



2021 ASCA Conference Board Led Sessions Summary Achieving Student Success

What are the best ways to achieve student success in Alberta within the realities we know exist now, and are likely to exist over the next two (2) years?

➤ ***In your community what would you say inclusivity would look like? It is important that we remember that inclusivity captures learning needs, economics, and many aspects of our communities.***

- Student success is when every person in the school community is working together to ensure every student is reaching their potential, whatever that may look like. Volunteers, teachers are connecting with students.
- In our school council, under inclusivity we are needing to focus on diversity. School community has Indigenous students, newcomer students, many types of individuals. How do we engage diverse parents?
- It's okay to acknowledge where voices are not being captured - school councils are quite often mostly comprised of white women. We can't make changes if we don't acknowledge the current situation.
- Over the next few years, given the current pandemic reality, we have a lot of hurdles to overcome (learning gaps and mental health issues - secluded in homes, etc.) It's going to be a rough go. Success is baby steps with each learning process. A lot of it will have to take place at home as well as in school. Parents will have to support schools/teachers. We're trying to mimic what our daughter is learning at school, at home. Award small achievements.
- it's definitely the emotional and social wellbeing of our children going forward. In particular, the older youth of our schools and the impact it's had on them.
- 5-year anniversary from the wildfires in Ft. Mac, floods last year, pandemic over last 13 months, closest to the oil sands, greater disparity, greater access to the food bank, low-income families, local business suffering, disparity with access to technology. School Boards have to find ways to support all students. Virtual school was never an option before, but Board now recognizing it's wanted/required - opens up learning to those who prefer not to be in person for a variety of reasons. Mental health is huge - we need more funding. Ft. Mac is actually privileged because of supports received from previous crisis', but we're almost back where we were 5 years ago. We have to keep our teachers healthy and safe to keep our kids healthy and safe.
- If I get overwhelmed just looking at a picture of a sporting event or concert, how will our kids feel when they are expected to be in the gymnasium with the entire school for an assembly? Gradual steps will be required.
- Will need to use a trauma-informed approach. Our children, all of us, have suffered deep trauma - how will we help?
- Our school's admin is amazing at taking care of all students - they ensure that all kids have a connection with at least one adult (librarian, lunch lady, doesn't matter). Also changed the day-to-day timetable to allow for extra learning supports (strengths and weaknesses).
- Every child having an adult connection is a culture we want to build.



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➤ *Learning Needs/Mental Health*

- What really upsets me about mental health is that it is frequently 'triaged' with long wait lists to get supports. Fewer and fewer supports in schools, and parents often can't afford private assistance. Heartbreaking to see families in need not getting what they need.
- Funding has really impacted the resources available in school. If resources were in the school, student success would be more likely.
- Students need to know where they will belong when completing school. Students need to know where they will fit into to their community. The world is changing faster than we can think. Unfortunately, our students need the community to involve them. We need true partners in education that links students with industry and education.
- In a community experiencing high suicide rates. Resulting in more conversations in schools, more resources in community, more kids in counselling, AB Mental Health has made some changes. Having mental health conversations (acknowledging feelings, etc.) starting in K (age appropriate) is important. Should be part of everyday conversations in our schools.
- Current system is reactive. If communities could be proactive, positive outcomes for students and families.
- School boards are having to navigate this new funding model. Some of the victims of it are the education assistants. There are numerous EAs across the province who are sitting on the edge of their seats waiting to see if they have a job next year. My son has worked with the same EA for 3 years now and he would not be where he is without her. But - we had to fight for her last year when AB ED cut funding and said that EAs were not needed. Assisting my son regularly has now led her to be working with numerous students in his FLA and etude sociale classes - not because they have any special needs, but just because they can use her help. Finally, the resources that students on IPPs get to use, should be available to all students. e.g. digital books, voice to text/text to voice, etc.
- Our experience is "triaging" as well. We had asked the school for help - but because 'behaviour' was not the issue, it's not likely. Teachers are tired. Spectrum of issues. Multiple things that result in minimizing the concerns until they become an "issue". The new curriculum does have self-regulation and dealing with anxiety. Concerned that past practices of dealing with mental health, and tired teachers, may not be effectively implemented. How can we work as a community to maintain consistent support?
- Creating partnerships in communities cost nothing but time and positive relationships. We all can't wait for government to throw money at education.
- A community approach is needed. Behavioural problems are 'connection seeking'.
- In rural communities, driving into larger centres is required to access assistance.
- Barriers of distance, and even reliable internet, need to be addressed.
- Speaking of elementary experience. Privilege to have a counsellor who is certified. Health workers are costly; tough decisions. In-school services are a smarter economic and educational choice (shorter time away from class, no need to have a parent (mom) leave work).



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- Even having real career councillors that have relationships with employers and the real world would benefit schools.
- A big topic of conversation is that having to travel from school to a different building, less 'uptake' on getting the help.
- A sense of safety when the appointment is in the school; the worker is familiar to the students.
- Taking a child to an appointment to an afterschool or evening appointment removes the student from the relevancy of the situation/environment.
- Both kids have learning disabilities - the big change looking for - shouldn't matter what child's background is - support should be accessible in school, not requiring a private specialist to be provided by parents.
- We send our children to school so they get an education, so they can obtain employment however we are not asking employers, "What is the education they require?" to employ our students.
- The other kids in class won't experience the same success because the system is two-tiered. Education should be the 'equalizer', not leaving 20% behind - that costs more money in the long run. As a parent I'm never asked for my input.
- Recognize there are other children with similar learning needs not getting the early intervention and consistency of required supports.
- How do we teach children life skills?
- One of the biggest challenges is that parents have to fight for years. Writing letters, waiting in line for tests, not 'severe enough', pulling out of class for specialized support and getting pushback from school, constant re-education of teachers (through grades, subjects). All supports should be available to every child, not just those 'diagnosed'.
- Newcomers need support to fight through the system as well.
- Always a fight - started an IPP in the fall, learned in March it was never followed up on.
- Literacy - many children below grade level. The information that would come back to parents from the school was so complex and technical that parents struggle to understand how to help. Our SC went back to Admin and provided advice that resources needed to come from a parents' perspective - how can SC help? Minimal progress, but it's a start. Real-life resources are required.
- Fontas and Pinnell is not evidence based for dyslexics but it is generally the only program used.
- Classroom management may not be best to get an accurate assessment of literacy levels (young children having to sit for 45 minutes and read).
- Progress over perfection is needed...having a child pick their own book for a literacy test is possibly not the best method.
- Standardized test should have a standardized book, and we shouldn't be seeking perfection.
 - Same with spelling tests...results don't help children to advance.
 - Teaching children to break down words is important, bring back phonics, basic understanding of the sounds letters and combinations make is vital.
- Sight words reading is a struggle - sounding words out should be encouraged. Why are we using Fontas and Pinnell in some classes, schools, divisions and others are not?



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- Inconsistency in same grade levels different classes.
- Some assessment practices actually diminish a student's self-esteem

➤ ***What do we define as success in terms of learning supports and mental health?***

- When parents are in the building - when there isn't enough time - EA's are spread thin, not enough adults in the building - that's a huge indicator of not being successful with learning supports.
- Learning supports: what we see in our schools, under the new funding model, withdrawal of services and supports (rural Alberta) - we pay a lot of windshield time when experts are needed in schools. We need experts in the school to work with children who have extreme needs (mental health, psychologist, speech language, occupational health) - all of those things that support kids and make the school more inclusive. If everyone feels supported, more possibility that every child will succeed. How much of our 'pie' is shrinking because of the pandemic - greater needs.
- With budgets at schools not what they used to be, the amount of resources are just not available to our students. Things will probably look similar next year as last year.
- School councils need to be having these important conversations with principals and trustees.
- Learning success: need more TAs and bodies to offer support. With online learning taking off - we'll get a lot less enrolment in schools, resulting in reduced funding. SCs will be expected to help with shortfalls but the government needs to recognize the need in education.
- For those districts continuing online learning, students can be well-served. Not all districts have the capacity, which may force families outside of the district. SCs are legislated to advise, not meet the funding gaps that exist. Our voices should be reflected in the system.
- Previous to Covid, our foster kids required extra support - now they need more support and it's not there. Where will the money come from after Covid to mitigate the damages?
- Advancing students who have not achieved the grade level expectations is not serving students well.
- Recognize the economy looks different - as parents and local/provincial advocates, we need to ask for more funding to go into education - it's a priority. We need to use our democratic voting voices.
- Re: moving kids forward to keep them with their age group, but program appropriately for students who aren't at grade level. If 'retaining' is consistent, students who are years older than the students in their class, they feel inadequate and don't continue in school. It's better to program appropriately.
- We're lucky we have a psychologist in the school 2 days a week, but we have a lot of kids where coming to school is the brightest part of their day - better than at home. Online learning takes that away from those kids. We're losing those kids - not engaged - no connection.
- We don't care about the 'results' - more celebration if his printing is legible, he's kind and he has tried his hardest.



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- We've never put a big emphasis on marks - more on effort. And that they go back to school day after day in spite of feeling unsuccessful compared to their peers. They are lucky we were able to get the help they needed - they didn't give up, we didn't give up.
- Success is that she wants to go to school, she's excited when she gets to the next level. We don't look at the marks, but we look for progress. Soft skills are important too. What she takes away from interactions with peers and teachers.
- We ensure that our son is successful in a variety of things, not necessarily in school. We don't look at school marks - ever. Progress and effort are more important.
- Conversations had with teachers are very mark-driven, emphasis on 'achievement'. Parents put a lot of stress on themselves. We have to be cognizant as to what we're willing to accept vs. what the school system accepts.
- We have the ability to influence the culture in our school and in our district. Ask "how can we do this different?" Not to judge the system as it's currently operated but how can we influence positive change that will impact all children?
- At this moment, we can't look past Covid. What is the importance of academic success / awards or should we be focusing on other things?
- Every parent is the expert of their child. What is important to one child, may not be important to others. If your school council has a different vision for defining success, it's important that your school council talks about that with your principal - awards may be painful for children who have been negatively impacted this year. Maybe they are just trying to maintain their humanity this year. Your school community could focus on many areas of success.
- Daughter loves science. If she is excited about being at school, likes her classmates, teachers, feels she's learned 'lots of good stuff', that's success.
- School does 7 Habits and Student of the Month. Student of the Month awarded for actions of humanity.
- If my child is happy being in the building, I'm happy. It's a bonus that we're seeing advancement, but her happiness is paramount.
- Success differs for every child in every situation. For some, it's just getting in the door that day. Staff do their best to meet students where they are at. Incredible heroes this year, juggling their school families/situations and their own families. Worried that once the crisis calms down, teachers will have a chance to de-escalate, and may leave the profession.
- A piece of this is to normalize success - yes, there is a need for accountability and measures, but we all experience education in different ways. We need to normalize the idea of success - we can't always live in the extremes.

➤ *Is there something you wanted to add?*

- Success for my boys is communication with the teachers. For each boy, success is different. We work closely with their teachers to support.
- Achieving their goal - it may be going to school?



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- How do schools in Jr High settings celebrate all of the personal goals reached by students to showcase their success?
 - Pose that question to the school council - that may be a great item to put into the SC plan over 3 years. There are ways to celebrate that don't involve major showcases.