning when I'm looking at their little faces? You bet it is.

Consequently, participants noted that future professional learning needed to take place during regular work hours, to ensure that learning was maximized. For instance, on teacher noted that her teacher induction program took place after school hours. She noted "if I'm going to something at 4:30, I've already had a full day. My brain is tired. I'm taking that information and it's fantastic but when I finish at 7:00 o'clock, I'm not thinking about how I'm going to put it into practice." Contrastingly, a participant from a board that currently offers professional learning during the school day noted:

> I've done more learning in three years than I've done in 20 and it just simply comes from the fact that we're given opportunities that we may not normally have access to, because before it used to be a 4:00 to 6:30 session somewhere downtown, or somewhere else, that I've got to drive to get to. I've got to take the initiative to sign up for and there wasn't a lot of that going on. This happens just in the confines of my teaching day, it honours my time, we get a lot done and we are taking care of in school business and the business of community of schools as well with the time we are given for catchment professional development. This has made an absolutely huge difference to the amount of PD that we have access.

As noted in our Canada study (Campbell, Osmond-Johnson, Faubert, & Zeichner, Hobbs-Johnson, 2016; 2017), job-embedded professional learning encompasses more than simply basing professional learning within the school context. Rather, participants advocated for continued opportunities to learn together with colleagues from within and beyond their own schools and with students. Time for reflection, discussion, and the sharing of practices was viewed as paramount to the future of professional learning. This is further discussed below.

COLLABORATIVE FORMS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The value of collaborative forms of professional learning was a theme that permeated every focus group we conducted. By and large, the teachers and administrators we spoke with shared a common belief that teachers learned best by learning from and with other teachers, with numerous participants commenting that collaboration should be a key feature in professional learning going forward:

> I want to be challenged to actually engage with the learning, but also have time to reflect and really have time to share and hear stories from people in the field…just that idea that we can share stories and network and build this stronger network of people that are all engaged in this work.

> I think that being able to offer opportunities for professional learning where you get to sit down with students, with teachers, with administrators and have those conversations and figure out what is working, what are some things that need to be changed from the different levels. That's important and you're going to get a pretty robust picture of some of the next steps.

> PD should be, wherever possible, collaborative, because I think it really helps a teacher's growth when you can sort of compare, see what others are doing, get new ideas, get inspiration, etc. So I really think collaboration is key as opposed to just individual development.

One administrator from the West Six group framed collaboration in terms of relationship building and trusting teachers, suggesting that autonomous forms of collaborative learning could reduce teacher burnout and attrition. Reflecting on their own experiences in West Six, they commented:

Our cornerstones in the District are equity, collaboration, accountability and integrity and I believe that that's what this group is. It is about relationships, because we talk to each other, we work with one another, and I think the future of professional development in Alberta and Canada will be to build relationships because you'll find less redundancy, less burnout. So I find that this whole experience for me has been about relationships and these are great people around the table here. I think that's what the future of professional learning is, whether you call it professional learning community or whatever, it's people working together towards the same vision mission of children being successful, and as our Superintendent will say living with dignity…I think is critical.

The continued movement towards collaborative learning opportunities was also supported by a multitude of data collected by the ATA that showed that teachers prefer to learn in this way (ATA, 2012; 2014; Beauchamp et al., 2014). This was further reiterated by the representative from the ATA in our study:

> *Teachers prefer to learn collaboratively. They prefer and want to engage in tasks where they are learning from each other and they're learning around practical tasks. So when teachers are engaging in professional development, that would be a good description of the things that they are choosing to do most often* (ATA representative 2).

Summary

In general, participants in our study were interested in seeing professional learning in Alberta continue to move in the direction of supporting and enabling collaborative, job-embedded, active learning experiences for teachers. They advocated for the continued release of control to teachers in determining their own learning needs, based on the premise of "what is best for students."   While it was apparent that participants did recognize the need for some level of system-led professional learning, the overall sentiment was that more professional learning opportunities needed to be placed in the hands of teachers themselves as they are best able to assess to student needs. Moreover, participants acknowledged that quality professional learning was 'messy' – it required doing, trying new things, not being afraid to take risks – and they advocated for wider acceptance and support for these kinds of active learning. Consequently, in the final section of this case, we turn our attention to both the enabling factors and the challenges with respect to the continued proliferation of quality forms of teacher professional learning in Alberta.

CONCLUSIONS: ENABLING FACTORS AND CHALLENGES

Looking across the data we have examined in this case, it is apparent that, as in the larger study of Canada, there are several factors that have enabled the establishment of high quality teacher professional learning practices in Alberta and others that have posed challenges to ensuring that these practices exist in all schools over time. Before discussing these factors, it is important to state one of the main findings from our previous study of the overall success of the education system in Alberta. In this broader study of teaching policies and practices in Alberta (Zeichner, Hollar, & Pisani, 2017), we concluded that the success of Alberta's education system

is a result of a variety of cultural, economic and political factors and policies both inside and outside the education sector, coupled with a general high regard for teachers and public education in the province. As evidenced in the larger study, this statement could apply to most all the jurisdictions in Canada, but with context-specific socio-political factors that influence teacher professional learning in nuanced ways.

Regarding the high quality of teacher learning opportunities presented throughout this case, we once again found a high regard for the teaching profession, and a long history of respectful collaboration among stakeholders in education such as school districts, the teachers' association and the Ministry. Although this relationship of mutual respect and trust has been severely tested in recent years, the election of the NDP and the appointment of a new Minister of Education have begun to once again create synergies across the system. In particular, it appears that the sentiments of teacher autonomy and shared learning established through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement have continued on in some districts and in some schools. Of course, it remains to be seen whether these efforts will be sustainable in the absence of provincial funding and support.

A second factor in the creation of a system of high quality professional learning opportunities for teachers has been the avoidance of punitive accountability systems and emphasis on teacher evaluation. While Alberta has one of the most comprehensive testing programs in the country - whose impacts are indeed felt by students and teachers – there is little doubt that theses stressors are far less than those of many American jurisdictions. A focus on teacher learning and professional growth has enabled a concentration of resources on providing teacher learning opportunities, as evidenced by the significant provisions allotted to AISI from 2000 to 2014. Decentralized budgeting structures and relative

autonomy for school principals has also provided flexibility for local solutions to system problems to be created at the school level. This was evidenced in many of the promising practices we highlight.

A third factor in the creation of high quality opportunities for professional learning has been the leadership of the ATA in crafting a coherent vision for teacher professional learning and advocating for its implementation. A strong advocate for teacher-led forms of professional learning, the Association is involved in every aspect of both policy and practice around professional learning and has provided stability around teacher learning that has seemed to survive, with few exceptions, changes in government and Ministry personnel. Evidence of this commitment is the ATA's Strategic Plan (2013), which underscores the importance of research and learning in a professional organization that "seeks to protect and nurture innovation and effective practice" (p. 5). This statement is backed-up with the reality that over half of the Association's current budget is committed to professional learning and research (ATA representative 1).

Our case also illustrates that several factors serve as challenges to the high quality professional learning opportunities for teachers that we identified in our previous and present studies of teachers in Alberta. The instability of the prices of gas and oil has a big influence on the economy of the province, and with lower income for the province from these revenues, funding for AISI was reduced and later cut altogether. While professional learning in some districts does carry the spirit and essence of AISI, the lack of provincial level policy around job-embedded and collaborative forms of teacher learning has limited access to such experiences for many of the provinces teachers. Similarly, there has been a decrease in resources available to schools that has resulted in an intensification of the work of teachers, further straining efforts to take advantage of the quality learning opportunities

that do exist. Larger classes with greater complexity and a recent aggressive effort to implement several different major reforms have also resulted in a decline in teachers' feeling of control over their own professional learning.

As we have identified throughout this case, high-quality learning experiences for teachers that value teacher judgment and provide spaces for active and collaborative learning are occurring in various pockets across Alberta. The teachers and school administrators whom we spoke to were highly supportive of the variable learning experiences afforded to them by their districts and the ATA. It was clear that their experiences had built on their existing human capital and supported the continued learning of their social and decisional capital. They worked with colleagues in their schools, from around the province and, in some instances, from around the world, to investigate substantive issues pertaining to student learning and engagement. They took on roles beyond the walls of any one classroom and embraced new professional identities as learners and leaders.

As a representative from the ATA suggested, "we need to ask ourselves what kind of profession do we aspire to be? In Alberta, it's not only about professional learning; its having the autonomy to direct one's own professional learning to support exemplary teaching practices across a range of school and classroom contexts" (ATA representative 1). While this case demonstrates that this is indeed the reality for some teachers in some school districts in Alberta, looking ahead, the question becomes how to make such high-quality professional learning experiences accessible for all teachers in the province. This sentiment is particularly important in the years ahead as the province faces the promise of major reforms including a redesign of the K-12 curriculum, the introduction of teacher, school and system leaders' standards of practice and a shift towards a more responsible and responsive approach to accountability.

References

Alberta Education. (2010). *Inspiring education: A dialogue with Albertans*. Retrieved from http://www. holyspirit.ab.ca/assumption/_cabinet/9/InspiringEdReport_june2010.pdf

Alberta Education. (2012). *Spotlight on… professional development: What we have learned from AISI*. Edmonton, Alberta. Author.

Alberta Education. (2013). *A transformation in progress: Alberta's K-12 education workforce 2012/13*. Retrieved from https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/b9f67a91-e513-4c9b-92ed-835f8b699485/ resource/08422626-c422-4855-b7b5-359724e51eba/download/6084401-2013-02-transformation-in-progress-february-2013-final.pdf

Alberta Education. (2014). *Curriculum redesign: Questions and answers*. Retrieved from https://www.ecsd.net/News/curriculum%20redesign/Curriculum-Development-Prototyping-Q-and-A.pdf

Alberta Education. (2015a). *Teacher growth, supervision, and evaluation policy*. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626684/tgse.pdf

Alberta Education. (2015b). *Alberta teacher workload study*. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/3114984/teacher-workload-study-final-report-december-2015-2.pdf

Alberta Education. (2016a). *Student population*. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/alberta-education/student-population/

Alberta Education. (2016b). *School and authority index*. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/alberta-education/school-authority-index/

Alberta Education. (2016c.) Draft Teaching Quality Standard. Retrieved from http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca/resource/resmgr/PDFs/2016/Teaching_Quality_Standard_dr.pdf

Alberta Education. (2016d). Draft School Leaders Standards. Retrieved from http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca/resource/resmgr/PDFs/2016/School_Leader_Standard_draft.pdf

Alberta Education. (2016e). *The guiding framework for the design and development of kindergarten to grade 12 provincial curriculum (programs of study)*. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/3273037/guiding-framework-oct-6-2016.pdf

Alberta Education. (2016f). *FAQs on professional practice standards for Alberta teachers and school leaders*. Retrieved from http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca/resource/resmgr/PDFs/2016/FAQs_School_Teacher_and_Lead.pdf

Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia. (2016). *Goals*. Retrieved from https://arpdc.ab.ca/index.php/en/about-us/goals

References

Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia. (2016b). *Alberta's cross-curricular competencies.* Retrieved from http://erlc.ca/resources/resources/cross_curricular_competencies_overview/documents/competencies-poster_11x17.pdf

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2010). *A framework for professional development in Alberta.* Retrieved from https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Professional%20Development/PD_Framework.pdf

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2012). *The new work of teaching: A case study of the worklife of Calgary Public Teachers.* Retrieved from https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Research/pd-86-23%20New%20Work%20of%20Teaching%20-%20Calgary.pdf

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2013). *Strategic plan.* Retrieved from https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Membership-and-Services/COOR-69d%202014%2003_Strategic%20Plan.pdf

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2014). *FinAl – the Finland Alberta partnership: Perspectives from principals, teachers, and students on leadership through a four-year international collaboration project.* Unpublished.

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2015a). *PD survey 2014: A retroactive in brief.* Retrieved from https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Professional-Development/PD-183%20PD%20Survey%202014_2015-07_Web.pdf

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2015b). *Renewing Alberta's promise: A great school for all.* Retrieved from https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Research/COOR-101-3%20Renewing%20Albertas%20Promise.pdf

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2016a). *2016-17 Professional Development Programs and Services Guide.* Retrieved from https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Professional-Development/PD-78%20PD%20Program%20and%20Services.pdf

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2016b). *Member engagement survey.* Unpublished.

Alberta Teacher's Association. (2016c). *Equity in Mathematics. ATA Magazine, 97*(1), p. 26-7.

Bascia, N. & Osmond, P. (September, 2013). *Teacher union governmental relations in the context of education reform.* Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Beauchamp, L., Klassen, R., Parsons, J., Durksen, T., & Taylor, L. (2014). *Exploring the development of teacher efficacy through professional learning experiences – Final report.* Retrieved online http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Professional-Development/PD-86-29%20teacher%20efficacy%20final%20report%20SM.pdf.

References

Black Gold Teachers' Local #8 and Black Gold Regional Division No. 18. (n.d). *Joint professional development framework.* Retrieved from http://www.blackgold.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Joint-PD-Framework.pdf

Campbell, C., Osmond-Johnson, P., Faubert, B., Zeichner, K, & Hobbs-Johnson, A. (2016). *The state of educators' professional learning in Canada: Executive Summary.* Learning Forward.

Campbell, C., Osmond-Johnson, P., Faubert, B., Zeichner, K, & Hobbs-Johnson, A. (2017). *The state of educators' professional learning in Canada: Full report.* Learning Forward.

CBC. (2015). *Calgary board of education prepared for Syrian refugee students.* Retrieved from http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-board-education-syrian-students-1.3349159

City of Edmonton. (2016). *2016 municipal census results.* Retrieved from http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/facts_figures/municipal-census-results.aspx

Couture, J-C. (2016). Building integrity through international cooperation. *ATA Magazine, 97*(1), p.46-9.

Education Partners. (2006). *A guide to comprehensive professional development planning.* Retrieved from https://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Professional%20Development/PD%20Resources/A%20Guide%20to%20Comprehensive%20PD%20Planning.pdf

Fort McMurray Catholic Schools. (June 15, 2013). Celebrating teachers' professional development. *Fort McMurray Today.* Retrieved from http://www.fortmcmurraytoday.com/2013/06/15/celebrating-teachers-professional-development

French, J. (June 16, 2016). Ambitious Alberta education curriculum overhaul will cover climate change, gender diversity and indigenous history. *Edmonton Journal.* Retrieved from http://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/alberta-to-spend-64-million-to-overhaul-education-curriculum

Gunn, T. M., Pomahac, G., Striker, E., & Tailfeathers, J. (2011). First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education: The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement Approach to Improve Indigenous Education in Alberta. *Journal Of Educational Change*, *12*(3), 323-345.

Hargreaves, A., Crocker, R., Davis, B., McEwen, L., Sahlberg, P., Shirley, D., Sumara, D., and Hughes, M. (2009). *The learning mosaic: A multiple perspective review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement AISI.* Edmonton, Alberta: Alberta Education.

Hargreaves, A. & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press and Toronto, ON: Ontario Principals' Council.

Lam, K., & Shirley, D. (2012). The Finland-Alberta partnership. *ATA Magazine, 92*(1). Retrieved from https://www.teachers.ab.ca/Publications/ATA%20Magazine/Volume-93/Number-1/Pages/The-Finland-Alberta-Partnership.aspx

References

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2014b). *New insights from TALIS 2013 – Teaching and learning in primary and upper secondary education.* Retrieved from http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/new-insights-from-talis-2013_9789264226319-en#page1.

Parsons, J. & Beauchamp, L. (2012). Action Research: The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) and its Implications for Teacher Education. *Action Researcher in Education, 3*(1), 120-131.

Parsons, J., McRae, P. & Taylor, L. (2006). *Celebrating school improvement: Six lessons from Alberta's AISI projects.* School Improvement Press. Edmonton, Alberta.

Sahlberg, P. (2009). AISI: A global perspective. In Hargreaves, A. et al. (Eds.), *The learning mosaic: A multiple perspective review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)* (pp. 51-61). Retrieved from http://pasisahlberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/The-Learning-Mosaic-2009.pdf

Shirley, D. & McEwen, L. (2009). AISI: A qualitative case study. In Hargreaves, A. et al. (Eds.), *The learning mosaic: A multiple perspective review of the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)* (pp. 77-89). Retrieved from http://pasisahlberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/The-Learning-Mosaic-2009.pdf

Stiles, J. (2013). Inside-out teacher leadership. *Educational Leadership, 71*(2). Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/oct13/vol71/num02/Inside-Out_Teacher_Leadership.aspx

Task Force for Teacher Excellence. (2014). *Full report.* Edmonton: Alberta Education. Retrieved from http://open.alberta.ca/dataset/0c3c1074-b890-4db0-8424-d5c84676d710/resource/1315eb44-1f92-45fa-98fd-3f645183ac3f/download/GOAE-TaskForceforTeachingExcellence-WEB-updated.pdf

University of Alberta. (2004) *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement: What have we learned: An assessment of district qualitative reports and promising practices from Cycle 1, 2000-2003.* Retrieved from www.education.govab.ca/K_12/special/AISI/pdfs/UniversityofA_Cycle1_Report_June 2004.pdf

Zeichner, K., Hollar, J., & Pisani, S. (2017). Teacher policies and practices in Alberta. In C. Campbell and K. Zeichner's (Eds.), *Empowered educators in Canada.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.