MASTERY LEARNING

Mastery learning is an instructional strategy that results in comprehensive grasp of curriculum as demonstrated through performance-based evaluations. Teachers support student mastery of material by providing guidance and assistance. The student builds upon each success and then moves on to another level of understanding. Norbert Baharally explains that "Mastery learning has increased communication between teachers and students, and teachers and parents. This partnership has created a sense of student accountability for their learning resulting in increased engagement and understanding of learning. Mastery learning should lead to better retention of knowledge learned – it is not simply rote memory and regurgitation."

Teachers use strategies to encourage students to integrate concepts and issues as well as understandings and skills across the curriculum. With this holistic learning, students take fragments of information and create personal meaning. Norbert Baharally explains that

"A focus on mastery learning has changed the conversations amongst our staff – they are considering questions that, in the traditional education system, would not be tackled. There are ongoing conversations occurring because teachers are not existing as standalone units, but are working together and collaborating."

> **Students and teachers require time to reteach, relearn and reassess. This must be addressed. Opportunities for quality time for students and for teachers to work independently or collaboratively, and for teachers and students to work together must be made available.**
>
> *Wanda Gerard, Principal, Peace Wapiti Academy, with Josina Nagtegaal, Flex Coordinator, and Debbie Terceros, CONNECT Coordinator*

What is the impact on students?

Students receive feedback not only about what they know well but also about what they need to revisit in order to demonstrate mastery. Chuck Jenkins explains the approach and impact in this way, "If you or I failed our driver's test, we wouldn't focus on the things we did right. We'd ask, 'What are the pieces that I need to fix up before I take the test again?' Teachers should ask themselves, "What are the missing pieces for success for each individual student? Are there alternative ways to show mastery other than pen-to-paper, retaking an exam?"

The impact of assessment paired with effective activities that address students' areas of need more for deeper understanding is motivating to students because the goal is successful mastery of the subject material. Wanda Gerard says, "The concepts of time and space have become fluid and dynamic in every aspect of running a classroom. It has become a place where students write a quiz or exam when they feel they have satisfactorily learned the material ... and work ahead if they feel they have mastered certain topics."

Chuck Jenkins also talks about how incorporating mastery learning into the instructional process does not have to be confined to the classroom. He says that, "his school has changed the focus to learning outcomes instead of grades, but diploma marks are staying equal to what they were – and our kids are reporting a better high school experience. It really shows that time in a classroom doesn't equate to better or worse learning."

What is the impact on staff?

Teachers become active collaborators with students when they work with the students to discover the appropriate activities that will help them master the curriculum. Tom Christensen says, "We have done a lot of work with how to do project design in class and project tuning between colleagues. Essentially, the belief is that one way to ensure mastery learning in any subject is to have the students develop the driving question they are going to try and resolve. Completion or mastery is set by how well they have explored the driving question that they themselves established. We have one part of our school which really emphasizes project learning as a main form of delivery."

He goes on to say that "A project is more than an assignment; it has to move the curriculum forward. It's more reflective of what students will do when they move onto a job. Even in a manufacturing job, you're not just doing what your boss says; you're problem solving and moving things forward. With our diploma exams, the general belief is that it is a race against time to get through the curriculum so that students are ready to write them. Hence there needs to be more teacher-directed instruction. I have some staff who have begun to try and do some project-based learning for their diploma courses thus becoming less teacher-directed." He adds that, "Particularly for Grade 12 teachers, who are trying to prepare their students for diploma exams, it's been a real leap of faith. But they've begun to realize that they can let go of some of the controls and it will be just fine."

With the mastery learning approach, all students can demonstrate excellence in their approach to learning. Teachers find that some students excel beyond the reach of the curriculum while other students are beginning to master the material. The impact on staff is extremely rewarding as the simple process of learning for mastery promotes differentiated learning in a timely and efficient manner.

Wanda Gerard recalls how one teacher commented, "Now we can concentrate on making sure that students have mastered the outcomes. If they master them quickly, the students can move on; if they master them slowly, we [offer] extension and reteach strategies that enable them to have the time they need."

When mastery learning is a focus in a school:

- self-directed learning is valued
- continuous (credit-recovery) learning opportunities are available
- learning is systematic and sequential, as students gain mastery of the subject material
- formative assessment is used to provide ongoing feedback
- time is no longer a barrier to mastery learning
- feedback is used to move student learning forward.

> "We have one part of our school which really emphasizes project learning as a main form of delivery. A project is more than an assignment; it has to move the curriculum forward."
>
> *Tom Christensen, Principal, Olds*

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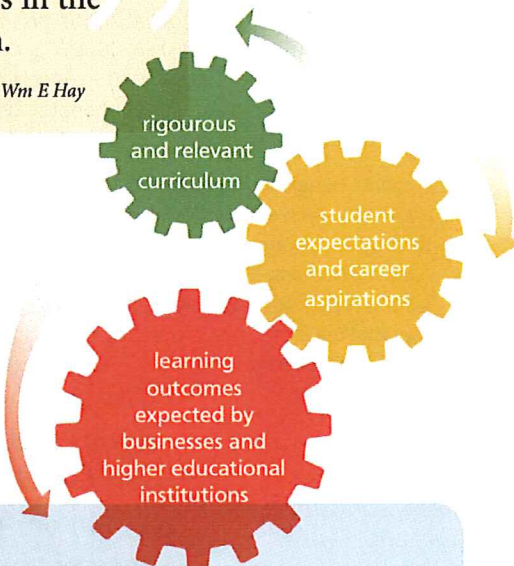
RIGOUROUS & RELEVANT CURRICULUM

Rigourous and relevant curriculum meets not only the career aspirations for high school students but also the needs of the business community and post-secondary institutions. Stimulating and inspiring curricula that sets appropriate learning objectives aimed at meeting these two purposes creates a meaningful, goal-oriented high school experience for students.

Mark Centazzo agrees, "as long as the individual curriculum are scrutinized for the factors described." He notes that there is a perception out there that some curricula are content-heavy. He says one teacher put it well by saying, "We cover a hundred miles of content but it only goes inches deep."

Rigourous and relevant curriculum challenges students to apply what they learn to real world situations. Students are required to use higher order thinking skills and to demonstrate mastery of discipline-specific concepts and skills. Norbert Baharally notes that students need to feel as though their learning is leading towards their future goals, and they need to feel that the learning is practical, with connections that can be made with the real world they are living in today. He says students "need to be challenged to think critically of the world around them."

> "Teachers are professionals. As professionals, teachers plan learning experiences that support each student in the class in mastering the learning outcomes in the curriculum.
>
> *Norbert Baharally, Principal, Wm E Hay*

rigourous and relevant curriculum

student expectations and career aspirations

learning outcomes expected by businesses and higher educational institutions

What is the impact on students?

Learning curriculum at school that is directly applicable to student life is highly motivating. Because the material is relevant, students use skills like active learning, problem solving, reasoning, and technology to demonstrate their grasp of the concepts. Students bring meaning to world issues through discussion, research, exploration, analysis, and relating the issues to their own worldviews. Being excited about the curriculum makes it easier to talk about with peers, which boosts exchanges of ideas and listening skills. When students and teachers collaborate on the investigations and discoveries, using technology together, the responsibility for learning the material is also shared. Mark Centazzo notes that "Part of the challenge here is making the set curriculum relevant to the wide spectrum of students. Relevance can be a very personal thing."

A rigourous and relevant curriculum asks students to make connections between disciplines too. Using strategies learned in one discipline to tackle issues presented by another helps students understand complexities and solve issues in meaningful ways. This in turn raises expectations of students as the curriculum becomes increasingly complex, ever building on students' prior knowledge.

When math or science curriculum pre-supposes familiarity with urban settings, the absence of prior knowledge for some rural students can be challenge enough. Trevor Mitchell explains, "We live in a rural, northern area. Many students have never been to the city, seen high rises or ridden in elevators. So the issue is how to make the math or science curriculum relevant to their daily lives." Making the curriculum more relevant to students' lives increases the success rate on Alberta's diploma exam results, as Tom Christensen describes: "We partner with Olds College, so we have students that are in both high school and college at the same time. ... The most at-risk students can be the ones who just don't see the relevance of the curriculum, but they do see the relevance of an apprenticeship in welding or carpentry."

What is the impact on staff?

As teachers, we engage more with rigourous and relevant curricula by developing learning experiences that ask students to apply concepts and skills in the context of their real-world situation. We also make sure that the learning experiences are appropriate, both developmentally and for the part of the world we live in. Using curriculum and developing it in this way, there is greater scope for bringing fresh ideas to the classroom and supporting students in their discovery of the personal relevance of these curricula. We try to get students to question the material, to interact with it, and to dig deeper into the issues, conducting research when sparked. As teachers, we can try to collaborate more often with each other to make the curriculum rigourous and relevant, and we want to make the connections between school and community/business more apparent. Collaborations with experts outside of the school also help provide another opportunity to connect learning to the real world. Using the curriculum in this way, we become facilitators and coaches too, inspiring students to use higher-order thinking skills and giving them the type of feedback that allows them to take the learning more into their own hands.

Norbert Baharally explains, "Using an Understanding by Design approach, each department worked through their curriculum documents to come to a common understanding of the learner outcomes in their curriculum area. They engaged in on-going discussions about how best to organize instruction ensuring all outcomes are covered in a way that allows students to achieve understanding."

> "Teachers strive to maintain rigour and relevance through sound teaching methods, which most in our profession continue to reflect on in order to better their craft, knowledge and practice.
>
> *Norbert Baharally, Principal, Wm E Hay*

> "Develop a school-wide career planning model to help make the transition to post-secondary more seamless. Make the schedule similar to what it will be in post-secondary. Offer diverse choices.
>
> *Tom Christensen, Principal, Olds*

With a focus on rigourous and relevant curriculum:

- teaching materials and assessment strategies are aligned with the curriculum's rigour and relevance

- assignments focus on the application of concepts and skills in a real-world context

- teachers support and encourage students to meet the high standards set for them

- teachers keep track of and share strategies that work.

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PERSONALIZATION

> "Students need to clearly understand the goal/target for each lesson or unit and to work toward the same goal, albeit through personalized means. Students need to be at the centre of their learning through interactive project-based learning. Students need to understand not only what they need to learn, but how they learn. Students need time to process information, focus on process skills and competencies, become avid self-assessors, and have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways."
>
> *Darlene Marcinkevics, Principal, Spruce Grove*

Personalized instruction seeks to understand every student's unique developmental level, learning style, passions, skills, and foundational knowledge. It is based on ongoing, differentiated assessment, and meaningful relationships between students and staff. Darlene Marcinkevics adds the following: "Tailoring learning; including the learning environment; personalizing learning to enhance social skills and a sense of responsibility; encouraging ethical citizenship; and using assistive technologies and resources to support all learners with mastery learning."

Janet Grenier notes, "Learning is repetitive. If students can make repeated connections between the languages and the sciences, they will get a deeper understanding of their content. If you understand what was going on politically and economically wherever in the world you were living, and then you understand why a certain author was writing what he was writing, all of that makes sense … Life doesn't happen in a bubble; everything is related."

Personalization and differentiated instructional practices can transform education into an adaptive practice designed to meet each student's unique needs. Deanna Helton says, "The personalization element has led to really good interdisciplinary discussion. Teachers share an office, and they share the students, so it's a lot harder for students to get lost. The whole point of personalization is to ensure that the pathway for each student is taken care of."

What is the impact on students?

When staff know students, the students' needs are more readily met. The school experience is increasingly built on relationships between students and adults in the school. Having role models is important, but more than that, students are able to convey their interests, goals and aspirations to the adults in the school. Tom Christensen describes the personalization principle at work in his school: "We don't have a lunch block; it's up to the students to use their time well. But we have a quad system, whereby the student body is divided into four groups and the students stay with the same teachers for math, social studies, English and science throughout high school. This helps build long-term relationships and contributes more than anything else to academic rigour. It's a trade-off: we have much more flexible timetables, like post-secondary school, but those student-teacher relationships provide the security that students at this age group need."

By having student needs up front, students accept the educational program as being more meaningful for them. Michelle Blair says, "In our academic support program, we have encouraged students to take more responsibility for their learning. Students are now better able to advocate for themselves, whether this takes the form of asking for accommodations based upon their learning needs or constructing a personal learning environment that helps them succeed."

Through personalization, schools progress toward clarifying student hopes and dreams, setting and correcting the course or roadmap to accomplishing those dreams, and finding new interests – new career paths that fit with their skills, attitudes and ambitions. In her school, Darlene Marcinkevics notes, "The decrease in drop-outs and an increase in graduation rates are all positive signals that personalization for student learning is working."

What is the impact on staff?

Managing to get to know every student and build relationships with them can be daunting in many schools. In addition, "Teaching is a very isolating job," says Tom Christensen. "You spend most of your day in a classroom, except for a few minutes in the staff room. We've tried to deprivatize the classroom. [Teachers] share an office, they have open spaces where they work with students – they don't take ownership of a classroom."

Setting up advisory systems with teachers can bring a measure of awareness of individuals in the school. Longer blocks for each subject period allow teachers to spend more time with students and get to know them better. Staff can also participate in setting up student internships and work experience opportunities.

For many schools, the shift to personalization has resulted in greater dialogue and collaboration. Michelle Blair says, "As we worked to shift the focus onto students and how they learn, teaching conversations began to change from what to teach to how to teach." Where teachers once spent PLCs creating exams, they now spend time dissecting those exams to determine what their students need next. Teachers are watching each other teach and offering positive feedback.

> " There has to be buy-in from students, parents and teachers. There has to be communication and planning in advance. "
>
> *Deanna Helton, Principal, Bishop McNally*

When personalization is a focus:

- [ ] communication and planning happen in advance, to ensure buy-in from students, parents and teachers

- [ ] teacher advisories are in place with a focus on building relationships and rapport

- [ ] multiple forms of assessment are used to get to know students' knowledge base, interests and aptitudes, to help them build on that knowledge base and to expand opportunities for students

- [ ] diverse choices for diverse career learning paths, including non-traditional learning paths, are in place

- [ ] portfolios, including e-folios, allow students to showcase their work

- [ ] cross-curricular teaching and learning is encouraged

- [ ] credit recovery options are available to students.

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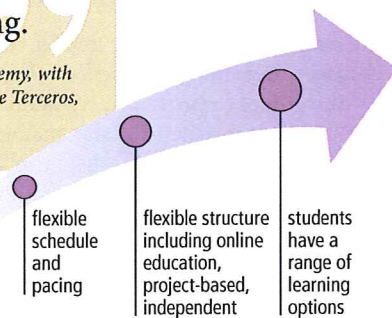
FLEXIBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The principle of flexible learning environments acknowledges that learning takes place everywhere, not only in the classroom. It takes this idea and makes it real. Wanda Gerard, with colleagues Josina Nagtegaal and Debbie Terceros, notes, "There has been a shift in the ownership of the learning, with students taking on more responsibility. One teacher said, 'It is not only about providing time in a day for students to decide how best to spend their time, but about allowing them to choose the best delivery method for an entire course, or choosing how to meet curriculum objectives within a course.'"

Flexible learning environments adapt to student requirements. For students who work or have other scheduling constraints due to sports or music programs, for example, these environments offer a variety of schedules and paces for student work. "Flex block helps kids manage their time," says Janet Grenier. "Out of 500 students, we have only about three who live within walking distance. Many are on the bus for two hours a day, so flex block gives them time to work together on projects or get help if they need it."

Structurally, the flexible learning environment expands beyond the classroom walls, allowing learning to take place in a variety of environments, including online. By offering choice through such environments, students determine what they learn, where they learn and when they learn. The role of the teacher in a flexible learning environment is to be a learning facilitator. Chuck Jenkins talks about how the shift to flexible learning environments affects attitudes, relationships and learning. He says, "It's up to teachers to know what the flexibility options are for students outside of their classrooms. The attitude in the past has been to say to the kid, 'It's your problem, figure it out.' Now teachers are asking, 'What can I do for this kid?'"

> " Our definition: Students are provided with a wide range of learning options in terms of time and/or structure. Thereby, they are able to make choices related to their learning. "
>
> *Wanda Gerard, Principal, Peace Wapiti Academy, with Josina Nagtegaal, Flex Coordinator, and Debbie Terceros, CONNECT Coordinator*

flexible schedule and pacing

flexible structure including online education, project-based, independent

students have a range of learning options

> " I would include … providing student choice that promotes independence, creativity, innovation, critical thinking [and] entrepreneurial spirit. "
>
> *Darlene Marcinkevics, Principal, Spruce Grove*

What is the impact on students?

Flexible learning environments offer students choices about their schedules, so that pursuit of extra-curricular activities is recognized as part of student learning. The approach is so attractive to some students that it makes the difference between attending high school and avoiding it altogether. Trevor Mitchell notes, "We've seen some of the biggest impact with our at-risk kids. At our school, there's a lot of transience. Few kids are here for more than four or five years and many are functioning below grade level. With the flex project, attendance has gone up, completion rates have gone up, and intellectual engagement has increased. Over time, this will lead to academic improvements."

A lot of it is about measuring students against themselves. "Sometimes," Mitchell says, "a student grows way more than a year in a year, even though they're still behind level." He notes, "Sometimes you pick and choose your goals. Maybe the measure is, 'Did you come to school more than not?' But usually," Mitchell asserts, "if you manage to get a kid hooked in one area, you'll see gains in others."

What is the impact on staff?

Flexible learning environments are often interactive and collaborative. These environments can take the form of small groups that meet to discuss, bounce ideas off one another, and share learnings. They can be very effective, alternate means of "structuring" time.

Great conversations have a way of expanding perspectives on issues while pinpointing specific aspects of the topic that make it unique. Students and teachers working together to discover these aspects of a topic cultivate student mastery of the material. Chuck Jenkins says, "Taking the 25-hour credit requirement off of each unit is like taking the handcuffs off of our high schools; it's an opportunity to get a whole bunch of new ideas going."

"I had a teacher who was struggling with how to fill the 125 hours for a course. ... I said, 'Stop right there. You don't have to do that anymore. Talk to me about the concepts that the kids need to acquire and understand.' So that's where we're at – we're changing the conversation."

Greater opportunities for teacher collaboration also mean a greater variety of learning experiences. "In our school," Trevor Mitchell explains, "humanities (or math and sciences) are given a large block of the day, and it's up to the teachers to carve that up. This gives them the flexibility to do a large project, go on a field trip, or watch a movie without worrying that they're eating the time for another class. It also works the other way – when teachers need time to write up report cards, we can give that time to students to self-direct. They decide what areas they need help in and seek that out."

Tom Christensen notes the shift in perception that's resulted as flexible learning environments have phased into his school. He says, "When I was first a principal, I defined a good day by whether the doors were all closed and the hallway was quiet. The environment we try to create here, and how we judge success, is by how many students are interacting in the open areas. If the students aren't in the open areas, we're not doing it, because that's where learning is really going to happen."

Wanda Gerard and her colleagues also note, "Teachers are recognizing that their perception of an ideal study/work place and time is not necessarily the ideal place for every student. Staff find it difficult to let students learn their way and have to take a step back sometimes to let them."

Flexible learning environments lead to active learning experiences and enhanced learning opportunities. Darlene Marcinkevics describes another approach. "Rather than a flex block around lunch time, we've created a rotating seminar block. With a significant population that accesses school buses, personalized learning time (PLT) is invaluable in not only accessing teachers, but also in expanding cooperative learning opportunities beyond lunch hours."

In a flexible learning environment:

- learning is student-centred
- students are responsible and accountable for their learning
- students have multiple entry and exit points into the curriculum
- new technologies facilitate online learning and one-on-one time with a teacher
- teachers are empowered to decide how best to structure time to teach students
- students have more control over the where, when and what they learn: they are more engaged, and by becoming more engaged, they are transforming their experiences into their education.

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EDUCATOR ROLES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

> "Teachers need time for collaboration. Instructional leaders need to provide support and professional development opportunities. Learning coaches and master teachers need to be utilized in a greater capacity for mentoring young educators in and out of the classroom, team teaching, sharing their expertise and knowledge with curriculum and the program of studies.
>
> *Darlene Marcinkevics, Principal, Spruce Grove*

The role of the teacher as guide, coach and career mentor, and the role of the administrator as instructional leader, are supported through professional development opportunities with collaborative and collegial school environments and professional learning communities. Administrators as instructional leaders thrive in collegial and collaborative learning environments, and bring a level of professionalism to their roles that benefits the entire school community. After all, in terms of high school redesign, professional development can mean collaborating with your colleagues. We all learn so much from each other. Janet Grenier says, "Teachers need to know not only their own curriculum, but what comes before and after, as well as the links with other curriculums." Further, she stresses, "What's vital for [cross-curricular knowledge] is professional development and time for teachers to get together and work. Teachers can't be expected to do it all after class time."

Strengthened and defined educator roles have an important place in high school redesign, and bringing about the shift to that place in the process is part of a new way of doing things. Darlene Marcinkevics says change "will only occur if instructional leaders provide the opportunity for collaboration and professional development to create a shift in school culture and a change in pedagogy." So not only do educator and leadership roles need to be revisioned, but also the interaction between administrators and teachers so that there is a renewed and mutual empowerment.

What is the impact on students?

Lifelong learning is for everyone. When students see their teachers pursuing professional development, and hear about the teachers' experiences, the whole impact of being a student is brought into a new, fresh perspective. From students' points of view, having teachers who are interested in new technology, world issues, and the whole gamut of amazing and exciting learning opportunities that can be brought into the learning environment means students and teachers share an enormous and exciting capacity for learning.

Wanda Gerard, Josina Nagtegaal and Debbie Terceros say that, in their experience with high school redesign, professional development can mean improved student-teacher rapport. "Students are developing better relationships with their teachers and their classmates because they share the responsibility for learning and advocate for what they need. They also feel less stressed because they have so much more control over their learning."

Along with enhanced teacher learning, "Students are no longer just allowed to play the 'school game,'" says Norbert Baharally, "where the teacher tells them what they need to learn, without using any of their creative thinking skills. There are now more meaningful conversations happening between teachers and students regarding assignment deadlines and opportunities to do things differently."

What is the impact on staff?

Educator roles and professional development opportunities help teachers and administrators build professional learning communities. These collaborative communities challenge teachers to think in a new way. Trevor Mitchell says, "Flexibility challenges teachers to get to know kids better, to get to know the community better, to do good assessments because they can't rely on canned programs and purchased resources. It's great for teacher morale. Teachers have more autonomy and, with that, more accountability."

In their experience, Wanda Gerard, Josina Nagtegaal and Debbie Terceros note, "Teachers require more time for professional development and professional time to have discussions, create solutions, and build supports within a new structure of learning." To that end, their "colleagues have explored team teaching, wider use of technology, and an increased focus on developing learning opportunities."

> Change is hard. Rich, meaningful conversations must be rooted in a climate of respect.
>
> *Wanda Gerard, Principal, Peace Wapiti Academy, with Josina Nagtegaal, Flex Coordinator, and Debbie Terceros, CONNECT Coordinator*

Professional development opportunities help teachers work with the curriculum, making it into something organically their own. Tom Christensen describes one approach. "We do curriculum deconstructs and builds, where we bring teachers together and look at key aspects of curriculum. If teachers don't make the curriculum personal to them, it's not going to be personal to the students. For eight or nine years, we've been doing professional development on project-based learning. Teachers have to be less of the sage on the stage," he says, "and more of a learning facilitator."

"Another aspect of this challenging, new way of thinking," says Norbert Baharally, is that "This process has encouraged teachers to rethink teaching – every idea is considered. Teachers have had opportunities to collaborate with other colleagues in the school, in the province and across North America as we strive to improve our teaching. There is much more sharing of resources and lessons as teachers strive to change practices."

How can other high schools facilitate this principle of Educator Roles and Professional Development? Baharally explains one way his school has gone about it. "We have implemented an instructional coach who meets with new teachers to help them as they develop their professional teaching methodologies and to work through the questions that often arise from our first year teachers. The instructional coach also meets with all staff members who are planning on attending PD opportunities to set goals beforehand and then later discuss how that teacher can share what they have learned with the rest of staff."

With a focus on educator roles and professional development:

- structures are created to better support new types of learning relationships
- collaboration and shared decision making are encouraged
- administrators participate in the learning community and expand their leadership roles
- teachers build and have access to a growing repertoire of approaches to learning
- teachers work together to improve the design and delivery of the curriculum.

> Engage students, parents and teachers in a dialogue around school redesign. Develop avenues for input. Create methods for updating and communicating progress. Provide impetus and a rallying point for involved commitment from students, staff, parents and the community.
>
> *Wanda Gerard, Principal, Peace Wapiti Academy, with Josina Nagtegaal, Flex Coordinator, and Debbie Terceros, CONNECT Coordinator*

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High School Redesign

MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

"Not all meaningful relationships start out through a positive experience. It is important to never give up on students, even though your patience may be tested on a regular basis," says Keith Johnson.

Developing meaningful relationships helps to ensure that no student remains anonymous in high school. Paying attention to students and working to get to know them allows teachers to connect with students' lives beyond the classroom. The results directly impact what goes on in the classroom. A relationship that demonstrates genuine interest between students and staff brings a level of trust and healthy interaction that stimulates intellectual pursuit and collaborative learning. Finding and creating more opportunities to build meaningful relationships strengthens the learning experience in high schools.

Norbert Baharally comments on meaningful relationships by saying "The key point of [meaningful relationships] is 'genuine care and concern' on the part of teachers – students easily identify what is and what is not genuine. Teachers who truly care about their students are able to quickly form relationships with those students."

Keith Johnson notes some points that could be added to improve the description of meaningful relationships. He says, "I would add, 'personal success.' [This] would involve students being confident in society and having a solid sense of self-esteem." Johnson added that meaningful relationships include "students being prepared for the world of work through a mentorship relationship focused on career planning."

> Teachers are not teaching to a group of students – they are teaching individuals who they know and care about. This results in a dramatic shift in instructional pedagogy and in the atmosphere of the school.
>
> *Norbert Baharally, Principal, Wm E Hay*

What is the impact on students?

Positive interactions with adults, on a regular basis, help students feel good about themselves. But more than self-esteem, communication skills are built. By having regular conversations with teachers, students can actually hear themselves speak about personal interests without fear of being assessed by the teacher or judged by a room full of peers. Janet Grenier notes, "There's not a day that our kids don't see their TA [Teacher Advisor] for about 40 minutes." The TAs communicate with the parents, establish objectives, celebrate birthdays. "It's a little bit like elementary school – and the kids need it. Two minutes a day is not a TA [Teacher Advisory] program.

"If you only see kids during class time and you're busy teaching, you might just see a kid who is acting up." But if the kid is talking to the TA, and the teachers are talking to each other, "often problems can be dealt with before they get out of hand."

Norbert Baharally agrees. He says, "Relationships in one realm spread to relationships in every realm of our school. Even small gestures, such as administration standing outside of the school to greet every student entering the building in the morning,

the one-on-one work with struggling students, attending extracurricular events of TA students and knowing their hobbies and interests – students feel a sense of connection and a sense of belonging to our school and that is how we engage students in their learning."

Friendships are built in this way. So are meaningful relationships with adults. Keith Johnson describes a program used in his school that fosters meaningful relationships. He says, "Through the TA program, students connect with a teacher for three years [so] there is less chance of students going through high school unnoticed. Students feel that there is an adult in the building who cares about their lives. … One of the key benefits to students in developing a positive relationship with adults during their three years of high school is that they begin to understand what a genuine real-world relationship feels like outside of their family relationships. There is a sense of security with students communicating with significant adults in the school community, as they are able to communicate more freely regarding certain issues."

What is the impact on staff?

Getting to know the students on a personal level provides a greater understanding of home, peer or community issues students may be trying to solve.

Wanda Gerard, Josina Nagtegaal and Debbie Terceros describe the impact of mentoring on staff by discussing their experience with Academic and Individual Mentor (AIM) teachers. These teachers, who mentor to a group of cross-graded students throughout their high school experience, have an important role to play. The trio says, "The role of the AIM teacher continues to evolve. The variety of interpretations of this role is as different as the number of teachers on staff. Time is being incorporated once per month as AIM time for teachers to meet with their entire mentorship group. Teachers are looking to build a stronger rapport with students through this time. The level of parent involvement has increased at the school through the connection parents are able to establish with their child's AIM teacher."

By talking with students about their personal issues, or simply talking about the latest movie, you can get a greater glimpse of individual personalities. Norbert Baharally says, "Staff have become more invested in their work. They know their students and understand their needs and that understanding has resulted in more individualization of instruction and assessment." The adult perspective you openly offer informs your role as a mentor and guide to students. You can help to shape careers in this way, simply by being present to student interests and creating new awareness in students who may be eager to learn more about what you know.

> Build trust with students by keeping your commitments to them. For example, if you say you are going to watch them play basketball, show up and stay for the entire game. Also, keep the relationships with students honest and open. Tell them how you feel their action led to a consequence and help them understand how to change an attitude or behaviour.
>
> *Keith Johnson, Principal, James Fowler*

> Students genuinely appreciate the mentorship and relationships between student and adult. They may not show you [this] immediately, but in time you will see the difference.
>
> *Keith Johnson, Principal, James Fowler*

> The significance of the relationships often comes back at year-end when you get a card or an e-mail saying, 'I was having trouble and I had no one to talk to and you were there.' I can't speak for my teachers, but what I hear is that they feel more connected – and that's why you become a teacher.
>
> *Janet Grenier, Directrice, École Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys*

When meaningful relationships are fostered:

- [ ] no student feels anonymous
- [ ] teachers and students communicate regularly
- [ ] teachers and students respect one another
- [ ] students see teachers as mentors
- [ ] students are supported in achieving high standards or excellence
- [ ] teachers build trust by keeping commitments to students.

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High School Redesign

HOME & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Home and community involvement forms a foundation where learning takes place not only at school but also in the home, in businesses, at post-secondary institutions and among other community facilities. Community representatives are involved in learning opportunities side-by-side with high school students. Home and community involvement is more about partnerships between people than about the place they come from. The school community feels like a family, with members coming from within the school's walls, as well as from home and community.

> "Positive partnerships, meaningful learning outside the classroom, and involvement in focus groups in which parents and stakeholders have a voice to discuss issues and solutions and how we can work together to create positive change in the future."
>
> *Norbert Baharally, Principal, Wm E Hay*
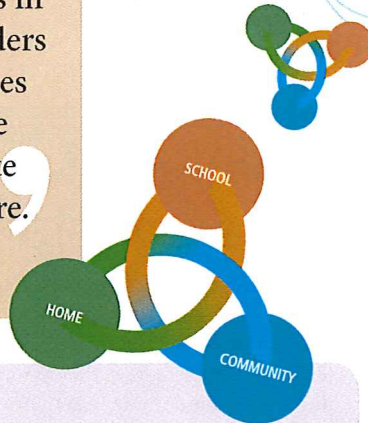
What is the impact on students?

"The current education system," says Norbert Baharally, "assumes that learning happens within a classroom. In the twenty-first century, this could not be further from the truth. It is vital that we continue to push education beyond the walls of the classroom and engage the community in teaching students the skills they need to be successful."

We've established partnerships with four community businesses, as well as work experience and registered apprenticeship programs. Portfolios are an exit requirement for Grade 12 students. "Students present their portfolios to a panel of community members who are in the [student's] 'career cluster' … They provide meaningful and authentic feedback to [help] our students to … prepare for post-secondary interviews or career interviews in the future."

When the lines of communication between teachers and parents are opened, meaningful, relevant relationships are formed. And, when relationships are developed that expand and open the school's interconnections with community, students benefit. Students have support for and opportunities to develop their talents and skills in the home, school and community. There is less of a division between these environments.

Tom Christensen explains some of the benefits his rural school experiences by building relationships with the town. "One of our goals in partnering with the Olds College has been rural development," says Christensen. "Our students would go through school and move away for college and sometimes never come back … A lot of what we're doing is going to keep more human capital in our community."

"Olds is a community-learning campus. It's a public facility. There's school during the day, but also seniors using the fitness centre so 'students can see Gramma and Grampa walking the indoor track while they're in a PE class. They can see that learning is a lifelong thing.' This is a public building and we have other government agencies, like Alberta Works, and Child and Family Services. It exposes our students to life in our community a bit more."

At Norbert Baharally's school, parental involvement can bring meaningful changes. He says, "Parents are becoming more engaged as the relationships between teachers and students change and parents are brought into the conversations more. Our traditional parent-teacher interviews resulted in a 12 percent turnout rate. [By comparison], the parent participation rate in student learning conferences [which involve teachers, teaching assistants, parent and students] this year was 87 percent."

Just as community and home members can come to the school, so too can students take their learning experience outside of the school. As Baharally explains, it's possible "to foster an understanding that meaningful learning can occur anywhere." At his school, students have "extended learning opportunities (ELOs). Students create their own curricular objectives in an area of interest outside of school and work with a community member who is an expert in that field. Then, they showcase their learning in a large scale, final presentation."

> "Get an audit of community resources and figure out how to bring them into the students' world. Get the students out into the community to do a service project. Make your facility more accessible to the public – it's not just about getting out into the community, but inviting the community in."
>
> *Tom Christensen, Principal, Olds*

SCHOOL
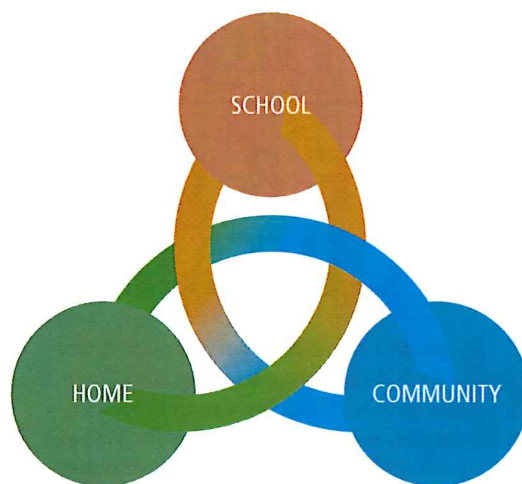
HOME

COMMUNITY

What is the impact on staff?

Building relationships with home and community makes new connections in ways that might not always be evident. Teachers have the opportunity to learn from, and invite into their classrooms, other community experts and community members in the school's fields of study. For example, teachers may meet a parent who is a professional musician. When one of the school's students speaks about an interest in music, a new opportunity exists to introduce the two like-minded individuals.

Tom Christensen notes, "The teachers have seen that the classroom isn't just the four walls. They might be doing work with the community garden, or with the college course in meat-cutting, or my science teacher might see that the college wetlands project is very relevant to what they're doing in Bio 20."

When home and community involvement is a focus in a school:

- [ ] school-wide strategies are in place to engage the home and community
- [ ] the community appreciates the learning opportunities available to students
- [ ] parents are more actively involved in the learning, and understand its intent, import and value
- [ ] students get out into the community to learn on a regular basis
- [ ] schools are more available to the public
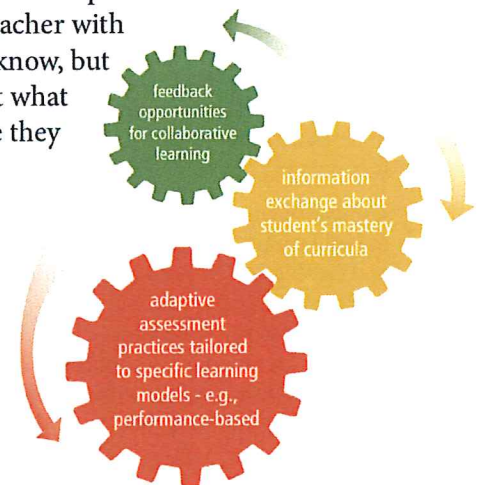- [ ] business and industry are invited to be partners in the education happening at the school.

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ASSESSMENT

> "You can't just say, 'Oh, you failed, let's go onto the next unit.' You have to come back and try again. There's a level of frustration for the teachers, and there does have to be a cut-off point, but this is a more humane approach. Kids don't come here to fail. They come here to succeed and you have to do everything in your power to help them."
>
> *Janet Grenier, Directrice, École Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys*

Kathy Muhlethaler says, "Assessment for learning strategies are effective for providing information to students about how they are doing. In classrooms that promote continual growth and mastery of learning, students complete assessments that provide the teacher with information on what students know, but also provide information about what students don't know and where they need support and feedback."

feedback opportunities for collaborative learning

information exchange about student's mastery of curricula

adaptive assessment practices tailored to specific learning models - e.g., performance-based

What is the impact on students?

Assessment used as part of the learning process provides feedback about how to improve, and gives students a clear view of what is expected. Assessment that is collaborative – shared between the student and teacher – greatly benefits students.

Students become aware of areas they need to concentrate on, who to go to for assistance in that work, and how to get there, step-by-step. Deana Helton explains, "If a student has a failing mark, we need to ask why. Sometimes a student seems to understand a concept yet still has a failing mark, so maybe the teacher didn't ask the question in the right way."

Performance-based assessment requires students to demonstrate what they can do and what they know. Its place is solidly based in school-wide standards, where all students know, through rubrics, portfolio plans and other explicitly stated expectations that they will be assessed on work they produce.

"At our school," Kathy Muhlethaler says, "we have focused on implementing a school-wide assessment plan. Students know at the start of each unit what their learning outcomes are; they experience a variety of learning activities; they have opportunities to review their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes; and they have a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their learning of critical outcomes."

Effective assessment that is part of the learning process builds student self-confidence, metacognition and self-directed learning. The impact is felt by students in a very real way. In addition, as Muhlethaler notes, "Students are more engaged as they continue to experience the changes in teaching and see the connections between the assessments for learning and the assessments of learning. … Overall, our school-wide assessment plan has led to an improvement in course completion and high school completion. It has also meant that students are more persistent and are challenging higher level courses, as evident in the increase of diploma exam participation rates."

What is the impact on staff?

How and why we conduct assessment has an impact on how we teach. Michelle Blair relates how, "in the weight training unit of PE, the teacher has focused on reciprocal and discovery-based learning by having students partner up to experiment with both the cardio equipment and the weights. This has been a way of moving away from the teacher-as-lector type teaching."

Kathy Muhlethaler says, "[Our] teachers have changed how marks are earned, reported and graded. We utilize targeted PD [through which] our staff have been introduced to, instructed in and given time to collaborate on research-based assessment practices ... Our teachers avoid practices that distort achievement, build clear, quality assessments, and calculate final course marks using their professional judgment. In the last few years, we have been able to move on from the topics of grading and summative assessment to the topic of formative assessment or assessment for learning. Our PD goal is that 'assessment for learning is happening in every classroom for every student every day.'"

Using assessment as a way to probe students' prior knowledge allows us to build from a relevant foundation. Wanda Gerard, Josina Nagtegaal and Debbie Terceros explain, "Staff are more focused on meeting students' needs than 'aiming for the middle.' Assessment is focusing more on mastery of outcomes than measuring content acquisition. Teachers are accepting students redoing work for reassessment. There's been an increase in project-based assessment. Teachers are seeing recovery as something that can be done within the semester timeline."

> "If it's about student learning, time should not be a factor in assessment; think timelines not deadlines. Establish a testing centre. Encourage students to assess their own mastery and provide tools for them to do so.
>
> *Wanda Gerard, Principal, Peace Wapiti Academy, with Josina Nagtegaal, Flex Coordinator, and Debbie Terceros, CONNECT Coordinator*

> "Understanding Anne Davies' assessment for learning has been very important for our teachers. Have empathy. Be open-minded. Develop a good knowledge of brain development and how the brain makes connections. And put away old ideas – I mean really put them away."
>
> *Janet Grenier, Directrice, École Ste-Marguerite-Bourgeoys*

When assessment is a focus:

- [ ] a variety of assessments are used, including portfolios, demonstrations of learning, applied projects, and performance assessments

- [ ] assessment is part of the learning process and is used to guide teachers in adjusting instruction, promoting learning, and assessing student mastery

- [ ] clear expectations about high standards foster a culture of continuous improvement

- [ ] students are given chances to replace earlier attempts and have opportunities to make up missed assignments

- [ ] fair, accurate and flexible grading practices are used, and teachers exercise their professional judgment when determining final course marks

- [ ] professional development assists teachers in understanding how to manage and use the data they gather.

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WELCOMING, CARING, RESPECTFUL & SAFE

> " I prefer this definition: In order for students to be successful in their program of studies, schools must be places where students and staff feel welcome, respected, cared for and safe. Schools create this by weaving respect for diversity into the fabric of their environments. "
>
> *Kathy Muhlethaler, Principal, ME LaZerte*

Welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning communities foster multicultural and multiracial diversity as well as respect for student differences. Such inclusive attitudes allow students to feel understood and cared for, and build a deeper connection to the school community. A healthy, positive sense of citizenship is built on an inclusive attitude, where every student contributes. The school environment feels like a family environment.

What is the impact on students?

Students in a school with a culture that respects diversity engage in conversations that have local, national and international importance. The students' world accepts and embraces multicultural and multiracial views and ways of living. Students' lives are not only enriched, but they are lived in a safe and caring environment. Students feel accepted and understood. Their perspectives are appreciated, and they feel connected to the curriculum.

Respectful learning communities teach students, not outcomes. Michelle Blair says, "Before this [flexibility enhancement] project began, our student satisfaction survey highlighted that our students felt teachers did not care about them as learners. Recent survey results suggest that the percentage of students who feel their teachers care has risen dramatically, as have our numbers who feel a sense of belonging. This is because we are focusing more deliberately on our students' needs than on curriculum."

Kathy Muhlethaler says, "At our school, the impacts on students have included a decrease in discipline issues; improvements in attendance and a [decrease in] lates; increased course completion rates; lower drop-out rates; a greater feeling of connectedness among students, who continue to hang out at our school both before and after school in clubs, on teams and as games spectators; increased student accountability; and a positive school culture that celebrates diversity."

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What is the impact on staff?

Diversity exists in every classroom. By embracing the diversity, staff can draw upon multiple talents, perspectives and ways of knowing. The curriculum is enhanced. Students teach one another about their differences and in the process develop citizenship and character skills that will serve them in the community as well as throughout high school. Staff enjoy the respect and appreciation of their peers and concentrate on building positive environments where leadership and understanding are demonstrated every day.

Kathy Muhlethaler says, "Staff have developed strong inclusive classroom practices. They are more involved in clubs and teams. District survey results show that our staff feel safe in school, feel supported by admin and respected by students. Implementation of a pyramid of protocol for behaviour has provided support for teachers – they are more positive about their work and enjoy coming to work."

Michelle Blair says, "When teachers were challenged to narrow the gap between our students' perceptions of our level of care and concern for them, and our own perceptions of our level of care and concern, the focus moved to students as individuals, which is the basis for the foundational principles of the flexibility enhancement project."

In Wanda Gerard's school, one teacher commented, "My role as a teacher has shifted from that of a lecturer and deliverer of information to that of a facilitator. Students are expected to become more independent and take their learning into their own hands. This has allowed me the opportunity to focus more on helping individual students as opposed to seeing the students as one single entity with a specific method of learning. I can also engage students more effectively because they are able to proceed at their own pace if they so wish. This increases student motivation and reduces behaviour issues that would have been caused by boredom and lack of meaningful learning. This method of teaching does require a different skill set, which I am developing in myself. Managing students who are each proceeding at a different pace requires great organizational skills, and dealing with students on a more individual basis requires a deeper understanding of the different methods by which students learn."

In welcoming, caring, respectful and safe schools:

- student voice is valued, listened to and acted upon
- high expectations are held for all students
- students demonstrate respectful speech and actions
- students and staff are mindful of others
- shared responsibility is expected
- teachers are responsible for all students, not just those they teach
- diversity is celebrated.

> "The goal is to improve student learning for all. Through empowering schools and teachers to make professional decisions that directly relate to students in such matters as tailoring instructional practices, grouping students, and flexing each student's program, as a system we are better able to meet the diverse needs of all learners. Providing each student with multiple ways to connect and engage with the program of studies enables us to personalise the educational experiences of all students. It is about finding what works to have each and every student reach their potential."

Trevor Mitchell, Principal, St. Francis, and Administrator, St. Mary