



Professional Learning Practice Guide

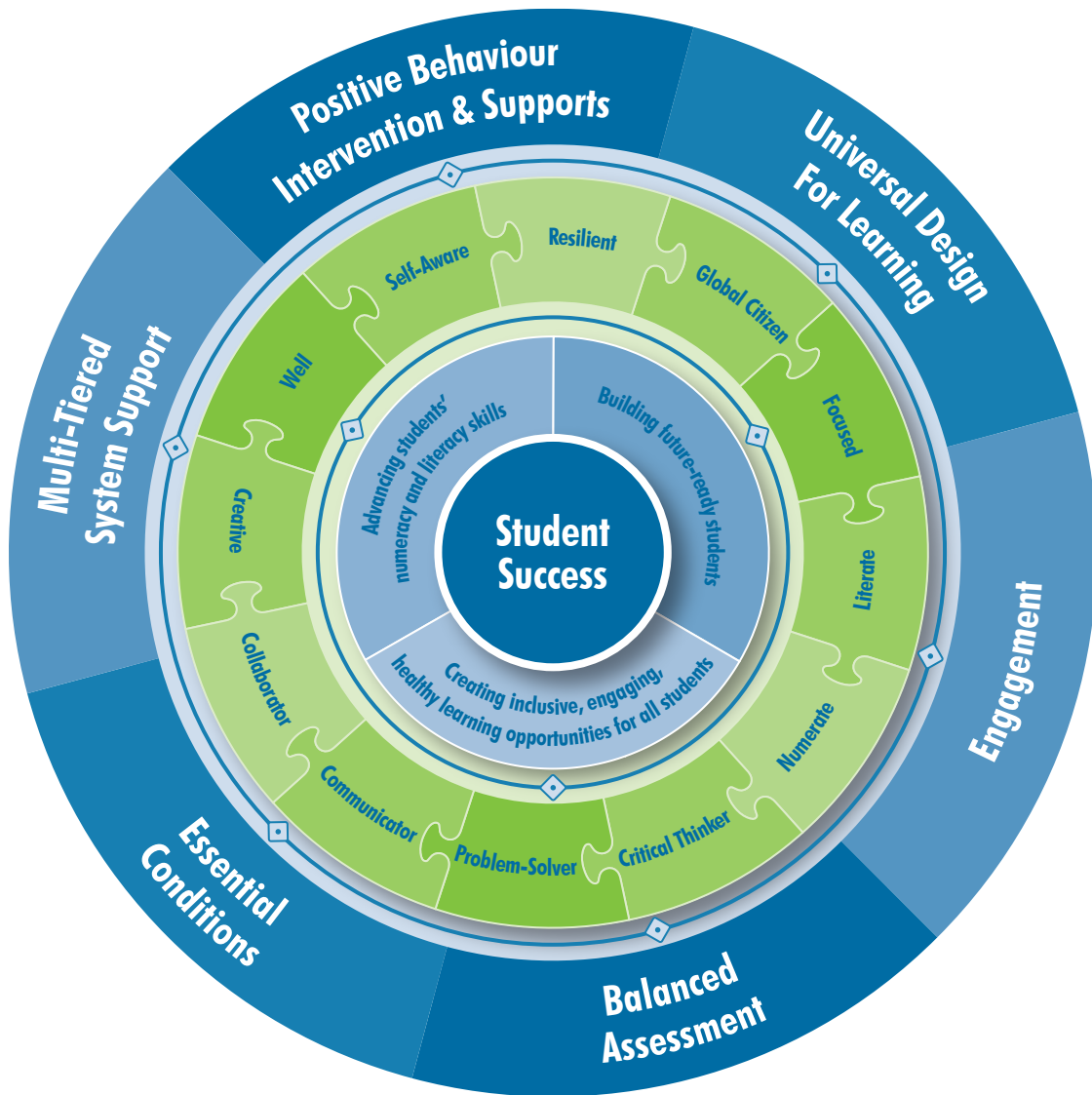
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Learning Model



Introduction

Professional learning is a personal and professional endeavor and the lever through which systemic improvement occurs. Professional learning that is data driven, coordinated and monitored for impact at the school and district levels builds our collective capacity as a learning organization.

Designed for leaders, educators and staff, the RVS Professional Learning Practice Guide serves to build a shared understanding of professional learning to support the reflective practice of each member of the RVS community. Staff are asked to make key connections between individual learning plans and the RVS professional learning model, philosophies and guiding documents.

Key structures serve as guides for shifting individual learning plans into action. All staff are encouraged to support one another, ask questions and develop a plan that is truly their own, inspiring the deep learning that continues to engage them in their essential work with RVS.

This practice guide is organized into six major sections:

1. Understanding Professional Learning
2. Professional Learning in Context
3. Essential Conditions for Implementation
4. The Professional Learning Model – Beliefs in Rocky View Schools
5. Key Approaches to Professional Learning
6. Documenting the Impact of Professional Learning

DISCOVER

Understanding Professional Learning

As an organization passionate about students and their learning, the ongoing pursuit of knowledge is essential. RVS commits to continuous improvement within the goals of the [RVS Education Plan](#).

Continuous improvement enables all learners within RVS to achieve the goals of the Education Plan as follows:

- **Advancing students numeracy and literacy skills**
- **Building future ready students**
- **Creating inclusive, engaging, healthy learning opportunities for all students**

Learning and growing together to meet the needs of students and optimize learning for all requires professional learning to be grounded in data. Data related to student learning drives professional learning for individuals and propels our collective efficacy as a jurisdiction. Educators reflect on and incorporate data to measure the impact of professional learning on students and their learning.

By approaching existing problems of practice across the jurisdiction with curiosity and the lens of a growth mindset grounded in data, our learning organization will meet the shared goals set out in the Education Plan.

Every individual must continue to pursue growth and excellence through an engaged and empowered reflective learning journey. In order to effectively design their learning, all RVS staff are responsible for designing and writing a Professional Growth Plan which includes self-identified needs for individual growth that will also improve outcomes for students.

Though a portion of an individual's growth plan may be required learning, staff are encouraged to embrace inquiry and curiosity through the process. Through conversation with others, we as learners share our paths, refine our purpose in learning, and gain deeper insights.

Professional Learning in Context

The pace of change in today's world is staggering. We are constantly uncovering new insights and gaining deeper understanding of the world in all fields; education is no different. To be effective in our roles, we must be continually learning. Research in education has consistently shown over the years that there is no larger impact on student achievement than quality teaching and effective school leadership (Timperley, 2011). In order for our teachers and leaders to be as effective as they can be in their roles, they need to be continually learning.

As a learning organization, it is critical to build capacity through a systemic and generative framework and establish core standards to guide our critical work in teaching and learning. RVS works in concert with the province of Alberta in the fulfillment of quality standards for staff.

Effective September 2019, educators, leaders and superintendents in the province of Alberta are required to meet the [Teaching Quality Standard](#), [Leadership Quality Standard](#) and [Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard](#).

Teaching Quality Standard

Engaging in Career-Long Learning (Competency 2)

- A teacher engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to improve teaching and learning.

Leadership Quality Standard

Modelling Commitment to Professional Learning (Competency 2)

- A leader engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to identify opportunities for improving leadership, teaching and learning.

Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard

Modelling Commitment to Professional Learning (Competency 2)

- A superintendent engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection, identifying and acting on research-informed opportunities for enhancing leadership, teaching and learning.

At the school level, along with the completion of Teacher Professional Growth Plans and Professional Growth Plans for support staff, schools are entrusted with the completion of their School Education Plans. These guiding documents, which are reflective of RVS' goals outlined in the Division Education Plan as well as Alberta Education's, help set the direction for a professional learning plan for the school.

Professional learning in RVS extends beyond the domain of direct student support and is central to the overall culture of improvement, innovation and excellence.

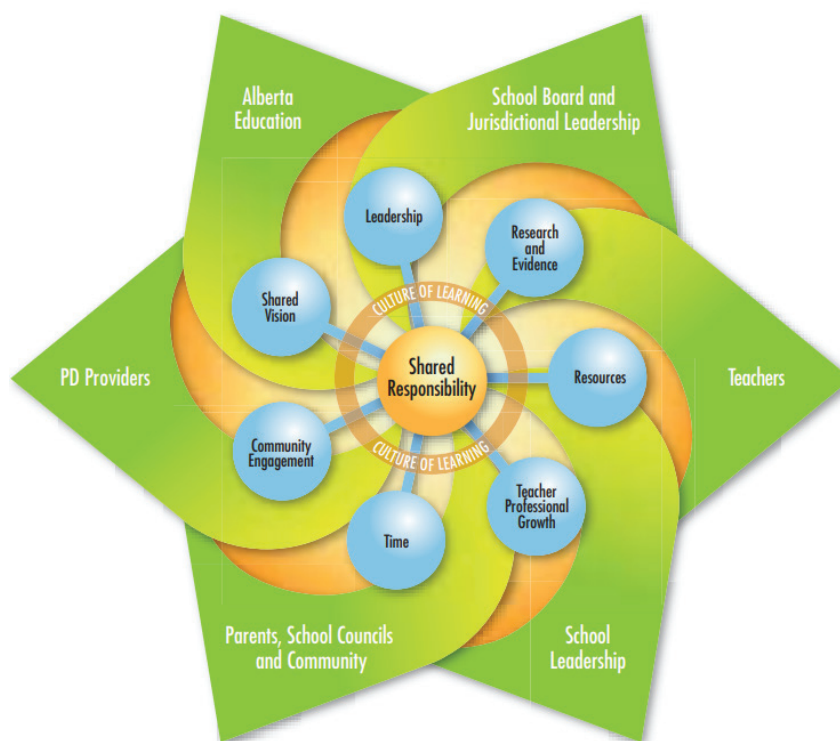
We believe that all members of our learning organization need to be learners in order for us to have the greatest impact on our students' learning. The jurisdiction believes that all members of RVS have a critical role and responsibility in the determination of both individual and collective growth.

The RVS Professional Learning Model is the foundation of learning for all as it involves a strong commitment to learning in a multi-faceted learning environment that is engaging, enriching and empowering.

DEFINE: Foundations for Action Towards Professional Learning

Essential Conditions for Implementation

Outlined below are the essential conditions necessary for the implementation of any change initiative in Alberta schools. This was developed by a provincial working group of education partners committed to realizing positive change in Alberta's schools and classrooms. (Full details and diagram can be found in [A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions](#)).

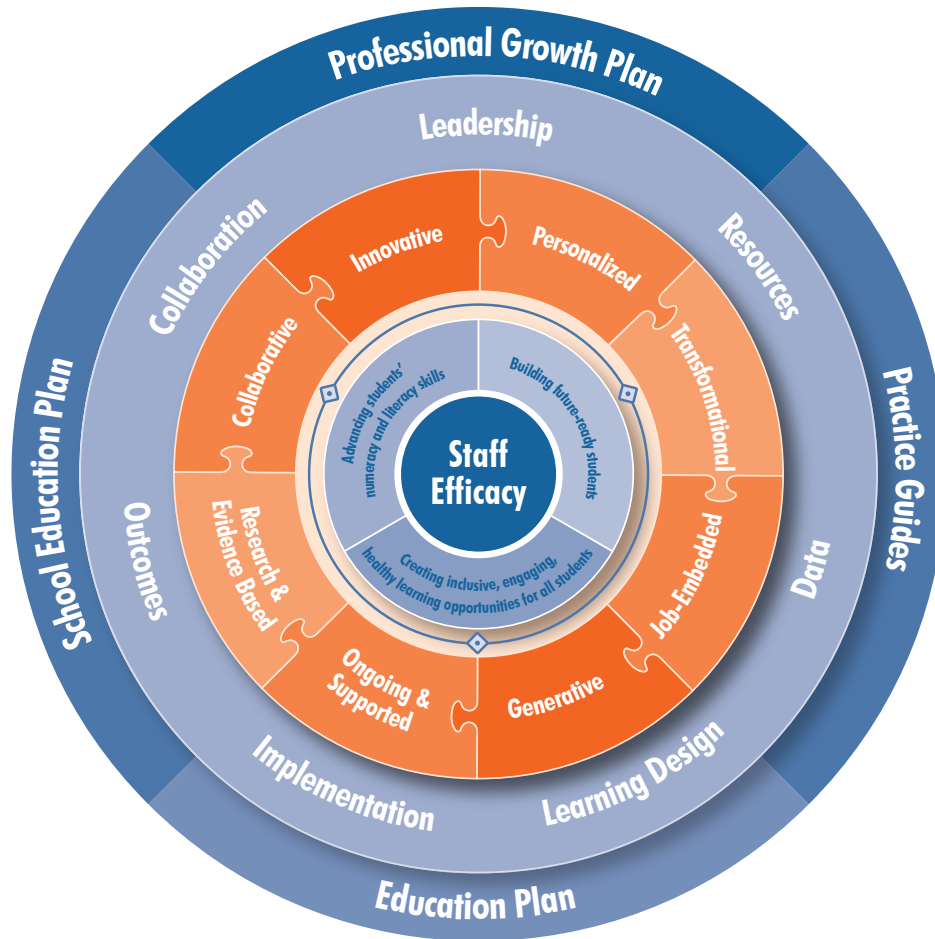


1. **Shared Vision:** Stakeholders share an understanding of and commitment to intended outcomes.
2. **Leadership:** Leaders at all levels have the capacity to champion the shift from the current reality to the intended outcome.
3. **Research and Evidence:** Current research, evidence and lessons learned inform implementation decision.
4. **Resources:** Human resources, materials, funding and infrastructure are in place to realize the intended outcomes.
5. **Professional Learning:** Staff knowledge, skills and attributes are enhanced through ongoing professional learning.
6. **Time:** Time is provided to support implementation.
7. **Community Engagement:** Parents, school councils, students, community members, businesses, industry and post-secondary institutions are partners in supporting implementation

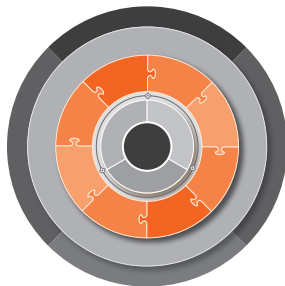
From: A Guide to Support Implementation, Essential Conditions, Alberta Education 2010

Professional Learning Model – Beliefs in Rocky View Schools

As a learning organization, it is critical to build capacity through a systemic and generative framework and establish core standards to guide our critical work in teaching and learning. The guiding framework for The RVS Professional Learning Model is captured in the diagram below.



Principles – Orange Ring

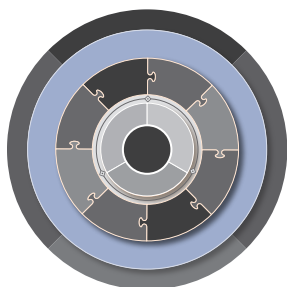


As a progressive learning organization, we are committed to improving student learning and believe professional learning must be:

1. **Research and evidence-informed:** Critical reflection plays a significant role in establishing high quality professional learning and professional practice.
2. **Collaborative:** Professional learning is a shared responsibility where collaborative and collective inquiry aligns with jurisdictional and provincial priorities for the most effective professional learning.
3. **Innovative:** Effective professional learning is dynamic, current and is designed to be responsive to ever changing contexts.
4. **Personalized:** Professional learning connects to individual goals, interests and aims to improve practice while aligning with school, jurisdictional and provincial priorities.

5. **Generative:** Professional learning empowers learners to generate, produce and reproduce learning in order to build collective knowledge, skills and competencies.
6. **Transformational:** High quality professional learning inspires individuals and teams to elevate and refine their practice to improve the overall experience for the school community.
7. **Job embedded:** Professional learning is job embedded with collaborative opportunities for guided conversation and co-creation of innovative practice.
8. **Ongoing, supported:** Organizational learning is ongoing, supported and fully integrated into RVS' culture.

Standards – Light Blue Ring



1. **Leadership:** Empower skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.
 High quality professional learning and transformational leadership are integral to sustainable school and system improvement. As architects and designers of lifelong learning, there is individual and shared responsibility for engaging in systemic, professional growth.
2. **Resources:** Prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for professional learning.
 Through the allocation of significant time and resources organizational learning is ongoing, supported and fully integrated into RVS' culture.
3. **Data:** Uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.
 Research and data-informed critical reflection play a significant role in establishing high quality professional learning and professional practice. As architects and designers of life-long learning, there is individual and shared responsibility to use a variety of rich data sources to assess student learning and inform our professional learning and practices.
4. **Learning Designs:** Integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.
 To navigate the complex, diverse, inclusive and dynamic classrooms of today, all members of the learning organization must embrace a disposition of inquiry and reflection. Collaborative and collective inquiry aligned with school, departmental, jurisdictional and provincial priorities is the most meaningful and effective professional learning.

5. **Implementation:** Applies research on change and sustains support of professional learning for long-term change.

Organizational learning is ongoing, supported and fully integrated into RVS' culture. To enhance and evolve practice, lead change and incorporate new ideas, [A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions](#) is provided.

6. **Outcomes:** Aligns professional learning with system performance and student curriculum standards and outcomes.

School-based collaborative and collective inquiry aligned with provincial and jurisdictional priorities is the most meaningful and effective professional learning.

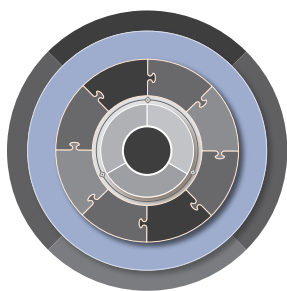
7. **Learning Communities:** Occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility and goal alignment.

RVS supports collaborative and collective inquiry through a number of professional learning opportunities and initiatives aligned with our vision, division goals and school education plans.

Reference for Learning: Learning Forward. (2011).
Standards for Professional Learning. Oxford, OH: Author

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Guiding Documents – Dark Blue Ring



There are four main documents that guide our work in professional learning each year in RVS. The **RVS Education Plan** and the **Practice Guides in Professional Learning, Inclusive Education and Instruction and Assessment** provide direction for the school district and guide the development of professional learning at all levels. As a part of **School Education Plan** development, professional learning priorities and plans are developed, implemented and reflected on regularly. At an individual level **Professional Growth Plans** allow individual members of organizations to create professional learning goals and plan and review those goals with their supervisor.

1. **RVS Education Plan:** Serves to align instruction, professional learning and services to reflect the best interests of students, staff, families and the community. The product of a 15-month exhaustive consultation, the plan incorporates feedback from thousands of stakeholders who weighed in on how RVS could evolve to advance students' numeracy and literacy skills, build future ready students and create inclusive, engaging, healthy learning opportunities for all students.

2. **Practice Guides:** Designed for leaders, educators and staff, RVS' Professional Learning, Inclusive Education, and Instructional and Assessment Practice Guides serve to build a shared understanding of our education system in each of these respective areas. Developed collaboratively by the Superintendent Design Teams, these guides endeavour to set RVS' direction in these three priority areas.
3. **School Education Plan:** Used to engage staff, parents and students in enacting the RVS Education Plan. Aligned with the human-centred design thinking approach being employed across the jurisdiction, the protocols outlined in the School Education Plans help staff build deep empathy for those they are designing for, generate ideas, test and share those ideas and eventually put the most innovative ideas to work.
4. **Professional Growth Plan:** All RVS staff are required to develop an annual growth plan to establish professional learning goals that are aligned with those identified in the RVS Education Plan, reflect the standards and principals of RVS' Professional Learning Model and are consistent with provincial Leadership and Teaching Quality Standard or RVS' Support Staff Quality Standard. The expectation for professional learning extends to all RVS staff groups with responsibility for supporting staff development of growth plans designated to department managers.

DEVELOP: Key Approaches to Professional Learning

RVS professional learning follows the stages of design thinking and is rooted in a ‘desire to know and understand’ within a cycle of continuous improvement. The role of the school administrator is to provide leadership and direction by connecting the inquiry of the school community with division and provincial priorities through intentional and coordinated professional learning structures. The role of the teacher within the design process is to be a reflective practitioner and researcher who works individually and in collaboration with others toward the ultimate goal of optimizing student learning through research-based practices. The collective efficacy of teachers is highlighted through strategic and thoughtful professional learning to enhance practice tied to RVS guiding documents as outlined in this practice guide, in particular the RVS Education Plan.

1. Within the RVS school year calendar, RVS designates Professional Learning Days.

School-based Professional Learning Days

RVS designates school-based professional learning days throughout the school year. School administrators consider the data collected through the School Education Plan and the RVS Education Plan to determine priorities for school-based professional learning days. Schools share the responsibility for identifying priorities and planning professional learning with a school-based committee.

School based professional learning plans are developed to support school priorities, outcomes and strategies for professional learning each school year and are embedded in the goals of the School Education Plan.

The school-based professional learning day should model engaging classroom practice that follows a design process. When designing learning, there are many variables to consider including whole staff activities through to small groups and learning carousels.

See APPENDIX

- > Exemplar: Annual Professional Learning Plan
- > ‘Planning a School-Based PL Day’

Self-Directed Professional Learning Days

RVS supports administrators, teachers and support staff to engage in self-directed professional learning. Reflecting on inquiry relating to practice, staff design learning opportunities for themselves as individuals and/or collaboratively with colleagues.

Prior to the self-directed learning day, teachers/support staff are encouraged to reflect upon student(s) needs, teaching and learning, and emerging initiatives in relation to the individual Professional Learning Plan, School Education Plan and the RVS Education Plan to determine the goal(s) for the self-directed learning day.

Individual goals and professional learning activities are shared with the school administrator or supervisor prior to the self-directed learning day. Approval of the school administrator/supervisor is required for off-site professional learning.

2. Dynamic and student focused professional learning in RVS may also be supported through collaboration and coaching outside of designated Professional Learning Days.

Learning Forward – Revised Standards for Professional Learning (December 2020) shares structures and designs that demonstrate evidence of effectiveness including:

- > Peer observations (in person or through video);
- > Co-teaching and peer observation and feedback;
- > Action research;
- > Peer or content expert coaching;

- > Immersive learning experiences, in which the educator experiences learning as a student would (McNeill & Reiser, 2018);
- > Collaborative study of curriculum and standards;
- > Collaborative lesson, unit, and assessment implementation;
- > Collaborative examination of student and educator work; and
- > Communities of practice and professional learning communities.

Learning specialists in RVS may support staff engagement in the above research based professional learning practices. Areas of specialization include but are not limited to literacy, numeracy, instructional design, technology for learning, learning support, English as an Additional Language and Indigenous Ways of Being and Knowing.

School based specialized teachers such as learning support, literacy/numeracy leads and lead teachers within schools are also able to provide professional development through their partnership with colleagues.

Teachers, support staff and learning specialists build collective capacity to meet the needs of all students through a variety of structures.

Access the [RVS Professional Learning Calendar](#) to sign up for professional learning opportunities provided by RVS staff as well as external professional learning providers.

3. RVS Supports Professional Learning Arrangements Outside of RVS

Specific information regarding professional learning through exchanges, minimal support sabbatical leave, and secondments may be found in RVS' [Administrative Procedure 424](#).

4. RVS is committed to a safe learning environment for everyone through orientation and mandatory ongoing training.

Required training ensures competency and focus across all staff groups. Annual and prescribed training through the Hour Zero website ensure the safety of all.

Human Resources provides an orientation for all staff new to RVS including how to access electronic tools such as the Atrieve system.

DOCUMENT

Professional learning done with intention is a powerful tool for building teacher practice and collective efficacy within RVS. Professional learning that is data driven, coordinated and monitored for impact at the school and district levels builds our collective capacity as a learning organization.

School and district level reporting is comprehensive and includes quantitative data as well as qualitative data. Data gathered through frequent checks and annual processes provide evidence of the impact of professional learning in RVS.

Stakeholder engagements and stories highlighting the impact of professional learning on student learning are featured in both the school and district level reporting structures. Evidence of the impact of professional learning can include positive changes in mindsets, strengthened classroom practises and interactions, improvements in content knowledge among teachers and students, and increased coherence among school and district initiatives (Learning Forward 2020, p. 46).

While captured through documentation at points in time, the integration of professional learning throughout the organization is dynamic in nature. Reporting structures at all levels are intended to provide comprehensive assurance within a cycle of continuous improvement in the important work of meeting student needs through the realization of the RVS Education Plan.

School Level Assurance – Annual School Education Plan

Monitoring professional learning for impact on student learning is critical. The goal of the School Education Plan is to support stakeholders to understand the direction of the school within the mandates of the school jurisdiction and province and to focus the shared support of the school community on students and their learning. Further, the School Education Plans, collectively, serve to mobilize the system to actualize the RVS Education Plan. Professional learning is a critical aspect of strategic planning at the school level.

Qualitative and quantitative data collected at the school, district and provincial levels are analyzed to determine, review and confirm school and district priorities. On-going data checks drive the annual Professional Learning Plans developed at the school level. The impact of individual Professional Growth Plans and School Professional Learning Plans is visible through the School Education Plans, particularly through the comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data collected at frequent points throughout the school year.

As a collective, the School Education Plans provide insight into how RVS schools are moving together, what connections might be made between schools to focus professional learning, and how to ultimately improve the quality of education for learners across RVS.

District Level Assurance – Division Education Plan/Annual Education Results Report

The RVS Education Plan outlines the goals, strategies and outcomes for the school division over a four year period. Using the design process, the priorities of stakeholders are uncovered and aligned with research based understandings of what learning can and should be for students. Careful development of outcomes and a plan for monitoring progress toward outcomes is an integral part of the planning process.

RVS Education Plan

The [RVS Education Plan](#) is included in each School Education Plan as the foundation for school strategic planning through the School Education Plan.

Annual Education Results Report

The [Annual Education Results Report](#) provides evidence of improvement toward divisional goals through the collective data gathered at the school level and features narrative exemplifying the achievement of divisional outcomes.

Celebrating Accomplishments!

Making learning and teaching in RVS visible between students, teachers and within the entire district provides acceleration and inspiration for knowledge transfer and future learning. RVS meets the challenge of sharing the good things happening across the division by harnessing social media such as [X](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#). Learning stories engage the community to focus on student learning, professional learning and the implied connection between the two.

Appendix

Accessing Professional Learning Opportunities:

Professional Learning Sources

Professional Learning opportunities are abundant. Sites for educators seeking quality professional learning include, but are not limited to:

RVS Professional Learning Registration Site (RVSP)

Staff are able to view and register for internally scheduled learning events within RVS through [RVSP](#). The site provides access to professional learning for employees across departments.

The Calgary Regional Consortium (CRC)

The Calgary Regional Consortium provides quality professional learning opportunities to K-12 education staff. Learning opportunities are accessed through the [CRC website](#).

ATA Specialist Councils

The ATA Specialist Councils host conferences annually. More information is provided through the [ATA website](#).

The Alberta Assessment Consortium

A not-for-profit registered society, the AAC provides a site rich with resources that can help develop and extend understanding of assessment promising practices. The AAC also provides PL opportunities to engage and enrich educators.

Opportunities are accessed through the [AAC Website](#).

Username: RVS41
Password: balance

Funding Structures to Support Professional Learning

Certificated Staff

As per [AP424](#), funding for Professional Learning for teaching staff "... is a shared responsibility of the Division and staff, and supports both in-service training and professional learning activities." As such, certificated staff may apply to the Professional Development Leave Committee (PDL) for funding to support professional learning within the guidelines articulated within the procedure.

In addition to learning resources and events, teachers may also apply for minimal sabbatical through the PDL.

To facilitate communication and connection, professional learning for individuals and groups of teachers must be approved by the school administrator. The school administrator is responsible for ensuring funds accessed through PDL contribute to the overall quality of teaching and learning. Administrator signature is required as per Form [AF424-A1](#).

Support Staff (Schools/Education Center)

Support staff will access foundational professional learning in consultation with and/or at the request of their supervisor. Professional learning specific to staff assignment is encouraged with schools/departments having the autonomy to plan for funding designated for professional learning through the annual budgeting process.

Professional Growth Planning (Annual) – Templates

Individual and Collaborative Professional Growth Plan Templates are available through The Alberta Teachers' Association.

School Professional Learning Plans

School professional learning plans are to be embedded within each of the school goals connected to the Division plan. Some goals may require more specific and intense professional learning at certain times and less at others depending on the goal and the needs of the school based staff including teachers and learning assistants.

School professional learning plans should be directly connected to the school and division goals and outline who is receiving the professional learning, in what manner (one session, multiple sessions, face to face/ via technology) as well as who will deliver the professional learning session/s. It is important to consider collaborating with RVS Learning Department staff to have the PL delivered to provide consistency with language, understanding and approach.

It is of value to consider collaborating with staff from other schools who are working on similar goals and have similar professional learning needs. This allows staff to be exposed to other promising practices, to develop ideas and materials together and to provide further consistency in instruction and assessment methods across RVS.

Planning a School-Based PL Day:

Planning a school-based PL Day begins with a goal or goals for the day as determined through the School Education Plan.

The whole staff may engage in a shared experience, carousels or structured study.

The learning experiences should fall into one or more categories of the design process or may, in specific circumstances, include all stages of the design process.

This will be dependent on the goals of the learning and the structure of the professional learning plan.

Is this goal of the time spent in learning to introduce and tap into what we know and wonder about a particular topic? Are we learning through a shared resource, or will we look at learning together through a variety of resources: books, videos, resources, site visits, guests? Then we are in the Discover Phase.

Is this learning to make connections for further understanding? To build our schemas? Will we have opportunities to pull learning together to create a better understanding of the parts to the whole? Then we are in the Define Phase.

Is this learning to imagine, plan and test our learning? Are we working with tools that we are going to use? Are we coming back together after having used them to reflect on the impact of our original thinking? Then we are in the Discover Phase.

Is this engagement to document, share, or celebrate our learning? Do learners have the opportunity to share out and connect their learning as colleagues, to share their learning to build collective capacity? To celebrate the learning by reflecting on and documenting progress? This is the Document Phase.

Is this engagement to tap into the 'So What – Now What?' Shift back into the Discover Phase.

Example: Using the Design Process to Plan a School-Based PL Day

Building Norms

Having a set of norms, or ground rules, that a group follows encourages behaviours that will help a group do its work and discourages behaviours that interfere with a group's effectiveness. This list is always under revision as we continue to reflect on our experiences and look forward to our next opportunities.

A good resource to learn more, including a process for collaborating and developing group norms as a class or staff can be found at www.learningforward.org. Search “[creating norms](#)” and look for the August 2013 tool.

Discover

What are your big ideas, driving questions, and goals?

- Consider stakeholder input, data and/or previous documentation led to the big ideas, driving questions, and goals.
- Ensure a clear connection between the data, the school education plan, the goals of the Division Education Plan and the professional learning opportunity.
 - > Example: Align assessment practices
 - Compile to share data with staff as it relates to assessment practices and why they are important to the teacher, school and district in optimizing student learning.

Who are your learners?

- Consider their background knowledge, expertise, enthusiasm and reservations they might bring with them.
 - > Example: Assessment practices
 - Consider sending a pre-survey to learn more about assessment practices in the building.
 - Compile to share the survey results with the staff.

What question is this PL answering?

- Example: Assessment practices
 - > Staff would move toward a common understanding of best practices in relation to assessment.
 - > Staff would be aligned in their use of assessment to optimize student learning.

Define

- Narrow the learning for the day.
 - > Example: Assessment Practices
 - Prepare information about key practices cited in the survey and/or introduce new assessment research/practices.
 - In collaborative groups, consider the practices listed and the potential for impact on student learning.

Develop

- An agenda including materials required for the learning should be provided ahead of the PL day. Create and/or provide a way for learning to be visible through the development of a product. Purpose and expectations should be clear.
 - > Example: Assessment Practices – Develop the Learning
 - In teams, teachers develop a plan to integrate the assessment tool or tools into daily practice. The plan may include how best to introduce and explain the assessment to students and parents – depending on staff comfort level. It should include criteria for reflecting on the assessment strategy. The team should generate the criteria for success. Consider asking your PL Committee to generate a template for developing the plan.

Document

- How are your participants reflecting on the learning and sharing?
- How are you gathering feedback?
- Consider your next steps. How will the learning from the day be re-visited and incorporated into the next cycle of the design process? You might consider an exit pass for participants with prompts “I like, I wish, I wonder, Aha!” or following up in a different way.
 - > Example: Assessment Practices – Plan to Document the Learning
 - Set a date, time, or strategy for sharing the learning. Perhaps by the next staff meeting, one or two volunteers would share what they learned through the use of the tool and provide some insight to colleagues. Perhaps time is set aside at coming grade team meetings to discuss the impact of the assessment.