



EVOLVING FROM A LIBRARY TO A LEARNING COMMONS

PRACTICE GUIDE

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Topic 1 – WHAT IS A LEARNING COMMONS AND WHY SHOULD WE EVOLVE OUR LIBRARY INTO A LEARNING COMMONS?

A learning commons is an inclusive, flexible, learner-centered, physical or virtual space for collaboration, inquiry, imagination and play.

“Whereas the focus of the library program in the past was on building strong collections of resources and assisting users to find and use them effectively, the goal now is to build learning communities and make connections among learners, thus facilitating knowledge creation in the school community.”

-Standards of Practice for Library Learning Commons in Canada

As schools change, school libraries must also evolve from simply providing information to students to engaging students and helping prepare them to become critical thinkers, evaluators, users, and creators of information and knowledge.

In addition to providing access to traditional forms of knowledge like books, periodicals and print information, students have access to other forms of media and devices they will need to create and share. Students can determine how best to use the space and resources to study or to work on school assignments, projects or coursework individually or with others.

Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community can also use the space for instruction, social or collaborative learning, production and presentation as we focus on engaging our communities in our schools. (Alberta Education)

Benefits of Learning Commons include:

- Learning commons promote global and cultural understanding as students collaborate with their local and broader community to investigate and create solutions to complex problems
- Learning commons emphasize active and collaborative engagement and encourage the co-creation of knowledge by all learners
- The virtual aspect of a learning commons (a VLC) promotes more efficient use of technology for creation and sharing of knowledge as well as enabling 24/7 access to resources and shared collaborative space for all students
- Research shows improved student achievement and literacy development for students who have access to quality school library services, which include learning commons (Alberta Education)



Topic 2 – ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION EVOLUTION - LEARNING COMMONS

When undertaking the transition from a Library to a Learning Commons, there are some essential conditions that should be met for the evolution to be successful.

“To be successful and sustainable, transformations need to grow from collaborative leadership. Administration, teachers, specialists, support staff, students and parents are all partners and leaders in this quest to provide the best possible learning environments and programs.”
-Brooks-Kirkland and Koechlin -
Leading Learning -Standards of Practice for Library Learning Commons in Canada (June 2015)



1. **Shared Vision** – Students, staff, parents, administration and the community are involved in creating the vision for the Learning Commons
2. **Leadership** – The administration understands the philosophy of a Learning Commons and is supportive of its use for student engagement and flexible learning spaces.
3. **Research and Evidence** – It is key to have a research based, shared understanding of Learning Commons, as a philosophy, with evidence to provide a foundation for the vision of the Learning Commons as a shared and flexible learning space.
4. **Resources** – A well-rounded digital and print collection, access to online tools, as well as productivity and presentation tools are part of a dynamic Learning Commons. Context of the school is a consideration when creating the collection.
5. **Professional Learning** – Staff must have ongoing support and training to maximize the use and effectiveness of a Learning Commons.
6. **Time** – Maximum access to the Learning Commons before, during and after school is desirable. 24/7 access to online resources and collaborative workspaces can be considered.
7. **Community Engagement** – The Learning Commons can be a hub and collaborative learning space for the community including parents and partners.

When considering your transformation and the essential conditions for successful implementation of your project, consider the following questions.

Shared Vision

- In what ways has a shared vision been cultivated?
- Is this vision of a Learning Commons aligned with other school initiatives and plans? i.e. S.E.P.

Leadership

- By whom and how will the shift to a Learning Commons be led and remain dynamic?



“To support students in attaining the goals and standards as stated in the Ministerial Order on Student Learning, school authorities must ensure that students have access to a learning commons. A learning commons is an inclusive, flexible, learner-centred, physical and/or virtual space for collaboration, inquiry, imagination and play to expand and deepen learning.”

-Alberta Education Learning Commons Policy Statement (May 2014)



Research and Evidence

- What research and evidence is supporting this transformation?
- Have the [Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada](#) been accessed and incorporated into the process?
- Have staff visited other Learning Commons, either virtually or physically to inform their understanding of this shift?

Resources

- Has the current collection been reviewed and updated?
- Has the collection been customized to the learners' needs in that context?
- Have all learners (students and staff) contributed to the contents of the collection?
- How are you ensuring the resources available meet all learners' needs? (What is the evaluation process?)

Teacher / Staff Professional Growth

- How will staff be supported in learning about and understanding the shift from a Library to a Learning Commons' philosophy?
- In what ways have and will staff be provided professional learning opportunities to maximize the effective use of the Learning Commons?
- What ongoing commitment to PL is required to ensure effective use of the Learning Commons?

Time

- What schedule considerations need to be made to maximize the use of the Learning Commons?
- How is maximum time and access to be provided for the Learning Commons?
- Has time been committed to fostering and supporting staff understanding of the shift from a Library to a Learning Commons?

Community Engagement

- How has the School Council been engaged in the transformation?
- In what ways has the greater community been informed and educated regarding the shift from a Library to a Learning Commons?
- In what ways have you garnered support for this transformation?
- In what ways can ongoing education occur to support this work?

Topic 3 – LEARNING COMMONS PLANNING

Rocky View Schools has a committee comprised of Planning, Schools, Asset Management, Maintenance and Learning Department personnel. All RVS resources are brought to bear to support the transition from a Library to a Learning Commons space. The process for planning your Learning Commons follows the chart linked [here](#). Please refer to this document and feel free to contact any of the committee members for detailed assistance. As part of the transformation process, you may utilize as a guide, the Learning Commons planning [checklist](#).

Topic 4 - RESOURCES

Many resources are available to support the transition of your Library to a Learning Commons. Some of them include:

[Learning Commons Guidelines](#) - Alberta Education (under Support Documents)

[Leading the Way in the Learning Commons](#) - Carol Koechlin

[Leading Learning](#) – Schools Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada 2014

[Library Learning Commons – Future Forward](#)

[Alberta Education: Benefits of Learning Commons](#)

[Alberta Education: Ministerial Order on Student Learning](#)

[A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions](#)

