Case Study of a School District Visioning Process and the Subsequent Implementation: Leading to deep and powerful school and district transformation

Dianne Turner, Special Advisor, BC Ministry of Education
Nancy Gordon, Assistant Superintendent, Delta School District

December 2017
INTRODUCTION - The Delta Context

The Delta School District is located in the southwest corner of British Columbia, Canada on the traditional territory of the Tsawwassen and Musqueam First Nations Peoples. The district consists of three distinct areas: North Delta, Ladner, and Tsawwassen. Each community is separated by vast areas of farmland, as well as by Burns Bog, which at approximately 3,000 hectares, is the largest undeveloped urban land mass in North America. The city of Delta is bordered by the Fraser River to the north, the United States (Point Roberts, Washington) to the south and the city of Surrey to the east. The population of Delta is just over 100,000 people with almost 1,000 living on the lands of the Tsawwassen First Nations. The student population of the district is approximately 15,600 students, with about 3.5 percent being of Aboriginal heritage. There are twenty-four elementary schools, seven secondary schools, as well as an adult community college, an education centre, and a farm school. The district also offers a wide range of sports, fine arts and academic academies.

In 2011, the Delta School District underwent a visioning process to establish its Bold Vision. The exercise to create the vision, described later in this paper, led the district to adopt teacher collaborative inquiry as the framework to achieve the vision. Initially, the district used the inquiry cycle that was outlined by Helen Timperley in her book, Realizing the Power of Professional Learning (2011). When Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser published Spiral of Inquiry for Equity and Quality (2013), the district began using the spiral of inquiry model cited in this publication.

Since the inception of the Delta School District’s Bold Vision in 2011, continuous professional learning has been a goal in the district. The Spiral of Inquiry (diagram 1) has provided the district with a common, coherent framework for learning at all levels.
Staff are continuously scanning the system in order to determine the next most important learning needs, and engaging in the professional learning required to move learning forward at all levels in the district - classroom, school, and district. A great deal of research has been published which supports the key foundational principles adopted by Delta. This includes research by Fullan (2015), Istance (OECD, 2012) and most notably, the significant research base of Ken Leithwood (2013). One of his more recent publications, *Strong Districts and Their Leadership* (2013), provides an excellent framework for the work that the Delta School District has engaged in over the past seven years. This paper will examine the evolving work of the Delta district through the lens of the nine characteristics of strong districts, provided by Leithwood.
I. ESTABLISH A SHARED MISSION, VISION AND GOALS:

> *Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes time. Vision with action can change the world.*

*Joel Barker*

Noted futurist, Joel Barker (1991) states that “having a positive vision of the future is the most forceful motivator for change-for-success that companies, schools, communities, nations, and individuals possess. It inspires people in an organization to think together, dream together and act together to make a difference.”

According to Ken Leithwood (2013) the first characteristic of a strong district is “a broadly shared mission, vision and goals, founded on ambitious images of the educated person”. His work revealed that high-performing school systems have widely-shared sets of beliefs and visions about student learning and well-being that have been transparently developed with the engagement of multiple school and system stakeholders. (Leithwood, 2012, p. 12)

From his research, Leithwood describes specific practices, with respect to the development of shared beliefs, visions and goals, that are indicative of strong district leaders. District leaders are tasked with the responsibility to ensure that the visioning process is transparent and direction-setting. Leaders in those districts engage the community in an extensive consultation process, providing sufficient time to ensure the mission, vision and goals of the system are “widely communicated and understood by everyone throughout the school district.” (p.24) It is imperative that the vision, beliefs and goals are well articulated and demonstrated by system leaders. Furthermore, the importance of the vision is best defined within a district when leaders ‘regularly and intentionally embed the district vision, directions and improvement plans in principals’ meetings and other district processes.” (p.24)

A clear, well-articulated vision sets the stage for the time and effort required to follow through on what might be a long, arduous journey (Sheninger, 2015). Kouses and Posner (2009) state the only visions that take hold in an organization are those that are
shared visions. Carmen Gallo (2011), in an article titled *Steve Jobs and the Power of Vision* explained that, “Innovation requires a team and you cannot inspire a team of passionate evangelists without a compelling vision: a vision that is bold, simple and consistently communicated.” Leadership expert Ken Blanchard (2011) says that a vision is the vital ingredient for long term success, and without a vision you end up reacting rather than acting. A vision provides clarity of purpose, with a commitment that helps move an organization forward. Hugh Burkett (2006) adds further to the importance of a compelling shared vision when he states,

“A clear vision …that identifies the learning to be achieved can help keep a school (or system) and the efforts of staff on target. A shared vision is critical to an organization’s future because it provides the underlying foundation upon which all decisions are made.”

As seen in the statements above, the value of incorporating a vision into an organization to support directions, goals and planning has often been researched and cited as being foundational to organizational success. Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo and Hargreaves (2015) state that “building professional capital across educational systems requires creating an inspiring and inclusive vision that raises the importance of and sets the direction for education and with teachers in ways that resonates with and inspires a majority of educators, school system leaders, and society as a whole to pursue it.” (p.7) Educators in the Delta School District engaged in a vision reflection process during the past year, which has provided clear evidence about the accuracy of this statement. The vision, and the subsequent implementation of actions to achieve the vision, has raised the importance of the work, has inspired the majority of educators in the district, has defined the importance of deeper professional learning and collaborative professionalism, and it has led to greater ownership of the vision, and the work, by the community as a whole.
The book ‘Start with Why’, by Simon Sinek (2009), strongly influenced the thinking of district leaders with respect to the importance of engaging in a visioning process that would include as many people in the school district as possible in order to develop a shared vision, and ultimately stronger ownership of the vision. Sinek’s Golden Circle is a powerful model of the value of finding the ‘Why’ for the organization, as described later in this section.

**Developing a Vision: Delta School District**

During the months preceding her 2010 appointment, while in the role of Assistant Superintendent, the Superintendent of the Delta School district attended a Canadian Educational Leadership conference with a team of Principals and students from the district. During one session of the conference, attendees were asked to describe their school district’s vision. It became apparent to the district team attending the conference that the Delta School District had no coherent shared vision that they could identify or articulate. In further follow-up, after returning from the conference, it was confirmed through meetings and conversations that there was a perception across the school district there was in fact no common vision in the district. It was noted that the previous district vision had been prepared by the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and a small group of staff, however, that vision was not well known by the community. When the school district community was engaged in a consultation process regarding a vision, it became evident that for some time school principals and vice principals had been asking what the vision for the district was, and they had been expressing concern that there seemed to be a lack of direction in the system.

In the fall of 2010, a decision was made by senior staff and the board, that the Delta School District would engage in a visioning process. The Superintendent had recently attended a strategic planning event for the local police department and had seen first-hand how such a process could be undertaken to engage an organization. The police department used a professional facilitator and graphic illustrator to document
the process, and the outcomes and feedback indicated that it was appreciated by all who were involved. Taking that model as a starting point, two members of the school district’s leadership team worked closely with a professional facilitator to develop a framework for vision development that would involve as many people as possible at every school and working site in the district. Once the visioning process was designed, the team felt confident it would provide an opportunity to engage all voices across the district to create a shared vision. The entire visioning process took place from January to April 2011. It engaged thousands of people, and although conducted under a tight timeline, the visioning process afforded the opportunity for the outcomes to be included in a district wide communication strategy and consultation process of goal setting for the coming years.

The visioning process was based on an appreciative inquiry model, and participants were asked to engage in numerous phases of the process. Participants at every school and worksite were given blank visioning templates to record and document the outcomes of individual inquiry process. As they began the process, each participant was asked to reflect on the most amazing learning experience they could recall while working or learning in the district. These memories and reflections were recorded and shared. From these stories, the common values that resonated in each of these stories were collected and became the core values of each site engaged in the process. Participants were then asked to consider ‘why’ the school district existed. What was the purpose of the district? What drove the Delta School District as an organization? Every site worked to craft this into a mission statement for their school or workplace site. Finally, every group was asked to consider their boldest vision for the district. What could the Delta School District look like ten years from now? Participants were encouraged to “dream big” and imagine a future without barriers. When the process had been completed, every school and work site was asked to record their work on the large poster template, and to submit them to a working committee that teased out the common values in order to create the core values of the district’s vision. They also
examined each of the individual mission statements and synthesized the responses in order to establish a common mission statement for the district. Finally, a working committee collated all of the visions that had been submitted by participating sites and worked to develop an overarching bold vision for the district that encompassed all of that feedback. What emerged was this graphic:

The above graphic represents the compilation of all the individual vision processes and depicts the mission, values and vision of the district. Surrounding the vision are three themes, and surrounding each of those themes are several sub-themes, which have all become foundational for every initiative in the district on the journey to achieving the bold vision.

Developing the district vision was not without its hurdles. Although most educators and employees of the district participated willingly, there were some individuals, and even a couple of sites, that were reluctant to engage in the process. There seemed to be a number of reasons for this. For some, a lack of trust appeared to exist. Still others appeared to be somewhat suspicious of the process. Some people
expressed that they were reluctant to take part because they felt that the district should be establishing the vision, and they resented giving up their time to engage in a process that they didn’t believe was “their job”. In the end, however, the vast majority of employees in the district participated and the bold vision was created.

In April of 2011, a district-wide celebration was held at one of the district’s high schools and the Delta School District’s vision was unveiled. It was a very positive event and the energy in the room was palpable. Those attending the larger district visioning process (including students, parents, teachers, support staff, and administrators) felt a strong sense of ownership for the vision. There was a noticeable sense of pride and unity in the gymnasium when the district vision was revealed.

The morning after the unveiling of the new district vision, the Director of Educational Programs visited one of the larger high schools in the district. When she arrived at the office the principal and the two vice-principals, who would be meeting with her, were holding copies of the vision poster handout, discussing the document and sharing their excitement around the possibilities of what could come from the vision. The principal, in his excitement said, “This is amazing! He then asked, “How do we get there?” That question, and others much like it, sparked the beginning of a ten year process of intentional learning in the Delta School District in order to achieve the vision of being A Leading District of Innovative Teaching and Learner Success.

What became clear was that action had to be taken to achieve the vision, and it would be dependent on system wide planning and goals that would provide a clear focus for the change initiatives that would occur in order to move from vision to action. District leaders learned that the planning, goals and actions would need to be monitored and evaluated along the way to determine if we were on the right track. David Taylor (2014) suggests there are crucial elements that are needed to successfully move from vision to actionable change. Firstly, he says that innovation must become a priority. The vision must align with the strategic goals of the organization. There must be communication about what achieving the vision will mean. Leaders must inspire the
organization to move toward the vision. The vision needs to be embraced and supported at all levels of the organization. Pride in the work of the organization moving toward the vision needs to be spoken of often and communicated at every opportunity. Leaders must live the vision and not just pay lip service to it, and they must get involved with the details. Finally, Taylor (2014) says leaders must model the desired practice.

**Shaping our Thinking**

Prior to the visioning process district leaders had engaged in significant study about the importance of a shared vision, beliefs and values, through reading books and articles, and sharing their thoughts on how best to undertake the process. More importantly they discussed how to achieve the bold shared vision once it had been developed. Several books and articles that shaped their initial thinking, and continue to shape the thinking, will be shared throughout this paper.

A book that played a critical role in the development of strategic action to move the visioning process forward was *Start With Why* by Simon Sinek (2009). Sinek’s premise is that most organizations begin their thinking and planning with a focus on WHAT they do. He states that although some groups know HOW they do what they do, very few can clearly state WHY they do what they do. Few organizations can articulate their purpose. In the words of Sinek, “A WHY is just a belief. That’s all it is. HOW’S are the actions you take to realize that belief. And WHATs are the results of those actions” (Sinek, 2009, p.67). The bold vision of the Delta School District provided clarity as to the ‘Why’ for the district’s existence – it provided an almost laser-like focus for every decision and action executed by the district. According to Sinek, “only when the Why is clear and when people believe what you believe can a true loyal relationship develop” (p. 54). Because of the means by which the vision for the Delta School District was developed, with all voices participating in its creation, a clear target was established for everyone in Delta.
A second resource which contributed to the process of achieving the vision was a book titled, *Building and Connecting Learning Communities* by Steven Katz, Lorna Earl, and Sonia Ben Jaafar (2009). This book had a profound impact on how the Vision needed to unfold in Delta. One of the fundamental concepts in the book relates to the notion that “many can indeed be smarter than the few and networks can be powerful organizational forms for school improvement” (p. 2). At the time that the Vision was unveiled in the district, most of the secondary schools in Delta began to establish collaboration time into their schedules for educators. This collaboration time was beginning to have a positive impact on teacher professional learning in schools.

Secondary schools had been able to schedule collaborative time twice a month by changing the start time of the school day for students. Elementary schools, however, were not able to adjust their days to include collaboration in the same way as secondary schools. Because it was believed that collaboration time was crucial to educators to engage in dialogue about their practice, the district focused on a means to create collaboration time in every school in Delta. During the budget process in that first year of the vision, the Assistant Superintendent worked creatively with the staffing formula to seek ways to include specialized music instruction for grades six and seven students at each elementary school. By not removing any teacher preparation time, elementary teachers were then provided additional time to engage in collaborative inquiry.

A second key concept in Katz, Earl and Jaafar’s book relates to the importance of lifelong learning and how knowledge is one of the most important resources for social and economic development. The book suggests that “a fundamental challenge for education, then, is to organize working with knowledge in a way that facilitates ongoing knowledge building and sharing among members of the community”. (p. 3) The district senior leadership team realized that in order to achieve the Bold Vision of being a *leading district for innovative teaching and learner success*, structures would need to be created to promote opportunities for knowledge creation and sharing.
There was a need to create what Katz, Earl and Jaafar describe as “groups of schools working together in intentional ways to enhance the quality of professional learning and to strengthen capacity for continuous improvement, in the service of enhanced student learning” (p. 9). In order to realize Katz, Earl and Jaafar’s vision of continuous improvement, a coherent framework was required to guide the work. The district continued to ask “What do we need to do to move the vision forward?” After doing a thorough investigation into the research, district leaders were convinced that continuous improvement and movement toward achieving the vision could be achieved through teacher collaborative inquiry. The district introduced a teacher leadership role for each school in the district to support staff collaborative inquiry. The role of Coordinators of Inquiry are described in greater detail in the next section of the paper.

Another resource that was influential in inspiring the movement from vision to action was Helen Timperely’s book, *Realizing the Power of Professional Learning* (2011). This book provided a framework to unify the shared networks that were being established across the district. Timperley stresses the power of professional learning in making a difference in professional practice. A clear distinction is made between ‘professional development’ and ‘professional learning’. While professional development is more of an external presentation where individuals participate in acquiring information, professional learning suggests an internal process whereby individuals create new knowledge through actively engaging with others in a collaborative process. Timperely emphasizes that the key purpose of professional learning should be improvement in student learning. Furthermore, all participants in the educational setting need to see themselves as learners. Perhaps most importantly, systematic inquiry is at the root of effective professional learning that leads to improved results for students. “If teacher inquiry is going to make a substantive difference to student outcomes, teachers need to be operating within new frameworks and accessing different kinds of knowledge that will push their thinking and challenge their practice.” (p.10)
Timperley’s work helped to crystalize the next steps toward the Bold Vision. Several themes were percolating at the same time: a common vision; the need for networked collaboration; and a common framework that would allow for the flexibility to meet the needs of each site. We began our work in Delta with Helen Timperely’s inquiry cycle. (Timperely, 2011, p.11)

II. PROVIDE COHERENT INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE:

Leithwood’s second critical feature of strong districts is “a coherent instructional guidance system” (2013). This is an area that the Delta School District focused intensely on. Prior to the development of the vision, it had been noted that the district lacked coherence in the professional learning opportunities offered. Workshops for teachers consisted of many “one-off” sessions. When multiple sessions were offered, there was no means of ensuring transfer to the classroom and so teachers who participated developed the mindset of “we’ve done that”, even when no change resulted in classroom practice. An example of this would be assessment for learning. Although a number of series had been offered, there was little change in the assessment practices that occurred in classrooms.

One of the key district changes that took place once subsequent to the creation of the vision was a renewed focus on the Learning Services Department. Over the years, this was an area that had been significantly reduced by budget cuts to the point where the department could offer little support to schools. The creation of the vision allowed the Director of Educational Programs to lobby for additional support targeted at the key areas of the vision. One of the first positions that was created was a District Principal of Innovation and Inquiry. As the Delta’s Vision was “a leading district for innovative teaching and learner success,” a message needed to be sent to the field that there was commitment to achieving it. The creation of the District Principalship sent a message to the system that the achievement of the Vision was central to everyone’s
work. Another clear message happened at the unveiling of the Bold Vision. In April of 2011, a teacher in the crowd asked the Superintendent, “Are you saying that we can take risks and try new things?” The response was an adamant “Yes!” This set the tone for a new approach in Delta which aligns with Leithwood’s practice of encouraging “staff to be innovative within the boundaries created by the district’s instructional guidance system” (2013, p. 24).

As collaborative teacher inquiry was to be the vehicle to help achieve the vision, support was needed to help move inquiry forward in the district. Leithwood stresses that strong districts “adopt a service orientation towards schools” (2013, p. 24). Through continuous scanning as outlined in Halbert and Kaser’s Spiral of Inquiry (2013), the district leaders continually ask, “what does the district need to do next to move the vision forward in Delta?” It was clear that in-school support was needed. As a result, Coordinators of Inquiry (COIs) were created and staffed in every school in the district. The purpose of establishing this teacher leadership position was to help schools begin the process of creating inquiry questions or a focus of inquiry in each site. These coordinators participated in ongoing training sessions (every 6 weeks) designed to build capacity in schools. An important, unanticipated outcome of the creation of the COIs was the profound impact it had on building teacher capacity and leadership. Delta now has a strong pool of future school and district leaders ready to formalize their leadership roles in the district.

It is noteworthy that around the time the Delta School District’s vision was created, the Ministry of Education was also in the process of redesigning the entire provincial curriculum from kindergarten through grade twelve. Although this was a daunting change for the province of British Columbia, it provided Delta with an opportunity to focus intently on curriculum, instruction and assessment through an inquiry perspective. In scanning the system in Delta, district leaders suspected that the one thing that would help to move the curriculum forward in the district would be internal capacity building in schools. Thus, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (CIA)
teams were established in each site. The school teams received training on the key elements of the redesigned curriculum, namely a focus on big ideas, inquiry-based learning, development of core competencies, and assessment for learning practices. According to Leithwood, strong districts “align curricular goals, assessment instruments, instructional practices and teaching resources” (2013, p. 24). The goal of the CIA teams was to become in-school resources on the redesigned curriculum as well as its implications for instruction. In addition, the team members were trained in assessment practices so that they could assist teachers in their schools on sound assessment for learning strategies.

Another key provincial change that occurred during Delta’s focus on its Bold Vision was a shift from District and Schools Growth Plans to a model of district and school plans being based on continuous improvement. No longer are hard and fast targets set which are either met or not met. The new Framework for Enhancing Student Learning (FESL) aligns closely to the Spiral of Inquiry with the focus being on continuous assessment of where are we at? - how do we know? - and where to next? Delta has used the Spiral of Inquiry Model as the template for school and district goals, contributing to the coherent instructional guidance system that Leithwood claims is foundational to strong districts. This new provincial approach to school and district improvement connects to Leithwood’s recommended practice of expecting schools “to focus on needs of individual as well as groups of students” (2013, p. 24). According to the provincial framework, schools and districts must have “a focus on each student, as well as particular populations of students” (BC Ministry of Education, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov). Within the new framework, goal areas must focus on intellectual, human and social, and career development. In addition, “plans will be expected to reflect local efforts to support each student and specific groups of students, including Aboriginal students, children in care, and students with special needs” (BC Ministry of Education, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov). This revised approach to school
and district plans clearly supports Leithwood’s practice of establishing coherent instructional guidance.

Finally, Leithwood suggests that strong districts “advocate for attention to the best available evidence to inform instructional improvement decision” (2013, p. 24). Although a focus on data continues to be a goal for the district, using the Spiral of Inquiry has helped to ensure that evidence drives the decisions that are made with regards to school and district goals. Within the Spiral of Inquiry, evidence must be considered in the selection of a focus (what evidence tells us that we are selecting the right focus?) and in the checking phase (does the evidence tell us that we made enough of a difference?). Establishing the Spiral of Inquiry as a district-wide approach to learning at all levels ensures that evidence is a foundational consideration of the work being done across the district. Using Halbert and Kaser’s questions, “What's going on for our learners?”, “How do we know?”, and “Why does this matter?” helps to ensure that evidence is a continuous consideration in the work that occurs at all levels within the district.

III. A COMMITMENT TO SEEK AND USE MULTIPLE SOURCES OF EVIDENCE TO INFORM DECISIONS:

This dimension of strong districts is one that has recently garnered the attention of the district. For a variety of reasons, the Delta School District’s use of evidence to inform decisions had eroded over time. Student participation rates in the Provincial Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) had declined so that district results were no longer valid. With no district-wide assessments to replace the FSA, the district was reliant on sources of data such as attendance records, report card letter grades, surveys and high school exam marks as ways of tracking student learning. Upon reflection, the district was limited by the data available. Rather than seeking data to confirm identified learner needs were accurate, district goals were determined based on the data available. The
Spiral of Inquiry enables the district to shift the focus towards scanning the learners to identify their needs, and to devise ways of assessing and ensuring that the hunches were accurate.

After the inception of the Vision, the Ministry of Education introduced a new Framework for Enhancing Student Learning (FESL). This Framework is being used for both schools and districts. It is important to realize that the new framework for developing school and district goals is very different than the previous model which was focused on SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely) goals, based on a three year cycle. The goals under the old model tended to be long-term, fixed in nature, and at the discretion of the teachers, administrators and parents. Under the new model, goals are developed using the Spiral of Inquiry and are developed using evidence to determine the learning needs of the students. The FESL is designed to be flexible and responsive in order to meet the needs of learners and correlates well with Simon Breakspear’s research on Agile Leadership. Breakspear states:

“Rather than engaging in efforts to create perfect, detailed plans and milestones and then implementing the strategy with fidelity, agile approaches embrace the inherent complexity and ambiguity of change processes in complex-relational environments. As complex challenges do not have a simple, neat plan that can be seen from the beginning, agile leaders must work with the knowledge they have, and remain open to the reality that new information and insights may lead them back to re-evaluate an earlier part of their work, including the very definition of the goals themselves.” (Breakspear, 2016)

The Ministry of Education’s Framework for Enhancing Student Learning incorporates the essence of Breakspear’s notion of agility in order to meet the ever evolving needs of learners. Flexibility is vital to the process. The Framework for Enhancing Student Learning is designed to be a continuous, reflective, responsive process.
A key component of the Delta School District’s work around the FESL is the relationship between school frameworks and the district framework which has allowed for the alignment of evidence across levels in the system. As stated, school goals were created through the use of the Spiral of Inquiry which identified learner goals through the collection of evidence in the scanning phase. The school plans were created based on the learner needs identified in each site. The plans were then collected by the district and scanned to identify themes from across the schools. Four main themes emerged: Assessment for Learning; Student Connectedness and Engagement; Self-Regulation; and Subject Specific Curricular Goals. The district respected the goals identified in schools and incorporated them into the district plan. At the same time, the scanning phase of the Spiral of Inquiry was utilized to identify the most important learner needs from across the district. This process helped to ensure that the evidence gathered within schools aligned with the evidence gathered across the district. Four key, actionable goals were identified for the district:

1. **Student Connectedness**: All students will have at least two adults in their school who believe that they will be a success in life and be able to answer the question:

   “Are there two adults in your school who believe that you will be a success in life?”

2. **Reading**: Students in the Delta School District will be achieve grade level literacy by grade three.

3. **Assessment for Learning**: The District Procedure on Assessment for Learning will be understood and implemented.

   All students will demonstrate an understanding of themselves as learners by being able to answer the “Big Three” questions:

   1. What am I learning?
   2. How is my learning going?
   3. Where to next?
4. **Graduation:** All students will graduate with dignity, purpose, passion and options.

These goals allow for the collection of data at the district level in order to “provide schools with relevant and accessible evidence about their performance in a timely manner” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 14). Because the goals of the Delta district were based on the goals that were determined by schools, district data aligns with and supports the work that is happening in schools. Further, because district staff have been closely involved throughout the process they are able to “assist schools in using evidence to improve their performance” (p. 14). It should be noted that the Ministry’s focus on vulnerable learners (Indigenous students, children in care, and students with special needs), is realized within the context of each of these goals.

In order to maximize progress toward school and district goals, district structures have been designed to create internal accountability and networking within and across schools. Most notably, collaboration time for leaders has been set aside in principal and vice-principal meetings to allow for planning, sharing, and networking around the school and district goals. Data collected by the district will be reviewed collectively on a regular, on-going basis during principal and vice-principal collaboration time so that progress can be monitored across schools and the district. This aligns with the importance of creating “collaborative structures and opportunities for the interpretation and use of evidence in schools” (p. 14).

The Delta School District is well poised to gather and monitor the data related to our district’s goals. There is an Information Service department that has the ability to capture student data from schools and produce timely reports. This enables Delta to activate Leithwood’s recommendation to “implement computerized information management systems” (p. 14). Delta is committed to the use of multiple, aligned sources of evidence to inform decisions across schools and the district. While the district is in the initial stages of the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning, the
likelihood that evidence being collected is appropriate and valuable is high because the Spiral of Inquiry ensured that the initial learner needs identified were evidence-based.

**IV. CREATE LEARNING-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES:**

The fourth practice of strong districts, according to Leithwood, is to “create learning-oriented organizational improvement practices” (2013). In his paper, Leithwood stresses the importance of strategic planning. The Delta district has carefully made a distinction between strategic planning and long-term planning. In the district’s strategic planning process, a desired future was envisioned - namely the Bold Vision. The district then utilized Halbert and Kaser’s Spiral of Inquiry (2013) to help define the steps needed to achieve the vision. Staff at the district level continually scan the needs of the system, and use evidence to inform the hunches as to what the next steps should be. The new learning necessary to move the hunches into action is central and continuous to the work in Delta. Specific actions are taken and finally, evidence is gathered to check to see if enough of a positive difference was realized. It is the integration of the Spiral of Inquiry that separates Leithwood’s notion of strategic planning from that of the Delta District where strategic planning begins with the end in mind and works backward to bridge the gap from current reality to desired outcome.

Leithwood states that “strong districts have a coherent approach to improvement which usually includes a small number of key improvement goals consistently pursued over sustained periods of time (2013, p. 15). This recommendation connects well to the work related to the new provincial school and district Framework for Enhancing Student Learning (FESL) which was described in the previous section. As a result of the process used to establish the District’s FESL, four clear goals have been established in the district that relate closely to the goals that were identified in schools. By limiting the number of district goals to four, the district is able to honor Leithwood recommendation
“to not overload schools with excessive numbers of initiatives” (p. 15) and to “set a manageable number of precise targets for district school improvements” (p. 25).

As mentioned in the previous section, school goals were created using the Spiral of Inquiry as the template. This ensured “improvement processes to be evidence-informed” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 25). In creating school goals, staff had to engage in the scanning process of the spiral which asks “what is going on for our learners and how do we know?”. Moving from scanning to developing a focus cannot be achieved without evidence informing the selection of a focus. In addition, once the focus is established and action has been taken, it is essential that evidence is used in order to know whether enough of a positive difference was realized for students.

As next steps, the Delta district will be working with its leaders to form committees that will develop the subsections of the District Framework for Enhancing Student Learning. This will ensure that Delta “develops and implements board and school improvement plans interactively and collaboratively with school leaders” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 25).

Finally, the Delta district has re-structured its principal and vice-principal meetings to make better use of the time and to allow for “the ongoing monitoring and refining of school improvement processes” (p. 16). Fichtman Dana et al (2011) state “Giving school-based leaders the gift of time for structured conversations and collegial support to investigate real-life dilemmas not only reinforces the notion that leaders must be learners but also sets the conditions so that principals see inquiry as part of their daily work” (p. 29) In Delta, principal and vice-principals’ meetings have been altered as per Leithwood’s findings and also in order to implement Jerald’s (2012) recommendations:

- “Refocusing principal meetings on effective instruction instead of operational concerns
- Deepening principals’ knowledge about curriculum and effective instructional practices
● Providing principals with opportunities for active participation during meetings, often based on authentic “problems of practice”

● Using the meetings to model good professional development practices; and

● Structuring meetings to better meet principals’ different learning needs” (p.31)

Each meeting begins with an address from the Superintendent that relates the most important learning needs of the system. Principals are then given a significant amount of collaborative learning time to work in groups in order to focus on the goals of their schools. In addition, time is allocated for discussions related to the study of a book that was selected to address the learning needs of the system. Finally, time has been allocated for administrators to have collaborative time to focus on the district’s learning goals. This ensures that the needs of learners in schools drives decisions at the district level and that school-level leaders are included in decisions about district-wide improvement decisions (Leithwood, 2015, p. 25). Feedback from administrators suggests the restructuring of the meeting time has been found to be beneficial to principals and vice-principals and is supportive of Leithwood’s evidence that suggests “approaches to district and school improvement which encourage communication between and among districts and their schools and which provide generous opportunities for networking are a powerful source of job-embedded, strategically directed professional learning” (p. 15).

Throughout all of the work that has occurred in Delta, it has been acknowledged that schools are unique and that learner needs vary from site to site. “School level variation in school improvement efforts” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 25) has been embraced as a construct since the Spiral of Inquiry was adopted as a means of achieving the Bold Vision. Just as educators need to differentiate for the learning needs of students, the district has had to differentiate for the learning needs of staffs and schools. The Delta district embraces diversity at all levels of learning and has adopted the motto “we are all
learners” to capture the culture of systemic learning and improvement that exists both horizontally and vertically in the district. When everyone within the system is moving forward with their learning, there is a belief that improvement will be realized.

V. PROVIDE JOB-EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

The fifth dimension of a strong district is to “provide job-embedded professional development” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 16). Early on, the Delta School District realized the importance of professional learning as a leverage for district transformation. As a result, since the development of the District Vision in 2011, professional learning has been a major focus of the district. Once it was established that collaborative professional inquiry would be the framework used to help achieve the vision, all professional learning opportunities offered focused on the needs of learners at all levels. The Education Programs Department has taken great care to continually demonstrate how the learning topics align and are interconnected. It is worth noting that with the creation of the district vision, references to “professional development” stopped and “professional learning” became the term of choice. The term “development” no longer resonated as by definition, it is the process of developing or being developed. The district wanted to emphasize the notion of continual, intentional improvement. Learning is not something “done to us”, but rather an integral process within the profession of education that involves deliberate, continual engagement in order to realize improvement.

Given the variety of topics being addressed through professional learning in Delta, school administrators asked for a graphic organizer to help educators understand the relationships between professional learning topics. The following draft was created to help build understanding across the district:
Although complex, the document helps to demonstrate the work taking place within the district. All of the work falls under the umbrella of school connectedness. Students who feel connected to school staff have a much higher likelihood of graduating. Similarly, staff who are not connected to other educators are at much higher risk of feeling isolated and leaving the profession. A goal of the Delta district is to have every student feel that there are at least two adults in their school who believe they will be a success in life (Halbert & Kaser, 2017) because if they don’t, there is little reason for them to engage in their learning.

Next, the graphic attempts to depict how professional learning is related to what we call “the learning equation”: Growth Mindset + Innovative Teaching = Learner Success. The equation reflects the essence of the Delta School District’s Vision. After working with the vision for some time, the importance of having a shared understanding of the terms used in our Vision became apparent. A collective process was undertaken with school administrators and their staffs to define and bring clarity to the terms
“innovative teaching” and “learner success”. These terms, along with “growth mindset”, are defined at the bottom of the graphic. Innovative teaching relates to the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment (a focus of the CIA Learning Teams that were outlined previously in this paper). From there, all of the areas of professional learning in the district have been inserted to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the professional learning opportunities within the district.

Finally, all of the work in the Delta School District has been based on three key foundational bodies of research: the OECD’s Principles of Learning; Universal Design for Learning; and the First People’s Principles of Learning. A graphic referencing this work is featured on the back of the graphic organizer:
The 7 Principles of Learning

1. Learners at the Centre
   - Learners are the central players in the environment and therefore activities center on their cognition and growth.
   - Learning approaches allow students to construct their learning through engagement and active exploration.
   - This calls for a role of pedagogy, which includes guided and active approaches, as well as recognition, inquiry-based, and service learning.
   - The environment aims to develop "self-regulated learners," who:
     - monitor, evaluate, and optimize the acquisition and use of knowledge
     - regulate their emotions and motivations during the learning process
     - manage study time well
     - set higher specific and personal goals, and are able to monitor them.

2. The Social Nature of Learning
   - Neuroscience confirms that we learn through social interaction - the organization of learning should be highly social.
   - Co-operative group work, appropriately organized and structured, has generated various benefits for achievement as well as for behavioral and affective outcomes. Co-operative methods work for all types of students, because, done well, they push learners of all abilities.
   - Personal research and self-study are generally also important, and the opportunities for autonomous learning should give students more autonomy.

3. Emotions are Integral to Learning
   - Learning results from the dynamic interplay of emotion, motivation, and cognition, and these are interrelated.
   - Positive beliefs about oneself as a learner and in a particular subject represent a core component for deep understanding and "deep-seated" expertise.
   - Emotions will tend to be regarded as "soft" and unimportant, though accorded in theory, are often more difficult to be recognized in practice.
   - Attention to motivations by all those involved, including the student, in order making the learning fun and learning more effective, are more essential (though better still if it is both).

4. Recognizing Individual Differences
   - Students differ in many ways fundamental to learning: prior knowledge, ability, conceptions of learning, learning styles and strategies, interests, motivation, self-efficacy beliefs and emotions. They differ in socio-environmental terms such as linguistic, cultural and social aspects.
   - Prior knowledge - on which students vary substantially - is highly influential for how well each individual learns.
   - Learning environments need to be adaptable to reflect these individual and potential differences in ways that are sustainable both for the individual learners and for the work of the group as a whole. Moving away from “one size fits all” may well be a challenge.

5. Stretching All Students
   - Being sensitive to individual differences and needs also means being challenging enough to reach above their existing level of capacity, and, at the same time, no one should be allowed to cease for any significant amount of time.
   - High achieving students can help lower-achieving students, which helps stretch all learners.
   - This understanding needs to avoid continued and de-motivating regimes based on rigid, fixed and unresponsive employment - not just for humanitarian reasons but because these are not consistent with the cognitive and motivational demand for effective learning.

6. Assessment for Learning
   - The learning environment needs to be very clear about what is expected, what learners are doing, and why. Otherwise, motivation decreases, students are less able to fit discrete activities into larger knowledge frameworks, and they are less likely to become self-regulated learners.
   - Formative assessment should be substantial, rigorous and provide meaningful feedback; as well as feeding back to individual learners, this knowledge should be used constantly to shape direction and practice in the learning environment.

7. Building Horizontal Connections
   - A key feature of learning is the complex knowledge structures that are built up by organizing many basic pieces of knowledge in a hierarchical way. If well-sustained, such structures provide understanding that can transfer to new situations - critical competence in the 21st century.
   - The ability for learners to make connections and "horizontal competencies" is also important for the coping learning environment and the societal environment and society. The "authentic learning" this promotes also fosters deeper understanding.

Universal Design for Learning

First Peoples Principles of Learning

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the Self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

Learning requires recognition of the consequences of one's actions.

Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.

Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.

Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

Learning involves patience and time.

Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.
This graphic organizer has proven to be extremely useful, especially in discussions and conversations related to the establishment of school goals for the FESL. It has been helpful for educators to gain a visual perspective of where the current focus for their school is and how it connects to the bigger picture. For example, a school that was initially focused on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) came to realize that they were really focusing on classroom management which connected to instruction and innovative teaching. This broader perspective enabled the school to discuss student behaviour through the lens of innovative teaching and the focus of the school shifted from a culture of blaming students, to one of teachers feeling empowered to make a difference in the learning of outcomes in their class.

Within the Delta district, there have been an abundance of professional learning opportunities for educators. The opportunities, however, are filtered through the scanning stage of the Spiral of Inquiry with a constant focus on the learning needs of educators in relation to the goals of the district vision. In addition, the learning opportunities are never “one-off” events. Sessions are planned as a part of a series to ensure that educators engage in new learning, commit to trying something new in their classroom or school, and then re-convene to talk about the experience and what they noticed. Further, learning opportunities are often offered in schools with teachers being released to observe lessons in other classrooms. Educators co-plan, teach, and then de-brief their lessons to ensure continuous, collaborative learning. This professional learning model supports Leithwood’s premiss that strong district’s “provide extensive PD opportunities for both teacher and school-level leaders, most of it through some form of learning community or on-the-job context” (p. 25)

A variety of networking systems have been established to help spread the learning in the district. Social media platforms have been created to highlight the learning across the district including a website called Delta Learns (https://deltalearns.ca/) which contains a toolbox of innovative teaching and learner success for teachers (https://deltalearns.ca/toolkit/), as well as a blog called 180.
Days of Learning (https://deltalearns.ca/180daysoflearning/) where educators share their stories of shifting practice.

Utilizing the Spiral of Inquiry as a framework for learning in the district has helped to ensure that “the content of professional development aligns with capacities needed for district and school improvement” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 25). The recent creation of school and district FESLs, has ensured that there is, and will continue to be, alignment between what learners need and the professional learning opportunities offered. As already stated, the school FESLs are based on the student learning needs of each school, and the school frameworks have been collected and collated to determine the needs that are important for the district to focus on. This “requires individual staff growth plans to be aligned with district and school improvement priorities” (p. 25). As school and district plans are based on the Spiral of Inquiry, evidence is a key component of the plans and the continual monitoring of progress is central to the process.

Using the Spiral of Inquiry has resulted in the identification of another key learner need. The strong focus on teacher professional learning and leadership has shown that the district also needs to focus on the professional learning of school and district leaders. In scanning the needs of the district it became apparent that a greater focus on the professional learning of principals and vice-principals was needed. A principal recently asked, “what is the district looking for in its principals?” This question made it clear that expectations for administrators were lacking and that the district needed to support the diverse learning needs of this group. This led to the development of the “Learning for Learning” series which will be discussed later in Section VII of this paper.
VI. ALIGNMENT OF BUDGETS, STRUCTURES, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES WITH THE DISTRICT VISION, MISSION AND GOALS:

Leithwood (2013) states that evidence used to define strong districts indicates there is significant alignment of processes and structures in those districts that support the district’s mission, vision and goals. According to the description of strong districts, there is a systematic and ongoing process to align budgets with the goals for improving the outcomes for student learning and well-being. Additionally, there are procedures for continuous attention to the alignment of personnel policies and procedures with the goals for student learning. Leithwood further states that in support of those goals for students there are systematic processes that will align organizational structures with staffs’ instructional improvement work, and there are adequate resources allocated for the professional learning of staff, including leaders, through budget processes. (p.17)

According to the Ontario strong district’s study, resource allocation in those districts was specifically aligned with the district’s focus on improving instruction and student achievement. “Strong districts use the alignment of resources to help close the achievement gaps by ensuring that those students struggling the most have disproportionate access not only to financial supports but also high-quality teachers, and successful peer models, all of which make a demonstrable contribution to student achievement.” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 18)

Each year since the inception of the vision, mission, and goals in the Delta School District, the budget has contained an allocation of resources specifically categorized as Vision Achievement. Resource alignment toward achieving the vision and goals of the district has become a clear focus during the budget development process. Since the vision was adopted by the board in 2011 the Secretary- Treasurer and the Director of Finance have become deeply engaged in leadership learning processes related to the vision and goals of the district. As a result, they conduct a budget process that engages staff and stakeholders in the process by asking very
focused questions at the budget table which relate to how a particular budget item will impact the achievement of the vision, goals and resulting student learning outcomes in the district. According to Campbell, Fullan and Glaze (2006), district alignment demands that the work of all members of the senior leadership team, including those responsible for finance, personnel, operations and academic programs, must be coordinated and aligned with the district vision.

Once the annual preliminary budget has been development in a given year, trustees in Delta begin their community consultations, deliberations, and decision-making during the budget process. Questions and inquiries asked by trustees and by the school district community members are focused through the lens of how a particular budget topic would help to achieve the district vision and goals. It is not unusual to hear a trustee ask a staff member to explain how a particular budget recommendation will impact the achievement of the vision and goals, and how it therefore aligns with improvement in student learning and well-being. Purposeful dialogue that takes place at the budget table provides clarity and coherence for the impact that the district’s annual budget will have on achieving the goals.

Within the Delta school district there is a strong alignment of budgets, structures, policies and procedures with the vision, mission, values and goals. While various parts of the district plan evolve and change over time, in response to the collective learning and input from numerous processes, the main goal of achieving the vision, and therefore aligning the resources to make that happen, is evident and has not wavered.

As an example of this strong alignment, when the decision was made to introduce the collaborative-inquiry process as a means to take action toward achieving the vision, the position of Coordinator of Inquiry was created, as explained in Section II of the paper. Included in that initiative was the budget for release time for teachers to engage in the inquiry process, external experts to help lead the inquiry process, Inquiry and Innovation Grants, resource materials, and the addition of a highly specialized position of District Principal of Inquiry and Innovation, to lead the entire inquiry initiative.
at the district level. The budget for that intentional, focused approach to becoming an inquiry-minded district at a systemic level required a significant funding commitment. In order to have the type of impact that would result in the desired effect, it would require that the budget commitment be sustained over several years. Beginning in that first year of vision implementation, the Board of Education has made the commitment to achieve the goals of the vision by ensuring it was foundational in their policy manual, as explained in Section VIII of the paper. As a result, the Board of Education in Delta has made a commitment through the annual budget process, to achieve the vision and has chosen to align their budget processes with the work of staff, district wide, in achieving the goals that have been set out through the district directions.

As seen in Section I of this paper, adding specialized music education for student learning, and therefore also providing release time for teacher collaborative inquiry, was another significant commitment through the budget process, and is an ongoing resource allocation in alignment with the goals of the vision. Through the win-win-win process of adding music specialists to enhance music education students in the district were receiving, teachers were also given the opportunity for professional learning through collaborative-inquiry, and in turn the opportunity for teacher learning has had a significant influence on teaching practice and student learning.

Access to current technology is essential for teachers as many of the learning tools for their use, and for their students’ use, can only be accessed on line and through district developed softwares and programs. Once again district leaders and the Board of Education have made on-going commitments to fund those tools, and ensure that decisions align with the goals stemming from the vision process. Technology Grants were introduced as a method for teachers to learn how to use technology in their teaching practice and ground it in pedagogical approaches. These funds were necessary initially to implement a goal emanating from the vision. Eventually it was acknowledged that if the district was to be an innovative district, ongoing funding would need to be available. Teachers have co-created a variety of resources for one another
and there is a website for sharing called Delta Learns, that has been developed specifically to assist in the storage of, and access to, those valuable shared resources for teachers. As a result of increasing technology needs for teaching, the district has hired specialized staff to support the use of technology in support of student learning, and to assist teachers with pedagogical approaches that enhance student learning. One major advancement in the use of technology in the district was the adoption of Google Applications for Education (GAFE). Permission to use this platform required permission from the Provincial Privacy Commissioner, but it was clear that having the permission to use this tool would change the way students and educators learned. These are the types of purposeful decisions that demonstrate alignment of resources with the district vision during the budget processes.

Since the beginning of the journey to achieve the vision in the district, teachers have been engaged in inquiry processes and have developed many questions about their own learning, have created resources to share with others, and have become deeply engaged in professional learning, as described in Sections III, IV, V and VII of the paper. The district has supported this increased professional learning through increasing the professional learning budget, and by introducing structures to support professional learning. District Leaders have designed a Leading for Learning program that supports many different levels of leaders within the district, through a structure of professional learning dinner series, including speakers such as Raj Dhasi, Drs. Helen Timperely, Judy Halbert, Linda Kaiser, Deb Butler, Nancy Perry, Leyton Schnellert, and Ken Leithwood.

In Section VIII of the paper connections will be drawn between the budgetary decisions to implement the various initiatives and the policies and procedures that support the district vision and directions emanating from those governance decisions.
VII. USE A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

In the Delta School District, this characteristic of Leithwood’s findings related to strong districts is currently central. Despite the fact that according to research, leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors that positively impact student learning (Leithwood et al, 2004), Delta has lacked a comprehensive, continuous approach to leadership development. Over the years, a multitude of one-off programs have been offered however, these tended to be of a “one-size fits all” approach, with the programs being somewhat siloed. Further, in the planning of these sessions, input from the leaders in the field was limited. Over the past three years, a more focused, connected approach to leadership development has been taken by the district.

The scanning phase of the Spiral of Inquiry helped to identify the need to focus further on developing a comprehensive approach to leadership development. The fact that some principals were questioning what qualities the district was looking for in its administrators is an indication that senior staff needed to be clearer with the learning intentions for principals and vice-principals. Although the district had done some work over the past three years on leadership development, the evidence phase of the Spiral suggested that the district had not yet made enough of a difference in the area of capacity building for leaders.

Three years ago Delta began a focus on leadership development by offering a series led by Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser. The purpose of this series was to introduce administrators and teacher leaders to inquiry as a framework for professional learning and to provide an overview of current research related to educational leadership at the international level. This series was well-received but because participation was voluntary, only some of the district’s leaders benefitted from the program. Those that participated spoke highly of the opportunity and many have gone on to become school based administrators.
After this series ended, school based leaders were surveyed regarding their professional learning needs. Citing Sinek’s Golden Circle (2009), administrators articulated very clearly that they understood the WHY of educational transformation. They also felt that they understood WHAT things needed to be done. What administrators were asking for was assistance with HOW to help make school improvement a reality. Many of their needs appeared to be related to communication skills, conflict resolution, and how to reach consensus with a group. In order to provide the new learning that district leaders were seeking, Raj Dhasi, a private consultant, was contracted to share her knowledge regarding the “structure and skills required for productive workplace conversations” (Turning Point Resolutions, http://www.turningpointresolutions.com). This six part series, which included all school and district leaders, provided the team with common knowledge around how to engage in difficult conversations. The feedback from this series was extremely positive however, the evidence helped the district to identify yet another learner need. Such is the continuous, iterative nature of inquiry.

Based on the evidence provided, it became clear that the district needed to differentiate in order to meet the diverse learning needs of administrators. After providing two years of common foundational learning, there was a need to embrace the complexity of leadership development and focus on what Leithwood calls, “a comprehensive performance management system for school and district leadership development” (2013, p. 18). The practices that Leithwood uses as examples include:

I. Uses the best available evidence about successful leadership...as a key source of criteria used for recruiting, selecting, developing and appraising school and district leaders

II. Matches the capacities of leaders with the needs of schools

III. Provides prospective and existing leaders with extended opportunities to further develop their leadership capacities

IV. Develops realistic plans for leadership succession
V. Promotes coordinated forms of leadership distribution in schools

When considering these five indicators, it is clear that there are areas where the Delta School District is sound and areas that require further attention. Although the District has a procedure related to effective administrative practice, these practices would benefit from review and revision. Once revised, the practices need to be shared and referred to on an ongoing basis, particularly when administrators are establishing and reviewing their professional growth plans.

The district has historically done a good job of matching the skills of its leaders to the needs of schools and recently, a practice was introduced that allows administrators to provide input into school administrative transfers and placements. In addition, leadership succession is a constant consideration for the district’s senior administrative team and hiring decisions are undertaken with succession plans in mind. Since the inception of the District Vision, there has been a strong focus on developing leaders at all levels in the system. The creation of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Learning Teams and school-based Coordinators of Inquiry are just a couple of examples where leadership opportunities have been created. The area where the Delta School District requires greater focus is in providing future and current leaders with diverse, in-depth opportunities to further develop their leadership capacities. The work of Meredith Honig has been embraced by the Delta district and has become central in its approach to leadership development:

“...districts generally do not see district-wide improvements in teaching and learning without substantial engagement by their central offices in helping schools build their capacity for improvement. Central offices and the people who work in them are not simply part of the background noise in school improvement. Rather, school district central office administrators exercise essential leadership, in partnership with school leaders, to build capacity throughout public educational systems for teaching and learning improvements.” (Honig, 2007)
The work of our Education Programs Department and the work of senior staff is focused on working alongside administrators and teachers to partner with and build capacity. This was very apparent during the past year when district staff worked closely with schools to assist them with the development of School Frameworks for Enhancing Student Learning (FESL). Now that the goals for each school have been established, schools are being clustered according to their goal areas and district support staff act as group facilitators to support the work happening in schools. In addition, the two Assistant Superintendents in Delta adopted a shared approach to school visits with co-developed questions that focus on student, teacher, and leader learning. This has resulted in vice-principals and principals talking about how the role of the school administrator is shifting in Delta:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From...</th>
<th>Toward...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building manager</td>
<td>Lead learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Capacity builder / Leader of teacher learning and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change manager</td>
<td>Improvement leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture keeper</td>
<td>Culture developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on fairness</td>
<td>Focus on equity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Honig cites three areas that districts need to focus on in order to realize district improvement:

- **“School Leadership investigation”:** The reconfiguration and exercise of leadership within elementary, middle, and high schools to enable more focused support for learning improvement
• **Resource Investment investigation**: The investment of staffing and other resources at multiple levels of the system, in alignment with learning improvement goals, to enhance equity and leadership capacity

• **Central Office Transformation investigation**: The reinvention of central office work practices and relationships with the schools to better support district-wide improvement of teaching and learning” (Honig, 2007)

All three of these areas will be a focus as the Delta School District moves ahead with a comprehensive, evidence-based three-year plan for leadership improvement. At the end of the 2016-2017 school year, school and district leaders were surveyed regarding their professional learning needs. This survey was conducted in partnership with the district’s Association of Delta School Administrators (ADSA). The results of the survey indicated:

- A high level of interest (90%+) in a variety of leadership development activities / a willingness to put in significant time and energy
- A desire for opportunities to connect their professional growth to their school improvement goals
- A desire for structures that allow for learning in teams / networks
- A very high level of interest in mentorship and coaching opportunities (small group and individual)
- Experienced Principals and Vice-Principals want opportunities to share their knowledge, experience and learning.

This evidence has led to the development of a six-strand leadership development series titled *Leading for Learning* designed for principals, vice-principals, exempt staff leaders, and teachers aspiring to school-based leadership positions. Extensive research (Leithwood, 2004, 2013; Honig, 2007; Jerald, 2012) identifies one of the key characteristics of high performing school districts as having a sustained, comprehensive leadership development program for school and district leaders. The
Leading For Learning series will meet the diverse needs of both seasoned and novice principals and vice principals with full or partial participation across all six strands. The intent is not that leaders must participate in all six strands, but that they will participate in the strands that are best suited to their current professional learning needs. In order to promote leadership at all levels in the system, the series will be co-planned by members of the Association of Delta School Administrators (ADSA), the two assistant superintendents, and district directors.

The following table identifies the six strands of the Leading the Learning program along with the targeted participants and a brief description of the leadership component;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRAND</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Learning Alliance Research and Practice Series</td>
<td>Interested principals and vice-principals</td>
<td>Journal/Research articles distributed each week for one month related to a theme, followed by a social event to discuss the topic and commit to an action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. New Principal and Vice Principal Toolbox Series</td>
<td>For administrators in their first two years of service</td>
<td>A series of workshops related to school administration with a focus on topics such as school organization, SAFE schools, school finances, professional growth plans, communication with parents, staff and students, human resources, leading inclusion, and instructional leadership to name just a few.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Mentoring Series</td>
<td>Open to all Principals and Vice-Principals</td>
<td>A networked model of mentorship (two mentors working with 4 - 6 mentees). The series will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Leading the Learning Dinner Series with key thought leaders in education.</td>
<td>Open to all Principals and Vice Principals</td>
<td>Organized by the Assistant Superintendents in partnership with Learning Services.</td>
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</table>
| V. Teacher Leaders Series (Connected to Dinner Series) | All interested Teacher Leaders, Department Heads, District and School Coordinators. | Principals, Vice Principals and District Staff will be presenters / facilitators. The approach will be thematic based around:  
  ● Leading Inquiry  
  ● Building Consensus and Developing teams  
  ● Setting goals for professional learning  
  ● Working Collaboratively  
  ● Embedding Indigenous Education  
  ● AFL + developing rubrics for grade subjects  
  ● Inclusive Learning |
| VI. Leadership Coaching | Open to select Principal + Vice Principal teams | Experienced Principals and Vice Principals will be trained as district coaches. An external facilitator, Raj Dhasi of Turning Point Solutions, will lead the training of the coaches. |
This comprehensive, multi-pronged approach to leadership development is specifically designed to meet the needs of the diverse pool of administrators. In addition to this six-strand approach to leadership development, the district has allocated a minimum of one hour at the beginning of each bi-monthly principals’ meeting for professional learning. Learning needs are determined by using the scanning phase of the spiral of inquiry and considering “what are the needs of our learners?” and “how do we know?”. A planning committee was created to provide the senior team with input regarding what should be included as topics on the bi-monthly meeting agendas. The creation of a planning committee is a deliberate attempt to ensure that the learning needs of our administrators are being met.

The creation of the Leading for Learning series is based on the OECD’s Principles of Learning (OECD, 2012). These principles, are foundational to all levels of learning including students in the classroom, educators in a school, and leaders in a district. Using these principles as the foundation for the Leading for Learning series helped to model them for the learning at all levels in the district. The seven principles include:

1. **Learners at the centre:** The learning environment recognises the learners as its core participants, encourages their active engagement and develops in them an understanding of their own activity as learners.

2. **The social nature of learning:** The learning environment is founded on the social nature of learning and actively encourages well-organised cooperative learning.

3. **Emotions are integral to learning:** The learning professionals within the learning environment are highly attuned to the learners’ motivations and the key role of emotions in achievement.

4. **Recognizing individual differences:** The learning environment is acutely sensitive to the individual differences among the learners in it, including their
prior knowledge.

5. **Stretching all students**: The learning environment devises programmes that demand hard work and challenge from all but without excessive overload.

6. **Assessment for Learning**: The learning environment operates with clarity of expectations using assessment strategies consistent with these expectations; there is a strong emphasis on formative feedback to support learning.

7. **Building horizontal connections**: The learning environment strongly promotes “horizontal connectedness” across areas of knowledge and subjects as well as to the community and the wider world. (Istance, OECD, 2012)

The *Leading for Learning* series was designed to incorporate each of these foundational key principles. Although the *Leading for Learning* series is in its early stages, it is a clear demonstration of Leithwood’s comprehensive approach to leadership development.

**VIII. ADVOCATE AND SUPPORT A POLICY-GOVERNANCE APPROACH TO BOARD OF TRUSTEE PRACTICE:**

“Governing well is no easy task. It takes knowledge, skills and experience. It takes courage and character. And it takes teamwork, in the sense of everyone bringing their unique talents and backgrounds to work together for the best interests of the people the board serves.”

(International Association for Public Participation Canada)

The eighth characteristic of strong districts, as explained by Leithwood, defines the work of elected boards in contributing to achieving successful outcomes of student achievement and well-being. He states that these outcomes are “encouraged when elected boards of trustees focus most of their attention on board policy and concern
themselves with ensuring the district mission and vision drive the district’s improvement efforts” (Leithwood, 2013 p.20).

Using the following 12 points, from the strong districts research, Leithwood states that a board is most effective when they:

- participate with its senior staff in assessing community values and interests and incorporate them into the school system’s mission and vision for students
- help creates a climate which engages teachers, administrators, parents and the wider community in developing and supporting the vision
- helps create a climate of excellence that makes achieving the vision possible
- use the district’s beliefs and vision for student learning and wellbeing as the foundation for strategic planning and ongoing evaluation
- focus most policy making on the improvement of student learning and wellbeing consistent with the system’s mission and vision.
- develop policies and support staff decisions aimed at providing rich curricula and engaging forms of instruction for all students and eliminating those that do not.
- contribute to the development of productive relationships with and among senior staff, school staffs, community stakeholders and provincial education officials
- provide systematic orientation opportunities for new members and ongoing training for existing members
- develop and sustain productive working relationships among members of the elected board
- respect the role of the director (superintendent) and senior staff in their responsibilities for school system administration
- hold the director (superintendent ) accountable for improving teaching and student learning in the school system
- hold its individual members accountable for supporting decisions of the board, as a whole, once those decisions are made.

(Leithwood, 2013 p.19-20)
Chuck Dervarics and Eileen O'Brien (2011), who conducted research for the Center for Public Education on Effective School Boards, suggest that there are eight characteristics of effective boards. They state that the existing research on school boards is clear: boards in highly successful school districts exhibit characteristics that are markedly different than boards in low achieving districts. Most of the eight characteristics align very well with the twelve points of an effective board that Leithwood presents from the strong district research. The research of Dervarics and O'Brien indicates that effective boards commit to a clear vision, and have strong beliefs and values about what is possible for students and the system’s ability to teach all children at high levels. Such boards are accountability driven and spend less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement. These effective boards are characterized by having a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and engage stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals. They further suggest that effective boards embrace data to help inform continuous improvement, and align resources to meet district goals, even in the midst of budget challenges. These Boards lead as a united team with the superintendent and build a strong relationship built on mutual trust. Finally, the researchers state effective school boards take part in team development and training to build knowledge, values and commitments for the school district improvement efforts.

Boards are responsible for setting the overall direction for the school system. This is done through a multi-year vision or strategic plan and it is reviewed regularly, keeping the vision or strategic plan as a focus to help set priorities and goals. The board also sets direction through its policies and processes to review and develop policies. A policy-oriented board of trustees is defined as one that focuses on strategic planning and ensures the district mission and vision for student achievement and well-being drives the district’s improvement efforts, and holds the district superintendent accountable for improving teaching and learning. In addition, the board creates
relationships through an engaging and supportive climate that encourages excellence, respecting the decisions reached by the board as a whole.

District Senior Leaders in strong districts encourage trustees to focus on district policy and the achievement of the district’s goals and priorities, and encourages the participation of the elected board in setting broad goals that will support their work of policy-setting and policy-monitoring responsibilities. To effectively do their work the board requires senior staff to provide regular progress reports that will assist them in achieving these broad goals.

Trustees in the Delta School District were actively engaged in the visioning process from the beginning, and participated in additional engagement with the community during the process. They helped to create the climate that engaged teachers, administrators, parents, students and the wider community in developing the vision. Once completed, the board used the vision as the foundation for district goals and planning.

Almost immediately following the visioning process in the Spring of 2011, the Delta Board of Education began a revision and renewal of the entire policy and administrative procedure handbooks for the district. It was acknowledged by the board that the policies and procedures over time had become significantly outdated and were overlapping, thus leading to confusion about the work of the board and the roles and responsibilities of senior staff in implementing the policies, and working with procedures to effectively implement the policies. Jim Brown (2006) states that ‘the secret to board effectiveness is understanding the different roles within an organization and how those roles relate. He further states, the secret formula is not an organization chart; it is a map to clarify the roles and relationships within an effective organization”.

Delta school district enlisted the assistance of Doctor Leroy Sloan, an expert in the field of governance and policy to help modernize and bring coherence to the policies and procedures, which were seen as crucial to good governance. He and his team worked with the board for several months to provide clarity of roles and responsibilities
and align policies with the newly developed vision. The outcome of that process resulted in a complete revision of policies and administrative procedures, which can be found on the district website (deltasd.bc.ca). Strategically placed at the beginning of the district policy document, the vision, mission, and values become foundational in the Role Clarification and Accountability policy model (RCA). All other district policies flow from that first foundational policy, and are aligned to reflect that vision or strategic plan as the beginning of the work of the board, and the resulting goal development and attainment going forward in the district. There are statements of roles and responsibilities within the policies, and defined role clarity with respect to policies and administrative procedures. The organizational model outlines the governance relationship between the board of trustees and the senior leadership of the district. Effective school board governance requires that a board has clarity with respect to its role and scope of responsibilities, and how it will govern. Understanding the way it governs will have a significant impact on the effectiveness of decision-making, policy development, and business practices of the board. Trustees in Delta are clear on their roles and responsibilities, as are staff, which paves the way for effective governance and coherence of accountability.

Most of the policy development has focused on the improvement of student learning and well-being, and the curricula development and engaging instruction that would help the district attain the vision of being the leading district for innovative teaching and learner success. Another main focus of the policy work was on the development of relationships among staff, and community members, and suggests that there is a need for orientation opportunities for the board, including developing and sustaining strong working relationships among members of the board. Saatcioglu et al (2011) suggest that there is evidence that the internal “bonding” of board members contributes much more to a district’s student achievement than efforts by the board to develop relationships with agencies and groups outside the board. The Delta Board of Education trustees are highly effective in their work on behalf of learners in the school
district, and have developed an excellent professional working relationship based on trust and respect.

Although not perfectly aligned, the policy work that the Delta School District has implemented clearly demonstrates that Leithwood’s eighth characteristic of “advocating and supporting a policy-governance approach to board of trustee practice” (p. 19) is being implemented in the school district, and has become a guiding focus for trustees.

IX. PRODUCTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS:

According to the strong district research the relationships that matter most, and are described as being of significant importance, are the relationships within the district’s central office and between central office and its schools, parents, local community groups and the Ministry of Education. Evidence suggests that in a successful school district, central office roles are interconnected and work is undertaken in a collaborative and service oriented way. Communication is frequent and cordial. School staff often participate in system decisions, have significant input into processes, and are in frequent contact with central office staff for support and assistance (Togneri and Anderson, 2003).

Communication plays an important role within the education system, and is particularly important within schools. The strong districts research suggests that communication is nurtured by structures which encourage collaborative work, that schools are responsible for productive working relationships with parents, and that it is vital the school system is in regular two-way communication with the Ministry of Education.

In terms of relationships within the school district, internal district relationships develop most effectively when those who work in central office work collaboratively, and the work is purposefully interconnected, and focused on shared responsibility and purpose. Decision making and the work of the Delta School District is highly collaborative, and in recent years there has been a complete realignment and
reconfiguration of the working spaces and environment at central office, to eliminate siloed working units and to encourage stronger collaborative teams. At the school level there has been a greater emphasis on involving school staffs in system decisions. Networks and professional learning connections at the system level have become a way of developing capacity, and there has been a distinct focus on using collaborative inquiry to solve problems and develop goals.

In *Change Leadership* Michael Fullan, (2011) cites Gittell (2009), who describes that organizations that are dramatically more successful develop cultures of relational coordination (shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect), and transparent communication. She posits that those cultures continually clarify and reinforce the focused efforts of the organization. She further suggests that because core ideas in those organizations are pursued collectively they generate deeper, consistent practices across the organization. Shared depth of understanding and corresponding skills are the result.

Improvement in schools and school districts depends on the quality of conversations among individuals and groups. Working collaboratively through challenges and differences enables problem solving and decision making that will support that improvement. “Where there is growing trust, the quality of discourse increases, again helping stimulate greater engagement and real collaboration... Trust-based relationships are essential if schools and districts are to fundamentally disrupt the extreme isolation of educators and help build a profession of teaching.” (Wagner and Kegan, 2006, p. 150). Bryk and Schneider (2002) have uncovered important ways in which trust contributes to relationship building in an educational organization, particularly in terms of the four distinct elements that must be present for trust to exist; respect, integrity, competency and personal regard. They conclude that the development of trust is foundational to the development of relationships in educational settings. The discourse that takes place during collaborative inquiry in the
Delta School District has contributed significantly to the development of trust-based relationships that allow improvements to occur.

District leaders in Delta have created structures and strategies to encourage their relationships to develop with school staffs, through purposefully aligning their work in a more focused manner. School leaders have similarly developed ways of providing opportunities for teachers to engage in collaborative inquiry, which has resulted in the development of a professional culture where there is shared responsibility for student learning and goal attainment. Evidence from interviews and surveys suggest that there has been a significant change across the system toward a growth mindset, that has come about as a result of staff engaging in collaborative inquiry. The collective efficacy that has resulted among professionals has generated deeper understanding of how to support their learners. Leana (2011) states, "When relationships among teachers and leaders in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interaction - that is, when social capital is strong - student achievement scores improve. In other words, teacher social capital was a significant predictor of student achievement gains above and beyond teacher experience or ability in the classroom." (p.19)

Kouzes and Posner (1998) identify seven essentials to developing relationships; setting clear standards, expecting the best, paying attention, personalizing recognition, telling the story, celebrating together, and setting the example. The working relationships that have developed in schools and the district have been cultivated by paying close attention to these seven essentials, particularly while engaging in the collaborative inquiry processes. Staff in Delta have frequently commented that they are truly enjoying their work and feel engaged as professionals, and they have attributed this to the working relationships they have with one another, describing that there are greater levels of social and professional capital among educators than in the past. They express pride and a sense of positive morale from working within a culture of professional learning, and it has enhanced their sense of professionalism.
Feedback from the district vision reflection process, at the halfway mark of Vision 2020, indicates that collaborative inquiry and flexibility in structures within school schedules have allowed schools to focus on student learning and on strategies for improvement. Opportunities for continuous professional learning, that focus on developing instructional practice and collaborative inquiry, have allowed real-time professional practice to change and improve. Over the past six years, what has emerged from the work toward achieving the vision is a strong culture of professional learning. Ken Leithwood suggests that “continuous learning in the interests of improving the success of all students becomes a foundational premise of the organization’s culture” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 21).

The district has facilitated the opportunity for schools to network together to share their learning, to create shared pedagogical innovations, and to build a collaborative culture among teachers, school leaders, parents and students. Staff have also had the chance to work together to identify constraints that prevent them from being able improve their work, and the learning outcomes for students, and then work together to suggest and devise solutions to the constraints. They have made their exemplary practice visible across the system through various tools for sharing their learning, as discussed in Section X, and some of that has been presented at conferences and written about in journal articles.

Teachers and leaders have taken on the responsibility of developing quality curriculum resources together, and have deeply engaged in professional learning that has impacted their instructional practice in the classroom. Through all of this work they have made huge investments of professional and social capital with one another. The culture that has evolved in the district is a learning culture, and the relationships between the educators has become strengthened through this work. There are powerful stories of shared learning being told by staff across the district, and the professionalism and pride among them is evident. Educational leaders are emerging in every school,
and the district continues to support the great work that is happening in each school across the district.

The parent community have also embraced the importance of the collaborative inquiry work that teachers are engaged in, and have expressed appreciation that they are regularly privileged to hear about the professional learning that takes place in the district and in schools. Staff regularly share the vision and goals at parent meetings at schools and at the District Parent Advisory Committee. Engaging parents in the processes of vision development, vision reflection and goal development has been an integral part of the work since the start. The contributions of parents continues to drive inquiry processes to find strategies that will improve outcomes for learners.

X.: KNOWLEDGE SHARING FOR HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL CONNECTEDNESS:

In addition to the nine dimensions of strong districts described above, the authors believe that a tenth characteristic is paramount to the realization of district-wide transformation. This is knowledge sharing. In order to achieve networked horizontal connectedness, it is critical to share stories of successes (and failures). In the book, *Rethinking Educational Leadership: From improvement to transformation*, by John West-Burnham (2009), storytelling is cited as the number one strategy that is relevant in the context of transformation. “Because much of the work of a transformational leader involves storytelling and the conscious use of metaphors, those who would lead transformation must seek experiences that get them outside the world of education” (Schlechty, 2009, p. 267). According to Michael Fullan (2002), “creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership. Information, of and which we have a glut, only becomes knowledge through a *social* process” (p. 18).

The Delta School District has embraced the philosophy of storytelling and knowledge sharing and in 2011, once the district vision was created, a variety of
structures were created to allow for sharing and networking across the district. Initially, a website called 180 Days of Learning was created (https://deltalearns.ca/180daysoflearning/). For the first five years of the vision, teachers, students, and district leaders shared one story of learning for each day of the school year. Last year, several powerful stories were highlighted each week. This site has served to encourage networking across schools, districts and countries. Recently, there has been an increasing reliance on Twitter as a venue for sharing professional learning across our schools. More and more Delta teachers and administrators are sharing their learning via Twitter.

Once the 180 Days of Learning site was a part of the culture in the district, a second sharing site was created. Delta Learns (https://deltalearns.ca) is a “one stop shop” for Delta educators where they are able to access blogs, create groups and share resources. Perhaps most importantly, there is toolkit for innovative teaching and learner success where educators can find a wealth of resources related to:

- Emotion and Motivation
- Professional Learning
- Planning for Learning
- Assessment and Reporting
- Curricular Resources
- Core Competencies

In addition, there is an on-line learning site for assessment for learning (https://deltalearns.ca/afl/) called Just One Thing comprised of learning modules where educators can learn more about Formative Assessment knowledge, skills and strategies. This site supports a district-wide three year focus on assessment where the entire focus of the first year is on setting clear learning intentions.

Fullan states “a norm of sharing one’s knowledge with others is the key to continual growth for all” (2002, p. 18). In keeping with the spirit of Fullan’s findings, the Delta Schools District participates in the Network of Innovation and Inquiry, (NOII). This
is “a voluntary, inquiry-based network of schools in British Columbia, Canada. Established in 2000 and funded by the BC Ministry of Education, the NOII is designed to improve the quality and equity of education in BC through inquiry, teamwork across roles, schools and districts, as well as a focus on applying coaching forms of assessment to assist learners to take greater ownership of their learning” (http://noii.ca).

The network was the inspiration of Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser, two prominent educators from British Columbia who have served as consultants to the Delta School District and presented often in the district. In addition, Judy and Linda have served as critical friends to the Delta District. Research has shown that having external input is essential to system growth and development (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Gurr & Huerta, 2013). There is a critical balance between relying on the expertise within the system, and introducing new thinking based on external knowledge. Without new thoughts and ideas, a system runs the risk of stagnating. Dr. Halbert and Dr. Kaser have served to elevate the thinking in the district by introducing international research and knowledge.

Another key action that has provided networking across both districts in British Columbia and across countries has been the willingness of the Delta School District to present their work as it was developing, rather than waiting until the work was completed. The Spiral of Inquiry is clear that the work in schools and districts is never complete. Continuous scanning, focusing, taking action and checking ensure that schools and districts are constantly engaging in continuous improvement. The Delta School district has deliberately presented at multiple conferences with the intent of sharing our learning. Staff have presented numerous times at the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) Conference to districts from across BC. As well, our work has been shared at the 2014 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris, France and at the 2016 Learning Forward Annual Conference in Vancouver, BC. In 2018, the Delta District will present at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) in Singapore.
Finally, Delta has made a point of hosting international contingencies from a wide variety of countries. Because knowledge creation and sharing is critical to educational improvement, sharing our work internationally is a priority for the district. One of the first visitors to Delta was Dr. Ben Jensen, from Learning First in Australia. This visit was in preparation for Learning First’s *Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performing Systems* (2016) which shows how British Columbia, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Singapore have dramatically improved teaching – and how the rest of the world can learn from them. Since that time, educators from Singapore, the Netherlands, Australia, Denmark, and New Zealand have come to Delta to discuss the framework and learn from the district. These international delegations are welcomed to Delta because the opportunity for two-way learning is viewed as incredibly valuable for everyone involved. In 2017, a Delta School Principal and two teachers were invited to Australia to share the learning that had taken place in their school. The Delta School District firmly supports knowledge creation and sharing within and across schools, districts, the province, and internationally. Fullan supports this philosophy:

“Creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership. Information, of which we have a glut, only becomes knowledge through a social process. For this reason, relationships and professional learning communities are essential. Organizations must foster knowledge giving as well as knowledge seeking. We endorse continual learning when we say that individuals should constantly add to their knowledge base—but there will be little to add if people are not sharing. A norm of sharing one’s knowledge with others is the key to continual growth for all.” (Fullan, 2002)

**CONNECTIONS TO OTHER RESEARCH:**

Although this paper has focused on the research of Kenneth Leithwood, it is important to note that the learning that has taken place in the Delta School District aligns with and supports the work of many researchers, including Fullan (2015), Katz, Earl and Jaffar (2009), Donohoo (2016), Butler, Schnellert & MacNeil (2015) , Campbell
(2016), Harris (2011), Breakspear (2016) as well as many others. The authors believe that more than ever, the work of international researchers is aligning - a phenomenon that is likely due to the advances of social media and the fact that research can be shared around the globe almost instantaneously.

The story of the Delta School District aligns well with the framework necessary for system wide change presented in Fullan and Quinn’s book, Coherence (2015). According to Fullan and Quinn, 4+ components must be present to allow for systemic change. These include:

- **Focusing Direction**: “...establish a focused direction that engages everyone with shared moral purpose, a small number of goals, a clear strategy for achieving them and change leadership that mobilizes action.” (p. 48)
- **Cultivating Collaborative Cultures**: “Collaborating is not just about creating a place where people feel good but rather about cultivating the expertise of everyone to be focused on a collective purpose” (p. 75)
- **Deepening Learning**: “We must shift to a deeper understanding of the process of learning and how we can influence it. This requires knowledge-building partnerships for everyone engaged” (p. 108)
- **Securing Accountability**: “The most direct way of understanding what is needed for internal accountability is to work diligently on...focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures and deepening the learning”. (p. 124) The best approach for securing accountability is to develop conditions that maximize ‘internal accountability’ and reinforce internal accountability with external accountability.” (p. 126)
- **“+” Leadership**: “Leaders influence the group, but they also learn from it. Joint learning is what happens in effective change processes.” (p. 138) “One of the marks of an effective leader is not only the impact they have on the bottom line of student achievement, but also equally how many good leaders they leave behind.” (p. 138)
In the Delta School District, examples exist of each of Fullan and Quinn’s key components. The district’s Bold Vision is a clear example of how *Focusing Direction* can positively impact transformation. In addition, the work that the district has done to align the thirty-one School Frameworks for Enhancing Student Learning with the District’s FESL has provided alignment and allowed for a focused energy on goals that were established based on the needs of the learners.

When considering *Cultivating Collaborative Cultures*, the Delta district has demonstrated that ensuring collaboration time exists during the school day for teachers to network and discuss their practice is a critical factor in transformational change. The schools where collaboration time was introduced with a clear, shared understanding of the purpose and a formal, predictable structure was created, have demonstrated significant improvement in curricular planning, instructional strategies and assessment practices. Further, the district has expanded the collaborative cultures to include school and district leaders. Time is set aside each month at principals meetings to allow for collaboration to occur amongst school administrators.

The Delta District has had a long-term focus on Fullan’s third component, *Deepening Learning*. Fullan (2015) stresses that this involves establishing clear learning goals. The district has a clear intention of developing this skill across the district. In fact, there is a three year focus on assessment for learning with the first year concentrating on the importance of setting clear learning targets (in classroom lessons as well as with school and district goals). It is interesting to note that although the district had been focusing on assessment for learning for many years, the one thing that made the biggest difference to teacher practice in Delta was revising the report card template to a communicating student learning (CSL) document that embeds the tenets of the new curriculum and the elements of effective assessment. This, more than any other professional learning opportunity offered to date, has served to advance pedagogy in the area of assessment. Fullan cites the importance of precision in pedagogy which aligns with the district’s well-established long-term goal related to
expanding educator knowledge related to curriculum, instruction and assessment. The work related to communicating student learning aligns with the Fullan’s notion of precision in pedagogy. Finally, deepening the learning makes reference to shifting practice through building teacher capacity. From the inception of the vision, this has been a goal of the district with positions being developed (such as the Coordinators of Inquiry and the Curriculum, Assessment and Learning Teams) to create opportunities for teacher leadership. School administrators are talking specifically about ways to continuously build teacher capacity as well as how to enhance teacher leadership.

Fullan’s fourth dimension for coherence is Securing Accountability. Specifically, he refers to internal and external accountability. “Internal accountability occurs when individuals and groups willingly take on personal, professional, and collective responsibility for continuous improvement and success for all students (p. 110). The Delta School District’s use of Halbert and Kaser’s Spiral of Inquiry has provided a framework that has helped to build teacher ownership of student learning needs. Helen Timperley’s practice of reflecting on “Who is My Class?” has established leaders’ ownership of student, teacher and administrator learning. Educators in Delta at every level have embraced the notion of continuous professional learning with the goal being to improve the educational outcomes of all students. Fullan states “External accountability is when system leaders reassure the public through transparency, monitoring, and selective interventions that their system is performing in line with societal expectations and requirements” (2015, p. 111). Fullan emphasizes that internal accountability must precede external accountability. The authors of this paper would concur. Little improvement can be generated at the system level until a mindset of collective efficacy exists within schools. Donohoo (2017) makes the case that “Collective beliefs about the staff’s efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the types of learning environments created in schools and the teaching behaviours exhibited by staff” (p. 13). It makes sense that when staffs feel confident in their ability to positively impact student learning, they will then have faith in their ability to share
their learning across schools and districts. The Delta district has been sharing the current research related to collective efficacy and Hattie’s (2016) finding that it has an effect size of 1.57 on student achievement. Donohoo’s book, Collective Efficacy (2017) has been used as a book study in principal and vice-principal meetings.

Fullan’s final key component of systemic change is Leadership. He emphasizes “it takes the group to change the group, and it takes many leaders to change the group” (p. 123). The Delta School District has embraced this notion and is working hard to develop leadership at all levels throughout the system. This is why the district has created a multi-faceted approach to leadership development - the Leading the Learning Series (previously cited). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the district’s efforts are making a difference. Professional conversations have deepened over the past six years with teachers and administrators talking about curriculum, instruction and assessment at a level of understanding not previously seen. Fullan would attribute this success to Delta’s central office staff focusing on 1. investing in internal accountability and 2. projecting and protecting the system (p. 126). “The more that internal accountability thrives, the greater the responsiveness to external requirement and the less the externals have to do” (p. 126). This has certainly been the case in the Delta district.

CONCLUSION:

There have been several key drivers of transformation in the Delta School District. The authors believe that at least seven foundational elements have contributed to the success that the district has realized. First and foremost, the creation of the Bold Vision and the collaborative process that was utilized in its development was pivotal. In addition, using the Spiral of Inquiry as a framework for professional learning has been instrumental. It has formed the basis of school and district goals, professional growth plans, and has been instrumental in determining the learning needs for students, teachers, and administrators. Related to the use of the Spiral of Inquiry was the creation of Coordinators of Inquiry in each school throughout the district. Establishing this role in
each site highlighted the district’s commitment to inquiry as a vehicle for district transformation. A third key factor that has contributed to the transformation agenda in Delta has been the provision of teacher collaboration time in every school. This has contributed to building teacher capacity in the areas of curricular understandings, pedagogy, and assessment for learning practices. A fourth factor that has made a significant difference to the district’s transformation has been purposeful professional learning that aligns with the goals of schools and the district. The district’s focus on professional learning has created a culture that recognizes the need for the continuous improvement within the teaching profession. Delta’s strong focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment has been powerful in moving system learning forward across the district. Each year since the inception of the vision, the district has created an organizational template of professional learning opportunities that connects to school goals, district goals, and professional growth plans. It is an organizer of district teaching and learning through the lens of the district’s work and it has helped to maintain clarity and alignment of the initiatives happening in the district. Whenever professional opportunities are being considered for the district, the scanning phase of Spiral of Inquiry (Halbert & Kaser, 2017) is used to determine the learner needs at all levels in the system. This ensures that professional learning is aligned with the district’s vision and goals. Fifth, there has been a continuous, purposeful focus on storytelling to increase the networking and capacity-building of the district. Deliberately sharing stories of success (and failure) has helped the learning in the district to transfer across school sites. Sixth, the district has focused on building leadership capacity through the creation of a differentiated, six-strand model titled Leading for Learning. Finally, there has been a cohesive approach across all sectors within the district to attaining the Bold Vision. The individuals who work in finance, human resources, information services, facilities and education programs are all committed to achieving the Bold Vision. Most importantly, the Board of Trustees have structured their work around the district’s vision.
Every decision made in the district is filtered through the lens of Delta’s vision - including the contents of the district’s policy and procedures.

The Delta School district’s journey is not complete. The Bold Vision drives the work in the district and although transformational change is well underway, there is still more work to be done. Delta will continue to use the Spiral of Inquiry to scan, focus and develop hunches as they engage in new learning, take action, and check to see if they have made enough of a difference. The iterative nature of the Spiral will ensure that the district continues to adopt “a fundamental mindset of seeking to get better all the time” (Breakspear, 2016).
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This article is part of EPPAA/AAPE’s Special Series on *A New Paradigm for Educational Accountability: Accountability for Professional Practice*. Guest Series Edited by Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond


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