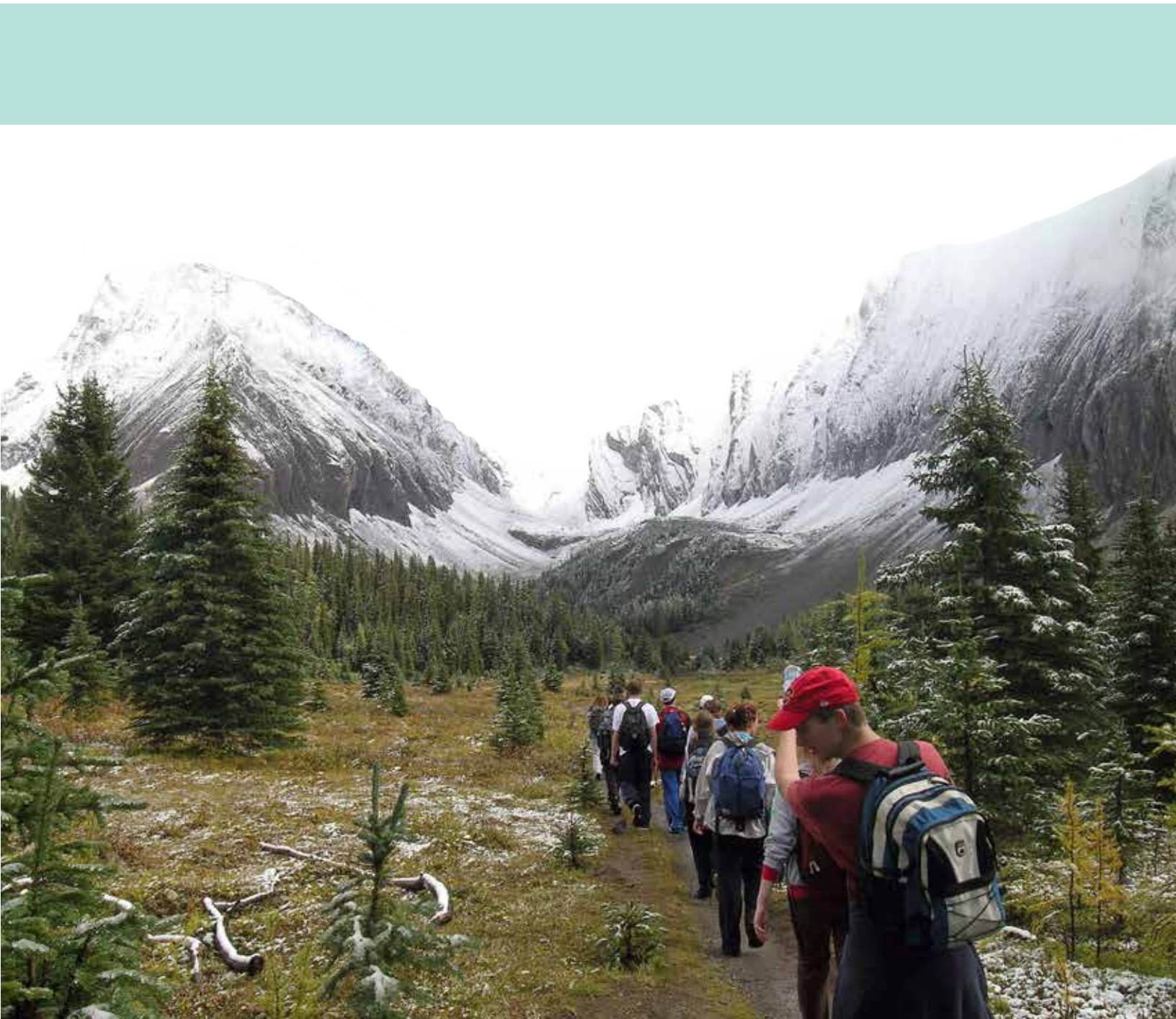




# Principal Professional Growth For Continuous Improvement:

A Collaborative Model Project



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# Preface

The Association is pleased to have collaborated with Black Gold Regional Division No 18 on this model project designed to foster the professional growth of school administrators. The fact that the province is currently implementing the Principal Quality Practice Guideline in school jurisdictions across the province makes this project particularly timely.

The collaborative approach that the steering committee representatives and school administrators followed in developing the division framework and other documents to support professional growth was exemplary. The professional growth process developed in the course of this project is not only consistent with the province's policy on Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation (policy 2.1.5) but also confirms the value of the Principal Quality Practice Guideline in fostering the development of leadership practice.

A project of this nature would not have been possible without the generous contribution of time and expertise on the part of members of the steering committee, whose names are listed on the next page. In particular, I wish to thank Stuart Evans and Dennis Nosyk, who served as acting superintendent and acting associate superintendent, respectively, for their invitation that initiated the collaborative project in 2009–10, and Norman Yanitski, superintendent, for continuing to support the work. The Association highly values opportunities to engage in field research that has the potential to improve Alberta's education system.

Gordon R Thomas

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# Introduction

In the fall of 2009, Black Gold Regional Division No 18 (BGRD) and the Alberta Teachers' Association formed a partnership focusing on implementation of the Principal Quality Practice Guideline. The purpose of this two-year project was to continue the development of a professional culture and enhancement of school leaders' skills to support continuous improvement in all facets of the school division.

The four goals of the project were to (a) encourage a leadership culture focused on continuous improvement by involving Black Gold principals in the development of a district leadership framework; (b) develop policy for principal professional growth, supervision and evaluation and a framework to support professional growth; (c) pilot the framework for principal professional growth; and (d) publish a final project report.

This project report describes the framework development, field test and evaluation of the processes and documents developed in the project to support principal professional growth in BGRD.



# Overview

The Black Gold Regional School Division No 18, formed January 1, 1995, consists of the former Leduc School District No 297, County of Leduc No 25 and the Devon School District No 492. The division extends from the New Sarepta area to the east to the Warburg area to the west, and it borders the south boundary of the city of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. BGRD includes the municipalities of Beaumont, Devon, Thorsby, Calmar and Leduc. In 2009/10, quality instruction was delivered in 27 different schools by 460 (FTE) teachers to 9,000 students. Of the 27 schools, 10 are in the city of Leduc, 5 are in the town of Beaumont, 3 are in the town of Devon, 2 each in the villages of New Sarepta, Calmar, and Thorsby, 1 in each of the hamlets of New Humble and Warburg, and 1 on the Warburg Hutterite Colony. The division's central office is located in Nisku, east of the Edmonton International Airport.

The senior administration of BGRD had followed the development of Alberta Education's Principal Quality Practice Guidelines (PQPG) since 2006. A review of the earlier working drafts showed a lot of promise in the direction and intent but there were questions regarding implementation. Although school-based administrators were aware of the development of the PQPG, the decision was made not to implement the PQPG in BGRD until it was officially approved by Alberta Education.

In March 2009, Education Minister David Hancock approved the Principal Quality Practice Guideline (2009) in principle and the education stakeholder organizations agreed to its voluntary use. That fall, the BGRD two-day professional development retreat for all principals and assistant principals included an information session on the PQPG. Konni deGoeij, associate coordinator Administrator Services, Alberta Teachers' Association, was invited to provide an orientation presentation on the PQPG and an overview of the Association's work with the other jurisdictions on implementation. The presentation confirmed the value of implementing the PQPG; however, the documents from the other jurisdictions didn't quite fit the BGRD culture. BGRD senior administration then approached the Association to work on a collaborative project to use the PQPG as a framework for leadership development in BGRD. The Association agreed to facilitate the project and provide some funding to support the work of the steering committee. A steering committee was formed and it designed the project plan, which incorporated multiple opportunities for feedback from school administrators to inform the process and development of the final documents. Over the two-year partnership, the project evolved from developing a policy for administrator growth, supervision and evaluation to focusing on professional growth and building the leadership capacity of school administrators to lead continuous improvement in their schools as outlined in the BGRD annual education plan.

Currently the Black Gold Regional Division strategic plan and annual education plan priorities provide the focus for the system and school administrators in their leadership practice. Early in this project the provincial descriptions for the seven dimensions of leadership were reviewed, slightly modified and adopted as the BGRD's expectations for school leadership. In addition, reflective questions and quality indicators were developed to guide school administrators as they implement the jurisdiction priorities in each school. The quality indicator columns include headings for school administration and the division education plan priorities of AISI, technology and student services. These documents have become integral to the development of each administrator's annual professional growth plan by providing a meaningful and practical focus for ongoing professional growth and leading change at the school level.

As a result of this project, BGRD will incorporate the division's dimensions of leadership into the leadership development program for all new principals and assistant principals. With the expectation that a large number of school-based administrators will be retiring in the near future, the practical nature of the division's dimensions of leadership will give the new administrators an understanding of what is important to Black Gold in their new role as school administrators and provide guidance for implementation of the division's annual priorities. Previously, school-based administrators were not expected to develop their personal growth plans relating to the PQPG because the PQPG was still in development. Now all administrators will be expected to relate their annual professional growth plan to the Black Gold Framework, which reflects the division priorities at the time it was written.



# Project Development Process

To develop a leadership culture focused on continuous improvement by involving Black Gold school-based administrators in the development of a division leadership framework.

The first step in the collaborative partnership was to form a steering committee to lead the project, facilitate the development process and set the project timeline to be followed. Initially the committee was made up of administrators in various leadership roles from BGRD: principal committee chairs; the administrator representatives to the ATA local; division principal; associate and acting superintendents; and Jacqueline Skytt, assistant executive secretary, and Konni deGoeij, associate coordinator Administrator Assistance, representing the Alberta Teachers' Association. As the project evolved, the steering committee was expanded to include the central office coordinators for technology, AISI and student services.

The first meeting of the steering committee occurred in November 2009. It included a review of the Principal Quality Practice Guideline, the development of the project purpose statements, a timeline and a discussion on strategies to involve all division administrators. The following are the agreed-upon project goal statements:

1. To develop a leadership culture focused on continuous improvement by involving Black Gold school-based administrators in the development of a division leadership framework
2. To develop policy for administrator professional growth, supervision and evaluation and a framework to support professional growth
3. To pilot the framework that supports school-based administrators' professional growth
4. To publish a final project report

The steering committee proposed completing the project within a year and a half, starting in November 2009 and finishing in March 2011. The ATA staff provided expertise regarding the Principal Quality Practice Guideline and the Alberta provincial policy 2.1.5, Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation (1997). The hope was that by working together BGRD administrative staff and the ATA would have a tangible resource to help with the implementation of the Principal Quality Practice Guideline in both BGRD and other school jurisdictions in the province.

In December 2009, the steering committee held its first workshop for the Black Gold school-based administration. The objectives were to ratify the project goal statements and have school-based administration become more familiar with the seven leadership dimensions. In order to encourage involvement and meaningful discussion, the administrators were separated into seven groups. Each group

included a member of the steering committee to guide the discussion and document the feedback on a Net-based tool called *etherpad*. Each group was assigned three dimensions to discuss and provide feedback from the context of being a school-based administrator in BGRD. The provincial titles and summary statements of the seven leadership dimensions were not to be manipulated; however, we were encouraged to modify and adapt the descriptors to reflect our local context. The discussion groups were instructed to review the descriptors and recommend any modifications necessary. The guiding questions provided to each group were as follows:

1. What do these descriptors mean in the context of our division?
2. What would be observable evidence if each dimension were being met?

All responses were recorded in etherpad so that common trends could later be identified by the steering committee. This process yielded a significant amount of information, which became the steering committee's starting point for the creation of the division's descriptors, to be called quality indicators, for each of the seven leadership dimensions.

**The school principal—must objectively look at his or her professional practice to identify leadership strengths and areas of growth in relation to the seven leadership dimensions outlined by the province.**

In January 2010, the steering committee met to accomplish three things: view the documents created in a collaborative project between the Association and Livingstone Range School Division, review the data from the administrator workshop and begin the development of quality indicators that would ultimately guide the evaluation of school-based administrators in BGRD. Unfortunately, the steering committee was not able to get through the meeting agenda. A large portion of the time was spent discussing the Livingstone Range School Division's principal evaluation rubrics. The steering committee was undecided whether a rubric-based supervision and evaluation system would be in keeping with the original BGRD project goal statement. The meeting was adjourned on that note.

At its next meeting the steering committee reflected on the progress made during the previous meeting and on the project purpose. It became apparent that many members of the steering committee were having difficulty in defining "our version" of the PQPG implementation. It was decided that a review of the feedback provided by the school-based administrators might bring clarity to what the steering committee was feeling. The feedback revealed three things: the administrators had recommended very few modifications to the descriptors for each leadership dimension, the administrator group had provided many examples of quality indicators for each dimension, and several clarification questions had been asked with regard to whether or not the completed document would be used for evaluative purposes. After much discussion on how the workshop was received, the members of the steering committee realized that school-based administrators believed that the current Black Gold supervision and evaluation policy was working well and what was needed was a user-friendly document that focused on professional

growth rather than evaluation. The steering committee members agreed to change the emphasis of the project to creating a framework that focused on professional growth rather than evaluation. Upon agreeing to the change of purpose, a noticeable difference occurred in the steering committee's productivity.

### **Change of Focus to Professional Growth**

The committee next reviewed provincial policy 2.1.5, Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation, to determine the provincial requirements related to professional growth. Provincial policy 2.1.5 defines professional growth as follows:

- (j) “teacher professional growth” means the career-long learning process whereby a teacher annually develops and implements a plan to achieve professional learning objectives or goals that are consistent with the teaching quality standard.

The committee accepted that for school administrators the teaching quality standard would naturally be replaced by the Principal Quality Practice Guideline and leadership dimensions, because they had been developed after the provincial policy was approved, in 1997.

The provincial policy goes on to outline the process teachers should use to develop an annual professional growth plan:

- 3(i) reflects goals and objectives based on an assessment of learning needs by the individual teacher,
- (ii) shows a demonstrable relationship to the teaching quality standard,
- (iii) takes into consideration the education plans of the school, the school authority and the Government, or the program statement of an ECS operator.

The first step in the growth process therefore is self-reflection, in which the teacher—in this case, the school principal—must objectively look at his or her professional practice to identify leadership strengths and areas of growth in relation to the seven leadership dimensions outlined by the province. The committee believed that, since its intention was to create a framework that would be practical and user friendly, providing guiding questions for self-reflection would facilitate and initiate the mindset needed for school administrators to start the professional growth planning process.

Leadership development is a career-long journey for school and system administrators, just as the development of teaching practice is for a classroom teacher. The Association staff referred the steering committee to the “Credo for Reflective Practice” of Osterman and Kottkamp (2004, 72). After discussion the

steering committee members agreed that this credo reflected their beliefs about professional growth and leadership development:

- Everyone needs professional growth opportunities.
- All professionals want to improve.
- All professionals can learn.
- People can change.
- People need and want information about their own performance. All professionals are capable of assuming responsibility for their own professional growth and development.
- Collaboration enriches professional development.

The steering committee also discussed the theoretical framework for reflective practice developed by York-Barr et al (2006), who identified four levels of reflective practice that could serve as critical guides for leadership development:

1. What happened? (description)
2. Why? (analysis, interpretation)
3. So what? (overall meaning and application)
4. Now what? (implications for action)

The professional growth needs of any school administrator are rooted in the specific school context where he or she serves. Building on the work of York-Barr et al, the committee developed a series of four reflective questions specific for each of the seven leadership dimensions to guide administrators in their self-reflection. These four reflective questions are intended to identify administrators' leadership strengths and areas of need, considering the school context. The committee intended that these self-reflection tools could be used individually or in collaboration with colleagues.

Having reflected on the overall purpose of the project, the steering committee realized that the long-term benefit of this project will be the development of a leadership culture focused on continuous improvement, thus increasing leadership capacity to lead change in the division priority areas. During the first workshop, some principals requested that quality indicators be developed that relate directly to the district priority areas of student services, AISI and technology. This would align with the BGRD administrator monthly meeting agendas, which include reports from the various initiative coordinators. Articulating quality indicators for these initiatives would enable administrators to lead change more effectively in those areas by providing a common vision of effective implementation and a list

of observable evidence they should expect when the change has been achieved.

The next two meetings of the steering committee were spent drafting the quality indicators for the jurisdiction priorities. This work was led by the division coordinators for technology services, AISI and student services, who drafted the initial quality indicators statements for each leadership dimension from the perspective of their area of expertise. The steering committee reviewed these statements and incorporated the information gathered at the administrator workshop, with an eye to reducing overlap and sharpening the focus on the priority area.

### Change Leadership

“Change is inevitable;  
growth is optional”  
—John C Maxwell

In a rapidly changing world, educational leaders must engage in professional growth, for themselves personally and for the organizations they serve, and then determine how to achieve that growth. The journey can seem daunting, whether we are following a well-worn path or venturing into new territory. Shelves full of books have been written about change in the field of education. Many of these present theories or historical research. There is value in understanding change on a theoretical level, but a principal's day-to-day work is not about theoretical, historical or hypothetical change. It's about leading real change in Alberta schools where everyone strives for continuous improvement.

Rarely does a central office administrator, board member or school leader believe *my mandate is to keep things as they are and ensure that we do not change*. Almost every leader wants to achieve some change. It may be helping students to meet the demands of global competition, working with teachers to enhance their skills to improve student performance, or helping system and school leaders operate more efficiently to conserve resources in profoundly challenging times. Change leaders, as described by Douglas Reeves in his book *Leading Change in Your School* (2009), know that they do not change organizations without changing individual behaviour, and they will not change individual behaviour without affirming the people behind the behaviour. Too many leaders think that their defining moment for effective change will be the speech to the staff, an address to the community or their remarks to the board. But of all the things leaders do in order to create conditions for change, the most important are their thousands of moments of truth when their actions speak louder than words. Reeves posits that today's strategic plans are significantly shorter than those of a decade ago because the emphasis of effective processes has shifted from producing an elegant document to directly monitoring the strategies themselves (p 12).

In April the steering committee hosted a second full-day workshop for school administrators to review the draft documents that had been created.



Jacqueline Skytt, assistant executive secretary of the ATA, developed a presentation on *Leading Change in Your School: How to Conquer Myths, Build Commitment, and Get Results* (Reeves 2009) intended to provide the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings for the professional growth approach the committee was proposing to the school administrators. Reeves believes that effective leadership for school change is not finding the magic or silver bullet, it's not ordered through pronouncements at a staff meeting, it's not achieved by delegating responsibility to one or more staff, and it's not diminished by pressure from individuals to keep the status quo. Change leadership is holistic in that it requires a school leader to have a clear vision of the future, develop effective relationships with staff implementing the change, monitor how the change supports teaching and student learning, ensure that the necessary resources are provided for the change, and proactively involve the school community in supporting the change.

In the Alberta education system, provincial priorities and initiatives are identified in the government's three-year business plans, which are then reviewed by system administrators and trustees to develop the jurisdiction education plans outlining the priorities for the jurisdiction. School principals then work with their staff to develop school education plans that align with the district and provincial priorities. After the education plan is developed it is the work of the school principal to implement the plan and facilitate the change process intended to result in school improvement. Every administrator has his or her own strengths and areas for growth. The leadership dimensions outline the knowledge, skills and attributes of effective school leadership. School administrators must draw on these leadership dimensions and descriptors when they lead change and school improvement initiatives. The leadership decisions and activities of the school principal, to be effective in implementing this plan, must respond to the school context. What is the current situation? What needs to change? How can the principal facilitate that change? And how will the outcomes be measured?

**"Leaders speak most clearly  
with their actions."**

—Reeves (2009)

When leaders embark on change in a school or school district, they start with a set of people with ingrained habits and ways of thinking. If the leader can get them to work together for a common purpose, definitely the odds tip in favour of working toward the change. And steering change in schools is never easy. Instead of facing an equal opponent across the table, it's more as if we're competing against a superforce named "the status quo." Change means loss; loss means abandonment. Deutschman (2007) notes the loss of personal identity and sense of individuality threatened by change even when the change is tremendously positive. Thus change is defeated by personal anxiety almost every time. Part of the challenge is reframing issues that create irrational anxiety (Burns 1999; Deutschman 2007). Successful reframing depends on placing new behaviours into perspective by identifying what will not change. The effective change leader looks for the qualities, values and stories that can be reaffirmed while focusing on the elements that do need to change.



In the context of educational change, *culture* is simply defined as “the way we do things around here,” where culture is reflected in the behaviour, attitudes and beliefs of individuals and groups. The single greatest impediment to meaningful cultural change is the gap between what leaders say that they value and what they actually value. Reeves (2009) outlines four imperatives of cultural change:

1. Define what will not change. Articulate the values, practices, traditions and relationships that will not be lost. Effective change leaders must place change in the context of stability.
2. Organizational culture will change with leadership actions (speeches and announcements are not enough). Leaders speak most clearly with their actions.
3. Use the right change tools for your system. Differentiate *cultural tools*, such as rituals and traditions; *power tools*, such as threats and coercion; *management tools*, such as training, procedures and measurement systems; and *leadership tools*, including role modelling and vision. To change the collective behaviour and beliefs of complex organizations such as schools, leaders must apply the right combination of change tools, varying their strategies to meet the changing needs of the system.
4. Change in culture requires relentless personal attention and “scut work” by the leader.

### **Implementing Change**

Implementation must involve a significant number of staff. Leaders need to recognize opportunities for teacher and student engagement and academic value throughout the school. Leadership can address the gap between intention and action. This is achieved by

- creating short-term wins. Use formative assessment data to give meaningful feedback to teachers and students. The key is that objectives are meaningful, attainable and provide immediate feedback to reinforce effective practice and modify ineffective practice; and
- recognizing effective practices clearly and frequently throughout the year.

Leaders do not gain buy-in through inspiration, demands, pleading or seminars. They gain buy-in through getting results that demonstrate that the effect of the change is in the best interest of all stakeholders. Leaders don't wait for buy-in but rather initiate the strategies for change and use the results to gain sustained support. This is achieved by

- emphasizing effectiveness, not popularity. Too many change efforts fail

because leaders have underestimated the power of the prevailing culture to undermine change. Change inevitably represents risk, loss and fear, which are never associated with popularity; and

- the knowledge that sustainable change depends not on compliance with external mandates or blind adherence to regulation, but rather upon the pursuit of the greater good.

Finally, leaders understand the importance of staff colleagues knowing what is expected. This is achieved by

- making a compelling case for change and associating it with moral imperative rather than compliance with external authority, and
- defining in clear and specific terms the purpose of the change and what good practice will be in the new context.

### **Leadership Leverage: Focus on Change with the Greatest Results**

Reeves (2009) contends that leaders must focus on things that are within their control as school leaders, such as teacher assignment, professional development, collaboration, time and meetings. These elements correlate to the seven leadership dimensions.

1. *Teacher Assignment—Instructional Leadership*: Who is best suited to the work? Implementing change requires extra effort, time and application of new skills. Provide smaller class size, more planning time, more professional development and opportunities for self-direction. Leaders must attend to teachers' basic needs: personal safety and professional respect. Without these, teachers are not attracted to challenging assignments.
2. *Professional Development—Facilitating Leadership*: Focus on developing internal staff capacity. Leadership of professional development efforts should come from the staff itself and take place in the school.
3. *Collaboration—Effective Relationships*: There needs to be agreement on the vision, consistency in the strategies and discussions focused on student learning data.
4. *Time—Managing Resources*: Whatever the challenges in scheduling, effective leaders must provide more time for collaboration during the school day. Asking teachers to work smarter without giving them more time impedes change efforts. Try to timetable collaborative time, purchase time with substitute teachers, use cross-grade grouping and/or schedule student project time.
5. *Meetings—Leading a Learning Community*: Faculty meetings should be restructured to focus on student learning, effective teaching strategies and collaborative planning related to the change initiative.

Reeves advocates that principals develop one-page action plans and share their action plans with staff.

### **Making Strategic Plans Work**

Schools with action plans that include strategies for monitoring, evaluation and inquiry experience two to three times the gains compared to schools that have less-developed action plans. Monitoring encompasses consistent and frequent analysis (at least monthly) of student performance, teaching strategies and leadership practices. Evaluation encompasses learning systems in which staff members challenge themselves to find relationships between professional practices and changes in student achievement and identify unproductive strategies to stop doing. Inquiry that attributes the cause of student achievement to teachers and leaders rather than student demographics supports a culture of professional accountability (Reeves 2009).

Reeves advocates that principals develop one-page action plans and share their action plans with staff. The one-page plans should be clearly focused and sufficiently simple that all participants in the process understand their role in executing the plan. In addition, principals can embrace action plans for strategic implementation that are focused and brief, and that provide for consistent monitoring and evaluation.

### **Professional Growth Plans for Change Leadership**

Following the presentation on *Leading Change*, the professional growth plan process outlined in the provincial policy was reviewed and the administrators were given copies of the draft documents prepared by the steering committee. Understanding that change leadership must be planned considering the school context, the principals were directed to the self-reflection questions developed for each leadership dimension. These questions are intended to lead school principals through a comprehensive self-reflection that encompasses all aspects of their role as defined by the leadership dimensions and quality indicators. The quality indicators for each priority provide a focus for the administrator to determine which area is the greatest need for the school at this time. Once the administrator has chosen an area of focus, he or she would develop a professional growth plan using a gap analysis process of matching the data in the self-reflection to the desired state described in the quality indicators. The next task is to draft goals and strategies to be undertaken within each leadership dimension to move the change forward. The resulting action plan is intended to bridge the gap between the current situation and the quality indicators of effective implementation for the priority or area of focus.

The school administrators once again worked in small groups to provide feedback on the draft quality indicators for each priority area. The steering committee used this feedback at its next meeting to further refine the quality indicators, reduce overlap and duplication, and improve clarity. A copy of the resulting Framework listing the quality indicators for four initiatives across the seven leadership dimensions appears in Appendix A.



# Framework Pilot

In September 2011, the self-reflection tools, quality indicators and professional growth plan template were piloted by all the school principals. Principals were encouraged to use the self-reflection questions and the quality indicators for the priority area they wanted to focus on to develop their professional growth plan using the one-page template. The reflective questions in each dimension enabled them to self-assess their understanding of the dimension, taking into account the evidence of their leadership using the quality indicators for each priority area. They used the Black Gold Framework to reflect on their leadership in the context of school improvement by choosing one or two priority areas.

The steering committee had decided during the development of the project plan that it wanted to engage an external critical friend to conduct a review of the project and offer feedback to the committee. The critical friend would undertake an assessment of the draft documents and help the committee evaluate its work. The role of a critical friend has been used in education systems since the early 1990s as a way for learning organizations to receive feedback through an assessment process. A critical friend provides feedback to an individual or a group and, as the name suggests, is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens and offers a critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend must take the time to understand the context of the work and the outcomes that the group is working toward (Costa and Kallick, 1993).

Dr J Brandon, of the University of Calgary, was engaged as the critical friend for the pilot phase of the project. To prepare for this role, Dr Brandon reviewed all the meeting notes and project documents and then attended a meeting of the steering committee, in December 2011, at which criteria were developed for assessing the effectiveness of the BGRD Framework, professional growth plans components and process. In June 2011, he presented the following final report to the steering committee.



# A Critical Friend's Perspective

There is potential for excellent learning and professional growth to occur with a framework like this. It is open-ended and CAN reflect open dialogue, reflective practice and supported professional growth.  
—A Black Gold educational leader

From my perspective as a critical friend, the Black Gold Principal Professional Growth Model Project is an example of reciprocal educational change. The two-year process that developed and is now implementing the Black Gold Effective Administrator Practice Framework has been characterized by *informed design*, *dialogic adoption* and *implementation as learning* directed toward the accomplishment of meaningful outcomes. The research is clear—such approaches are much more likely to succeed than top-down or bottom-up strategies alone. *Reciprocal change* initiatives are research based, collaboratively adopted and implemented through nuanced attention to emergent successes and issues (Brandon 2005). This report provides feedback to the Black Gold and Alberta Teachers' Association Steering Committee through a critical friendship perspective.

The primary focus of this paper is on the implementation of the Black Gold Principal Professional Growth Model Project. Attention is placed on what is working and what might happen next to better support high quality principal practice in the division's unique context. The fact that this critical friendship perspective has been structured into the initiative's plan is testament to the steering committee's commitment to an *implementation as learning* orientation. A further indication of the committee's desire to "learn its way forward" in an open and honest manner is that the design of this assessment was collaboratively generated by the multi-stakeholder steering committee. The report begins by reviewing the purposes and design of my work as a critical friend to the initiative. Findings are then presented in two sections. Following a short overview of the survey results, focus group summaries are then conveyed in four subsections: (1) thoughts on the Effective Administrator Practice Framework, (2) perspectives on the professional growth processes, (3) fostering a culture of continuous leadership improvement in Black Gold, and (4) general feedback and suggestions. Three recommendations arising from the findings are then presented as possible next steps for further leadership learning.

## Looking at the Three Initiative Purposes Through a Critical Friendship Lens

As a critical friend to this initiative, I sought to gather perspectives on the degree to which each of the following three initiative purposes were being realized during the spring of 2012. The three stated intentions of the initiative are to

1. develop a framework (policy and supporting documents) for administrator professional growth, supervision and evaluation in Black Gold School Division;

2. pilot the framework to support principal professional growth in district priorities areas such as instructional leadership, technology integration and critical thinking; and
3. encourage the development of a leadership culture focused on continuous improvement by involving division principals in the development of the division framework.

### **Study Design**

The design for this critical friendship inquiry was developed with the steering committee during a half-day meeting in December of 2011. Using an affinity charting process, the steering committee members brainstormed, categorized and drafted questions to be used by Dr Brandon in the online survey and focus group interviews. Early in April 2012, data gathering consisted of a short online survey and seven focus group conversations. The focus group interview approach was selected for two reasons. First, this approach is time efficient. It maximizes participation opportunities within the time available. Second, focus groups involve two-way public conversation in which all participants can contribute to and learn from the perspectives of others. Participants received the focus group conversation outline a short time in advance of the sessions, and draft summaries of the group conversation were e-mailed to participants for review and verification in May.

### **Online Survey Findings**

Online survey results from 21 participants are summarized below. As the results table illustrates, participants quite strongly support the initiative. Six of the 10 items were given a rating of 3.3 or higher out of 4.0, and all 10 rating averages exceeded 3.1. The *agree* side of the table is higher than 85 per cent on 8 items, shows 90 per cent support on 2 questions and exceeds 80 per cent on all 10 of the measures.

Three open-ended questions were also provided on the survey:

1. From your perspective, what are the best things about this initiative?
2. What, if anything, could have been improved in the initiative?
3. Do you have any other comments to help the committee with this leadership initiative?

Eighteen educational leaders responded to questions 1 and 2. There were 14 responses to the final question. Comments and suggestions from this open-ended survey section have been included in the qualitative section, which follows.

**From my perspective, the Black Gold Effective Administrator Practice Framework ...**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>Rating</b>
1. has helped to provide direction in my leadership practice.	<b>9.5% (2)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>33.3% (7)</b>	<b>57.1% (12)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>3.38</b>
2. has improved my understanding of the provincial Principal Quality Practice Guideline.	<b>9.5% (2)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>9.5% (2)</b>	<b>81.0% (17)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>3.62</b>
3. provides helpful reflective questions in each of the seven sections.	<b>9.5% (2)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>42.9% (9)</b>	<b>47.6% (10)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>3.29</b>
4. is an effective tool for supporting leadership reflection and growth.	<b>9.5% (2)</b>	<b>4.8% (1)</b>	<b>14.3% (3)</b>	<b>71.4% (15)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>3.48</b>
5. is useful as a basis for celebrating areas of strength in my leadership practice.	<b>9.5% (2)</b>	<b>4.8% (1)</b>	<b>42.9% (9)</b>	<b>42.9% (9)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>3.19</b>
6. is useful as a basis for discussing challenging areas of leadership practice with my colleagues.	<b>9.5% (2)</b>	<b>4.8% (1)</b>	<b>28.6% (6)</b>	<b>57.1% (12)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>3.33</b>
7. is useful as a basis for discussing areas of leadership practice with my central office supervisors.	<b>4.3% (3)</b>	<b>4.8% (1)</b>	<b>38.1% (8)</b>	<b>42.9% (9)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>3.10</b>
8. should be used more extensively for leadership professional learning in Black Gold.	<b>4.3% (3)</b>	<b>4.8% (1)</b>	<b>38.1% (8)</b>	<b>42.9% (9)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>3.10</b>
9. should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis as part of the Black Gold strategic planning process.	<b>14.3% (3)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>23.8% (5)</b>	<b>61.9% (13)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>3.33</b>
10. should be used more widely for leadership development with assistant principals, administrative coordinators and aspiring leaders in Black Gold.	<b>9.5% (2)</b>	<b>0.0% (0)</b>	<b>23.8% (5)</b>	<b>61.9% (13)</b>	<b>4.8% (1)</b>	<b>3.45</b>

## Focus Group Findings

In total, seven focus group interviews were held in seven different sites across the Black Gold Regional Division on April 3, 4 and 5, 2012. Nineteen school principals and four system leaders participated in these one-hour conversations. Findings from these sessions are presented in the following four sub-sections: (a) thoughts on the Effective Administrator Practice Framework, (b) perspectives on the professional growth processes, (c) fostering a culture of continuous leadership improvement in Black Gold, and (d) general comments and suggestions.

### **a. The Effective Administrator Practice Framework**

The reflective questions lead me to think about evidence of success on the dimension.

The Effective Administrator Practice Framework is a uniquely Black Gold approach to defining school leadership practice. A steering committee of school principals, system leaders and two Alberta Teachers' Association executive staff developed the Framework in collaboration with all principals over an extended period of time. The Framework is based on the seven leadership dimensions of the *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* (Alberta Education 2009). In each of its seven pages, the Framework outlines four essential elements for school leadership practice in the division. First, it presents the leadership dimension as stated in the provincial document. Second, it presents three to seven "made in Black Gold" descriptors of what leadership practice means within the dimension. These descriptors are the product of considerable thought and conversation on the part of committee members and principals. The descriptors speak specifically to the leadership practice within the Black Gold context. Third, four reflective questions have been developed for each dimension, each set of questions designed specifically for the specific leadership dimension. Fourth, four sets of quality indicators have been developed as benchmarks for practice within each of the seven dimensions. The document provides indicators of quality leadership practice in (1) school administration, (2) student services, (3) technology and (4) AISI-PD.

The 21 school principals and 4 system leaders who participated in the focus groups were highly supportive of the Framework. Several reasons for this support were expressed in each of the seven conversations. The Framework was viewed as a good tool to promote leadership growth because it helped leaders to better understand the provincial dimensions in the Black Gold context. Participants were appreciative that the Black Gold descriptors helped to build understanding of the provincial dimensions and felt that the reflective questions were helpful starting points in the growth planning process. While many viewed the overall document as a concise and helpful summary, a few conveyed that the expectations within the seven pages could be daunting.



The following participant comments are illustrative of these views.

- It is a clear guideline for principal practice.
- It is nice to have something that reflects our context.
- It reminds me of the big picture of our work—the seven dimensions capture most of what is important in school leadership—the structure is helpful.
- The document itself can be daunting.
- It puts the provincial picture into our context.
- We've been working on the meaning of the dimensions since our October 2009 retreat.
- The reflective questions help me to think about the dimension and often lead to my growth goal.
- The reflective questions lead me to think about evidence of success on the dimension.
- The questions get me thinking about the descriptors and what they mean in my school.

Greater diversity of opinion was revealed through principals' comments about the value of the four indicator areas. While all respondents found the school administration indicators of value to their practice, there was no unanimity with respect to the three other indicator areas. As anticipated by the committee's questions in this regard, several Black Gold leaders indicated that the three areas should be regularly updated through system planning processes that take evolving provincial priorities into account.

Sample participant comments about the value of the four quality indicator areas in each section of the Framework are as follows.

- The three priority areas should be updated over time.
- They should be reviewed annually.
- There should be a strong link to the strategic plan.
- For me, the school administration section is most important. I think the other three sections could be grouped into one area: learning support.
- There should be supports provided in each of the divisional quality indicator areas.
- Combine the three right columns into a "Learning Supports" category and add a middle column (2nd from the left) for "Programming for Student Learning and Engagement."

### ***b. The Principal Professional Growth Process***

Almost all respondents felt that the Framework was very helpful as a growth-planning tool. A variety of approaches to using the document for this purpose were reported in the focus group conversations. While it was indicated that all of the dimensions had been used in growth planning, the most often cited were Fostering Effective Relationships and Embodying Visionary Leadership. Though seen as challenging, the dimensions of Providing Instructional Leadership and Leading a Learning Community were considered to be of great interest and significance to the moral purpose of school leaders. Working in the area of Developing and Facilitating Leadership was another dimension seen to be particularly crucial to participants. Other individuals were focusing their growth efforts on considerations within the management realm. Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context was considered to be the most challenging dimension in which to develop meaningful growth goals.

A few of the comments about the value of the Framework as a professional growth-supporting tool are provided below.

- It is a good tool to support our growth planning.
- I link my plan to this document and the 3-year plan.
- It is an excellent tool for supporting growth.
- The way the descriptors have been adapted to fit the Black Gold context is helpful.
- Q1 [School Administration] is the most important; we need to ensure that everything is driving student engagement. That is our job.

### ***c. Towards a Black Gold Leadership Culture of Continuous Improvement***

**It has started an important conversation in the division.**

Respondents expressed strong support for the efforts of the steering committee. For many, this initiative is the kind of significant leadership development work that Black Gold administrators should continue to pursue. Appreciation for the collaborative efforts of the steering committee was expressed in every focus group session. Moreover, the committee's feedback meetings, focus groups and presentations really helped Black Gold educational leaders to develop their understanding of the provincial PQPG. In addition, the learning and dialogue sponsored by the committee yielded numerous shared insights into what good practice looks like in the local context. These collaborative professional learning experiences were widely viewed as effective and influential in setting the direction for school leadership practice in the division.

At the same time, there were several suggestions for taking the initiative further. Many school and system leaders felt that additional collaborative work under the steering committee's guidance could yield even more powerful results and would further promote the notion of ongoing, continuous leadership improvement in Black Gold.

This general support for the process used by the committee is revealed in the following sample comments.

- The committee got us engaged and supported our understanding of the document.
- The process was effective.
- It affirms that we are doing many of the right things.
- It has started an important conversation in the division.
- The challenge is to keep it alive.
- We could do more sharing and celebrating—much of what we do is best practice.

#### ***d. General Findings***

It was clear through every data-gathering conversation that there is significant pride in the leadership learning work being undertaken in the division through the guidance of the steering committee. Educational leaders in Black Gold are moving their leadership practices forward with the support of the Effective Administrator Practice Framework and most are interested in taking this work further. Almost all respondents indicate that one of the best things about the initiative is its focus on growth in professional leadership practice rather than on principal evaluation.

While the document is widely appreciated for its function as an effective growth-planning tool, there is considerable support for working with it in ways that might be described as “going wider” and “going deeper” into school leadership practice. Going wider would involve using the tools to foster leadership development and to support the practice of assistant principals and administrative coordinators. Working with aspiring administrators could also be included. Going deeper would involve more ongoing use of the tools for growth planning and leadership learning through a variety of means: cohort professional development, focused dialogue and inquiry during administrative meetings throughout the year, and the formation of regional leadership learning communities, for instance. Another clear desire is to set up an ongoing review process for the three jurisdiction priorities. The idea of linking these indicators to the rapidly changing external environment and shifting provincial educational priorities through the division's strategic planning process was expressed in several of the focus group conversations.

The “grassroots” manner in which it was developed and is being implemented is the best thing about the initiative.

The following participant comments are illustrative of these general findings.

- The best thing about this initiative was that it was the first time our admin association spoke about the principalship and what effective practice looks like. We had some great dialogue. Appreciating and devoting time to administrators’ needs is important.
- The three areas should be updated over time.
- A logical structure is provided to think about principalship practice.
- It reflects Black Gold’s collaborative culture.
- It could be used more widely (with mentors and assistant principals).
- We could use it more with assistant principals.
- We need to continue to develop it as a living document over time.
- The idea that we could learn more effectively if we used the document in a small learning community of peers should be explored.
- The “grassroots” manner in which it was developed and is being implemented is the best thing about the initiative. It is there as a guide and support but not a checklist against which we are rated. The charts that were created for each dimension that flesh out the details and give specific examples of what the provincial directives mean in real terms are really helpful.
- The role of the new division principal could be to bring us together to bounce ideas off of.
- The document should be used more for vice-principals and mentoring.
- Include more administrators on the [steering] committee and fewer directors/coordinators.
- An orientation session based on the document would be a good addition.
- It could be part of a collaborative growth or PD process through our cohorts or in other smaller groups
- The growth focus should continue—it must not evolve into an evaluation document.
- Keep it succinct—remember that it is a tool and not an end.
- It would be helpful to have multiple levels of interacting with the document, rather than having it as a formal document that just gets sent to Central Office. It would be good to have interaction at the local principal cohort level and with CO staff on a more ongoing basis.

- I have grave concerns that this initiative, while excellent in its potential, will be placed on the back burner for many administrators because of the demands of the job of administrators. We know that for professional growth to occur to its optimal, there should be periods of sustained focus, opportunities for reflective practice to occur. In the climate of schools today, unless this is a planned focus, I am afraid it may not occur. I realize that the division has attempted to have collaborative dialogue, opportunities for PD, etc, but these too are being held on division PD days, principal meetings, etc. These are not days for this type of focus to occur.

### **Three Possible Next Steps—Learning from Implementation**

The literature on the benefits of using such frameworks supports the importance of the processes of reflection, dialogue and collaborative inquiry in developing a widely shared understanding of what effective practice means.

Evidence gathered in this critical friendship review of the Principal Professional Growth: Collaborative Model Project and the Effective Administrator Practice Framework reveals that tremendous progress is being made toward all three of the stated goals of the initiative. The primary document is thoughtfully detailed, research informed and well written. Moreover, the Framework has become well supported and widely used in the principal professional growth planning process. Even more important for the long term, however, is the widely expressed and deeply felt view that this work is significantly contributing to a culture of continuous leadership improvement within the jurisdiction.

The tremendous success of and pride in this initiative leads to the question of how best to move forward to sustain the momentum that is so evident in this Black Gold leadership development work. Three ideas for further implementation learning from my perspective as a critical friend to this very successful initiative are now presented. The first looks at ways to evolve the Framework as a living document. Second, strategies for coherently widening the leadership growth processes are conveyed. Third, ways of deepening the ongoing leadership learning are suggested.

#### ***a. Evergreening the Effective Administrator Practice Framework***

The Effective Administrator Practice Framework has been developed by the steering committee as a meaningful reflection, dialogue and planning tool for leaders in Black Gold public schools. The literature on the benefits of using such frameworks supports the importance of the processes of reflection, dialogue and collaborative inquiry in developing a widely shared understanding of what effective practice means (Brandon 2005, 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Leithwood and Louis 2012). Through processes orchestrated by the steering committee, Black Gold leaders have developed a widely shared understanding of what quality leadership practice means in four areas: (1) school administration, (2) student services, (3) technology and (4) AISI-PD.

To ensure that the Framework continues to serve as a meaningful tool for school and system leaders, it will need to be revised and updated on a regular basis. Revisions to section one, school administration, should be made on the basis of expected updates to the provincial *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* (Alberta Education 2009). It may be best to link adjustments in the other three areas to the biannual strategic planning process. To add to the sense that these three “divisional areas of practice” are more fully owned and supported by school-based administrators, it is further suggested that the steering committee continue to work with both school and system leadership colleagues to collaboratively generate recommendations for the specific areas of practice and descriptors in future Framework iterations.

### ***b. Widening Framework-Based Leadership Learning***

The idea of using the Effective Administrator Practice Framework more widely as a leadership-learning tool was advanced in five of the seven focus group conversations and mentioned in several open-ended survey responses. In fact, some principals are already using the document to support the learning of their assistant principals and administrative coordinators. These principals report that the Framework is also a remarkably helpful tool for reflection, dialogue and practice enhancement for these colleagues. The notion of using the Framework to support aspiring administrators in the divisional leadership mentoring program was expressed as a similarly logical next step in several focus group conversations.

The steering committee and division administration should work together to mobilize these ideas into action. The literature is also clear on the relationship between more widely dispersed (collective, distributive and shared) leadership and improved student learning (Brandon 2006; Leithwood and Louis 2012). An additional benefit is that aspiring and current school and system leaders will be working toward a more common vision of what effective practice involves in Black Gold, while at the same time building leadership capacity and sustainability in a coherent and collaborative manner. Rather than thinking of this work as “one more thing” for district leaders to take on, several principals indicated their desire to take on this kind of involvement as parts of their growth investment.

### ***c. Deepening the Leadership Learning***

The data gathered for this report indicate that there is tremendous support for and pride in Black Gold’s forward movement in implementing the Effective Administrator Practice Framework. Over the past three years, the division has become a provincial leader in this regard. The Framework and its strengths as a tool for reflection and growth have been shared with other jurisdictions, and with colleagues from across Western Canada at the Leadership .11 conference, in Edmonton,

sponsored by the Council on School Administration (CSA) in the fall of 2011. The Framework is also scheduled for presentation to the Canadian Association of Principals (CAP) conference, in Banff, in May 2013. The work to this date is appreciated and is a source of considerable pride for Black Gold school and system leaders. Yet there is a feeling among many of the cohort that additional benefits could be garnered by deepening the use of the document.

Several suggestions for using the tool for deeper reflection and more meaningful dialogue designed to enhance leadership practice have been noted in this report. Again, the steering committee's role going forward will be integral to success. Though no specific approaches will be recommended in this section, it would be wise to think about and act in directions suggested by the following questions:

- How do we structure workable opportunities for generating, sharing and assessing our own growth plans with the support of our peers? How can division administrators help with this process?
- How can we deepen the collaborative culture and structures in our division to ensure that growth plans can become even more authentic tools for improving leadership practice in the Division?
- How can we meaningfully align our leadership learning in administrative meetings with the Framework's quality indicators?

### **Reflections from Two School Principals**

The project steering committee asked two school principals to write a short narrative about their professional growth experiences during the pilot year. The reflections of a novice and experienced principal are printed in this section of the report.

#### ***Reflections of a Novice School Principal***

In October 2009, the administrators from Black Gold Regional Schools had the opportunity to review and discuss Alberta Education's *Principal Quality Practice Guideline* (2009). Initially, I felt overwhelmed and inadequate. I questioned how I would implement this document and how it would be a useful tool in my professional development and growth. I needed to better understand the dimensions and descriptors and be able to visualize them in context. It was also important that the tools developed would help guide my professional growth goals.

The steering committee developed a process in which all principals gave feedback as each part of the document was developed, which enabled principals to take ownership of the document and make it reflect the culture of Black Gold Schools.

The reflective questions bring the focus to the essential understandings of the dimension. This personal reflection can be the starting point in creating a context to recognize an area of need or develop a goal. The quality indicators are most valuable for developing a better understanding of each dimension. They are the practical application of the descriptors. The quality indicators give a new administrator specific examples of what one can do to fulfill the leadership dimension. For experienced administrators, the quality indicators represent examples of best practices that can be implemented.

The Professional Growth Plan template organizes the essential information into one page. It is simple and focused. It is easy to see the goal and the actions needed to achieve the goal. It eliminates the feeling of being overwhelmed and not knowing where to begin. In addition, the Framework was intended to be a living document to address principal growth within a changing education context. In order to maintain the flexibility that would be necessary to address changes, the document was placed in the BGRD administrative procedures handbook instead of Board policy.

I had the privilege of participating as a member of the steering committee. Through the frequent exposure and review of the documents, I believe I have come to an understanding of the various components of the document. I often wonder if administrators who were not members of the steering committee, without the benefit of open, professional dialogue over an extended period of time, have the same understanding.

### ***Reflections of an Experienced School Principal***

As an administrator of 10 years and three different schools, the Framework helps to keep me focused on the essential issues within each dimension. It challenges me to meet a high standard. I know that I cannot achieve all of the quality indicators, but I can push myself to meet many of them. It will keep me from getting complacent. As my career evolves, I can look back at what areas I have improved upon as a principal and plan what areas I can work on in the future.

Black Gold descriptors basically answer the question, “What does this look like within Black Gold?” These questions are great starting points for discussion for me and my administrative team. By extension, they are a great discussion starter for our staff.

I realized the dimensions are broad and therefore can mean different things to different principals in different school contexts. Yet, they provide common ground for discussion of all principal and effective leadership qualities. Feedback from my peers within the district helped to broaden my perspective of each dimension. The professional dialogue helped to find common ground as well as explore the possibilities in the definitions. The BGRD leadership framework helps me be more focused on what I want to accomplish within a time period. It has helped me better



define my role. It helps me challenge myself to tackle areas that I don't necessarily view as my strengths.

**The BGRD Framework has provided a definite direction within our administrative group.**

It gives all BGRD principals a framework for planning and developing a focus for their professional growth. Ultimately it will translate into making them better leaders of better school communities, which will ultimately improve programs and student achievement.

The development of our own framework has been a unifying experience in Black Gold. It provided a clear focus for our entire administrative group, because everyone had a part in making the document unique to Black Gold; everyone has had an opportunity to provide input and was part of the discussions.

We were able to use part of our monthly administrators' meetings to work together on the document, as well as some Professional Development days. Since it was to become part of everyone's annual professional growth plan, there was an excitement among the administrators to make something that was practical and beneficial to them. Everyone was encouraged to know that it was a growth document rather than a supervision or evaluation document.

All of our administrators are using the document for their professional growth plans. It can be a starting point for discussions and we can speak the same language of the PQPG about our schools and our students.

The BGRD Framework has provided a definite direction within our administrative group. The document has become a living document and is discussed by our members. We know that it is reflective of the time we were in and the priorities we had in the division, and we know that we will have to revisit the document from time to time to have it reflect new priorities for us. It will remain as a unifying document that provides a definite direction for all of us.



# Lessons Learned and Conclusions

The project steering committee met in June 2012 to receive the report from its critical friend and to draft the lessons learned from the project. Based on the results of this project, the steering committee believes that implementation of the Principal Quality Practice Guideline will be most effective if school jurisdictions apply the following general principles:

1. *Implementation is a partnership of key stakeholders based on collaboration and authentic/meaningful engagement.*

The diversity or composition of steering committee members should reflect the purpose of the implementation project; those that are most affected and represent diverse perspectives should be involved. The steering committee should begin its work by developing guiding principles for the project that reflect the culture, context and values of the school jurisdiction. These guiding principles articulate shared values and guide the steering committee in its work.

2. *Meaningful engagement and transparency are critical to stakeholder support.*

The steering committee should be made up of representatives who serve as liaison to their respective stakeholder groups. It is important that the work of the committee be open and transparent to build trust in the process and project. A project manager or external facilitator can lead the process and contribute an outside perspective and expertise. Members of the steering committee are actively involved in the development of the documents. The steering committee should report regularly to stakeholders; this must be reflected in the working plan, which should allow time for communication and feedback. Committee meetings and large-group meetings should model open dialogue and consensus decision making.

3. *The project purpose and desired outcomes must be clearly defined and agreed upon by all stakeholders.*

The steering committee needs to clearly define the purpose and outcomes of the project and seek endorsement from all stakeholders. This endorsement is critical to stakeholder willingness to engage in the development and actively support implementation of the project. Further, each jurisdiction must recognize that importing another jurisdiction's policy and procedures may be problematic because those documents may not honour and reflect the culture of the division (rubric versus focus areas).

4. *Implementation is an ongoing and evolutionary process that reflects the local context.*

Effective implementation is characterized by ongoing continuous improvement and a willingness to regularly review and enhance policy and procedures. School administrators recognize the value of the documents created; however, they also understand the need to reflect the growth of leadership capacity and changes within the broader education system. This may include evergreening and widening components of the Framework that reflect new initiatives, such as global citizenship, inclusion and teacher pedagogical leadership. The development of leadership practice should be responsive to the needs of the individuals and the context in which they work. The jurisdiction policy and procedures that support effective leadership are important artifacts of the jurisdiction's culture of leadership. These documents should be shared with new administrators and those aspiring to leadership as part of their leadership development.

5. *Effective policy development is a journey of many steps.*

The development of good policy, practice and procedures will likely take one to two years, but the benefits of this collaborative process far outweigh the time invested. The steering committee has to respond to feedback from stakeholders, even if it delays the timeline/working plan—this collaboration and feedback are paramount in the successful implementation of the project. Construction, obstacles and road blocks are part of the journey, and the job of the steering committee is to navigate toward the desired outcome.

6. *Be open to opportunities to learn from and celebrate the project successes, milestones and moments of truth.*

Be open to having an external critical friend who can provide another set of eyes and help the committee evaluate the success of the project. Choosing someone who has knowledge and expertise in the area adds rigour and lends credibility to the evaluation of the project. In addition, discussing the work of the committee in meetings, conferences and publications not only holds the steering committee accountable, but also creates opportunities for additional feedback, input and affirmation.

Implementation framed by an informed design, dialogical adoption and implementation as learning builds leadership capacity across the school district. This entails thoughtful planning and sensitive implementation, and above all, consultation with and involvement of the people affected by the Framework. Because of this the steering committee was composed predominantly of principals who engaged in an open dialogue about the provincial Principal Quality Practice Guideline. In addition, the steering committee recognized that participation, involvement and open, early, full communication with all school-based administrators were important factors. Recognizing this, administrators were empowered to give regular feedback during the whole process, with facilitation and support from the steering committee. This resulted in common understanding

of the leadership framework and ownership of the documents developed. Further, this process enabled the dialogue about what constitutes quality leadership, and the sharing of best practices within the context of BGRD. The data from the evaluation indicates that leadership capacity across the school division was enhanced as a result of this project. The highest-rated outcomes of this project were (a) improved understanding of the provincial guideline, (b) confirmation that the Framework is an effective tool for supporting leadership growth and (c) recognition that the Framework should be used more widely for leadership development of current and aspiring leaders.



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# Appendix A







# Dimension #1: Fostering Effective Relationships

## Provincial Summary

The principal builds trust and fosters positive working relationships, on the basis of appropriate values and ethical foundations, within the school community – students, teachers and other staff, parents, school council and others, who have an interest in the school.

## Black Gold Schools Descriptors

The principal

- acts with fairness, dignity and integrity;
- demonstrates a sensitivity to and genuine caring for others and cultivates a climate of mutual respect;
- promotes an inclusive school culture that respects and honours diversity;
- demonstrates responsibility for all students and acts in their best interests;
- models and promotes open, inclusive dialogue;
- supports processes that improve relationships and deal with conflict within the school community; and
- adheres to the ATA's Code of Professional Conduct.

## Reflective Questions

1. What is your assessment of the current working relationships in the school community?
2. What programs/strategies are in place to build trust and support positive working relationships?
3. How effective are these programs and strategies?
4. What resources or skills may be needed?

## Quality Indicators

### School Administration

- Builds awareness by engaging with staff, students and parents outside the administration office.
- Participates in curricular and extracurricular school events.
- Works with other schools to facilitate student transitions.
- Is available to talk with and support the school community.
- Fosters professional relationships.
- Handles discipline matters with fairness, dignity and integrity.
- Supports parent/family/community events.
- Engages the school council as an advisory body.
- Recognizes the positive contributions of students, staff and volunteers.
- Applies Healthy Interactions.
- Responds to diversity at the level of both the individual student and the school community.

### Student Services

- Is aware of external resources (eg, LASHP, ERECS, LMH) for students with diverse learning needs and provides time to build a support team for such students.
- With respect to the Standards for Special Education, recognizes that the principal has a role to play in such matters as talking to parents and handling appeals.
- Maintains effective working relationships with wraparound service providers.
- Values parents as contributing members of the child's learning team.
- Ensures that the school culture is inclusive and thereby helps every student to integrate meaningfully into the regular learning environment.
- Ensures that students with diverse learning needs feel accepted and valued by the school community.

### **Technology**

- Uses technology to communicate effectively with staff, parents and the wider community.
- Uses technology to facilitate collaborative communication with staff, parents and the wider community.
- Uses technology to facilitate collaborative communication with colleagues both within and outside BGRD.

### **AISI-PD**

- Communicates and promotes the goals of the AISI projects and professional development.
- Facilitates and fosters trusting relationships with AISI lead teachers, coaches and staff.



# **Dimension #2: Embodying Visionary Leadership**

### **Provincial Summary**

The principal collaboratively involves the school community in creating and sustaining shared school values, vision, mission and goals.

### **Black Gold Schools Descriptors**

The principal

- communicates and is guided by an educational philosophy based upon sound research, personal experience and reflection;
- provides leadership in keeping with the school authority's vision and mission;
- meaningfully engages the school community in identifying and addressing areas in which the school can improve;
- ensures that planning, decision making and the implementation of strategies are based on a shared vision and understanding of the school culture

that takes into account the current and future needs of the school community; and

- communicates and celebrates school accomplishments in a way that inspires continuous growth.

### **Reflective Questions**

1. As the educational leader, what are your vision and goals for the school?
2. What is your assessment of the school's current shared values, vision, mission and goals?
3. How are the school values, vision, mission and goals communicated and applied in the school community?
4. What resources or skills may be needed?

### **Quality Indicators**

#### **School Administration**

- Applies best practices and current research.
- Ensures that the school's programs, initiatives and processes reflect the school's shared vision.
- Clearly articulates his or her educational values to the school community.
- Maintains a meaningful school mission/vision/value statement that fits within BGRD's overall vision.
- Refers to the school's mission, vision and values when talking to students, staff and parents; publishing newsletters; organizing assemblies; and making decisions.
- Incorporates the school vision into such events as Welcome Back, Education Week, Parent Orientation Night and the Volunteer Tea.
- Collaborates with staff in creating a three-year plan that aligns with BGRD's goals.
- Celebrates and shares school/student/staff successes through such means as the website, school signs, the media, progress reports, classroom and school newsletters, and student conferences.
- Solicits and analyzes feedback from the school community.

### **Student Services**

- Aligns the school's vision and values with the broader district vision of inclusive education and ensures that they result in such practices as student-focused learning, the creation of a culture of inclusiveness in which each student feels valued, and the development of responsive and flexible instructional practices.
- Demonstrates an inclusive attitude.
- Applies the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) in developing the school's vision, mission and goals.

### **Technology**

- Collaborates with the school community to develop a shared vision of technology that aligns with BGRD's vision and belief statements about technology.
- Ensures that technology goals are incorporated into the school's broader goals.
- Regularly articulates to students, staff and parents a vision of how technology is to be used.
- Expects that students, staff and parents can describe the school's vision of how technology can be used meaningfully to support learning.

### **AISI-PD**

- Supports the division's shared vision of AISI and professional development.
- Collaboratively develops a school plan that aligns with the division's vision.
- Develops strategies to effectively implement AISI and professional development within the school.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the professional development calendar and the deadlines contained within it.



# Dimension #3: Leading a Learning Community

## Provincial Summary

The principal nurtures and sustains a school culture that values and supports learning.

## Black Gold Schools Descriptors

The principal

- develops and communicates a culture of learning,
- promotes and models a culture of learning,
- fosters a culture of high expectations and
- encourages parents to become meaningfully involved in their child's learning and development.

## Reflective Questions

1. What is your assessment of the current culture of learning in the school community?
2. What programs and strategies are in place to develop and promote a culture of learning in the school?
3. How is the current culture of learning affecting the school?
4. What resources or skills may be needed?

## Quality Indicators

### School Administration

- Engages in collaboration, professional development and professional reading.
- Reviews teacher professional growth plans and long-range plans.
- Models best practices with respect to pedagogy, technology, PLC, assessment and SMART goals.
- Promotes professional development at the divisional level.

- Ensures that time and resources are available for professional development.
- Facilitates collaborative school professional development opportunities.
- Shares current research with staff.
- Conducts teacher and school supervision.
- Integrates division supports with school professional development.
- Encourages parents' participation in school community learning activities, as appropriate.
- Reviews student assessments such as report cards, IPPs, transition plans, and standardized and diagnostic tests.
- Provides such school and district resources as ELL, ATL, team meetings and the development of IPPs in June for implementation in September.
- Celebrates students' successes with respect to academics, athletics, behaviour, effort and development as citizens.
- Encourages the display of student work.

### **Student Services**

- Supports professional development that facilitates inclusive educational practices and programming for students with diverse learning needs.
- Fosters a school culture of high expectations for every learner, including those with diverse learning needs.
- Encourages parents to become involved in their children's learning and development as specified in the Standards for Special Education.

### **Technology**

- Ensures that the technology available to students is appropriate and fosters higher-order thinking skills.
- Uses technology in his or her work routinely, effectively and intentionally.
- Incorporates technology into his or her teaching to enhance and support learning.
- Facilitates and participates in school-based technology professional learning communities.
- Allocates time and resources and provides supervision to ensure that all staff are able to use technology effectively.

### **AISI-PD**

- Uses a variety of communication strategies in AISI and professional development.
- Supports professional development opportunities for staff.
- Understands the goals and the rationale for BGRD's current AISI projects.
- Encourages parents to become involved in AISI projects.



# **Dimension #4: Providing Instructional Leadership**

### **Provincial Summary**

The principal ensures that all students have ongoing access to quality teaching and learning opportunities to meet the provincial goals of education.

### **Black Gold Schools Descriptors**

The principal

- demonstrates a sound understanding of current pedagogy and curriculum;
- ensures that student assessment and evaluation practices throughout the school are fair, appropriate and balanced;
- implements effective supervision and evaluation to ensure that all teachers consistently meet the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard;
- ensures that students have access to appropriate programming and pedagogy based on their diverse learning needs;
- recognizes the potential of new and emerging technologies and ensures that they are used to support teaching and learning; and
- ensures that teachers and other staff communicate and collaborate with parents and community agencies, as appropriate, to support and enhance student learning.



## **Reflective Questions**

1. What is your assessment of the quality of teaching and of the learning opportunities available to all students in the school?
2. What programs and strategies are in place to support high-quality teaching and learning for all students?
3. How effective are these programs and strategies in enhancing pedagogical practices and improving student learning?
4. What resources or skills may be needed?

## **Quality Indicators**

### **School Administration**

- Ensures that the school policy on student assessment and evaluation practices is current.
- Ensures that teachers understand and are guided by the Teaching Quality Standard through activities such as reviewing professional growth plans, leading discussion at staff meetings and professional development activities.
- Applies the Teaching Quality Standard in the supervision of teachers.
- Establishes a schedule at the beginning of the term for supervising teachers and evaluating them when necessary.
- Regularly communicates expectations with respect to curriculum and pedagogy.
- Facilitates communication between home and school through a variety of strategies.
- Is knowledgeable about instruction strategies that support numeracy, literacy and early childhood development.
- Collaborates with school counsellors and student services regarding transitions and career opportunities.
- Ensures that students and parents have access to information about scholarships, postsecondary programs and work transitions, as appropriate.
- Facilitates the application of various levels of intervention.

### **Student Services**

- Expects such evidenced-based practices as differentiated instruction, appropriate assistive technologies and reading-intervention programs to be used to help students with diverse learning needs.

- Ensures that teachers understand diverse learning needs and appropriate curriculum outcomes (as described in sections 2e and 3d of the TQS) and use the SETT framework to make decisions about assistive technology.
- Facilitates transition planning and appropriate response to intervention.
- Uses multiple measures to determine the effectiveness of special needs programming.

### **Technology**

- Acts as a resource for teachers in using technology effectively.
- Regularly communicates expectations about the effective use of technology during class visits and informal discussions with staff and students.
- Provides supervision on the effective use of technology.
- Regularly uses multiple measures to assess the effect of technology on student learning (including the fostering of higher-order thinking skills).

### **AISI-PD**

- Helps teachers achieve AISI goals.
- Uses multiple measures to monitor the effectiveness of AISI projects.
- Facilitates the collection of data with respect to projects and professional development.



# **Dimension #5: Developing and Facilitating Leadership**

### **Provincial Summary**

The principal promotes the development of leadership capacity within the school community—students, teachers and other staff, parents, school council—for the overall benefit of the school community and education system.

## **Black Gold Schools Descriptors**

The principal

- demonstrates informed decision making by engaging in open dialogue and considering multiple perspectives;
- promotes team building and shared leadership among members of the school community;
- uses collaborative and consultative decision-making strategies to involve the school community, where appropriate, in the operation of the school; and
- identifies and mentors teachers to undertake educational leadership roles in the future.

## **Reflective Questions**

1. What is your assessment of leadership capacity\* within the school community?
2. What programs and strategies are in place to promote and develop leadership capacity within the school community?
3. How effective are these programs and strategies for stakeholders in the school community?
4. What resources or skills may be needed?

*Leadership capacity* means the broad-based skilful participation of members of the school community in the work of leadership.

## **Quality Indicators**

### **School Administration**

- Facilitates school-based strategies that support the induction and/or mentoring of new teachers.
- Provides support (PD, resources, familiarity with school routines), guidance and ongoing feedback to new teachers.
- Provides leadership development opportunities and support to staff and students.
- Promotes team building and positive school culture through activities such as school functions and theme days.

- Encourages staff and provides opportunities to share skills, talents and resources.
- Assists and supports the school council chair.
- Promotes the school council and parent volunteers.
- Schedules time for collaboration (such as common prep/PLC time).
- Solicits feedback from members of the school community for continuous quality improvement of leadership practices.

### **Student Services**

- Defines, identifies, supervises and supports the work of the special education team.
- Encourages staff to access, as appropriate, the services and supports of the school-based special education team and of the district.
- Uses the wraparound services available to schools.
- Facilitates the work of the division student services team (ie, the consultants and coach).

### **Technology**

- Fosters a culture that encourages responsible risk taking and is aligned with the technology vision.
- Supports staff in developing technology leadership.
- Uses technology and Web 2.0 tools to facilitate communication and encourage distributed leadership.
- Effectively communicates the school's technology vision to the school community, including school council.

### **AISI-PD**

- Defines, identifies and supervises lead teachers in the school.
- Facilitates and supports the work of AISI coaches in performing their roles in the school.



# Dimension #6: Managing School Operations and Resources

## Provincial Summary

The principal manages school operations and resources to ensure a safe and caring, and effective learning environment.

## Black Gold Schools Descriptors

The principal

- effectively plans, organizes and manages the human, physical and financial resources of the school and identifies the areas of need;
- ensures that school operations align with legal frameworks (such as provincial legislation, regulations and policies) as well as with school authority policy, directives and initiatives; and
- uses principles of teaching, learning and student development to guide management decisions and the organization of learning.

## Reflective Questions

1. What is your assessment of the current allocation of resources?
2. What programs and strategies are in place to ensure a safe, caring and effective learning environment?
3. How effective are these programs and strategies for the learning environment?
4. What resources or skills may be needed?

## Quality Indicators

### School Administration

- Develops and implements policies on student conduct and positive school climate that reflect a systemic approach to issues.

- Coordinates crisis response drills and safety inspections.
- Monitors student behaviour.
- Allocates resources (people, money and time) that reflect school needs.
- Allocates staffing to best meet student and school needs.
- Demonstrates environmental consciousness by recycling and managing resources.
- Ensures that staff and students comply with copyright and FOIP requirements.

### **Student Services**

- Collaborates with the division Student Services team to ensure that the school is resourced and able to support and respond to the needs of students in an inclusive way.
- Accesses and manages targeted funds for special education.
- Ensures that school programs align with the provincial education framework.
- Accesses division resources and makes referrals using the Student Services wiki.

### **Technology**

- Allocates resources to ensure that BGRD's technology vision is implemented.
- Ensures that access to available resources is efficient and equitable.
- Oversees technology-based operational systems for tracking and accounting, such as PowerSchool and MyBudgetFile.
- Addresses issues related to the privacy, security and online safety of staff and students.

### **AISI-PD**

- Manages targeted funds for AISI to improve student learning and teaching practices.
- Allocates time and resources for school-based professional development.
- Uses a variety of strategies to provide time for AISI and professional development, including staff meetings, PLC, Momentous Mondays and in-school PD days.



# **Dimension #7: Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context**

## **Provincial Summary**

The principal understands and responds appropriately to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting the school.

## **Black Gold Schools Descriptors**

The principal

- advocates for the needs and interests of children and youth;
- demonstrates a knowledge of local, provincial, national, and global issues and trends related to education;
- assesses and responds to the unique and diverse community needs in the context of the school's vision and mission; and
- advocates for the community's support of the school and public education.

## **Reflective Questions**

1. What are the needs and interests of the children and youth in the school community?
2. What advocacy strategies have been used?
3. How effective are these strategies?
4. What resources or skills may be needed?

## **Quality Indicators**

### **School Administration**

- Is aware of trends and developments in education that could facilitate purposeful change and innovation.

- Implements a comprehensive school health model that includes wraparound services.
- Liaises with community resources and other schools in the area.
- Seeks opportunities for the school to participate in community, provincial and global initiatives.
- Is sensitive to the socioeconomic conditions of the community in planning and implementing such school initiatives as lunch programs, prekindergarten and field trips.
- Supports the community by participating in joint-use agreements, food bank drives and the Christmas Elves program and by undertaking student displays in the community.
- Promotes the school and public education in the community.

### **Student Services**

- Is knowledgeable about provincial and local initiatives and services for students with disabilities and diverse needs.
- Is committed to addressing the diverse learning needs of students in the local school community in a way that is consistent with BGRD's vision and mission.
- Is familiar with preschool and outreach opportunities and programs in the community for students with diverse learning needs.
- Is familiar with the evolving post-school workforce and societal opportunities for students with diverse learning needs.
- Is familiar with group homes in the district.

### **Technology**

- Facilitates purposeful change and innovation based on current trends and developments in education technology.
- Educates staff and students about the ever-changing social, legal and ethical implications of using technology.
- Ensures that students and staff use technology safely and appropriately.



### **AISI-PD**

- Advocates for professional development and AISI in the school and the community.
- Identifies specific school needs and supports professional development opportunities to address those needs.





## **Appendix B**



# Professional Growth Plan

## Area Of Focus:


## Vision of Success (Goal):


## Action Plan:

LD	Quality Indicator(s)	Strategies/Timeline	Measures
1. Fostering Effective Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>		
3. Embodying Visionary Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>		
3. Leading a Learning Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>		

## Action Plan:

LD	Quality Indicator(s)	Strategies/Timeline	Measures
4. Providing Instructional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>		
5. Developing and Facilitating Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>		
6. Managing School Operations and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>		
7. Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>		

## Resources:



