

# ontrack

Three Year Plan Edition



## Building the Power to Enrich

**R**ocky View Schools is proud to have one of the finest public education systems in Alberta. Through the dedication and commitment of our school communities, Trustees, and Education Centre staff, over the past three years we have collectively embarked on a transformational journey to retool our education system to meet the needs of today's 21st Century Learner, and ultimately, the future success of our communities.

This path has disrupted the status quo, challenged us to question our assumptions, and moved us towards building a culture of creation, whereby each of us has the responsibility to ensure our children develop new capacities and skills to successfully thrive in a diverse, networked global society.

Rocky View Schools' 2011-2014 Three Year Plan is about taking our transformation to the next level. It outlines a framework that promises to move our system from a level of awareness to a point of action. The plan promises to "build the power to enrich" by focusing on four main drivers: ensuring universal accessibility, focusing on personalized, authentic-based learning, building 21st Century competencies, and accelerating research and innovation. These drivers illuminate the need to prototype new models of learning, to breathe new life into the K-12 curriculum, to inspire learners to construct and deepen their knowledge and understanding, and to further embrace emerging technologies to expand our learning environments. Most importantly, this Three Year Plan

highlights the importance of everyone concerned about education – not just students, parents and educators – to deepen our networking power to encourage 'collective intelligence' and 'distributed innovation' that will extend learning beyond the walls of our classrooms, our school system, and our communities. In doing so, we will provide the catalyst for today's learners to create economically strong, vibrant, and productive citizens of the future.

Rocky View's Schools' Three Year Plan edition of Ontrack is dedicated to sharing with you our draft 2011-2014 Three Year Plan, the concerted effort behind its development, and the feedback received through a six-week consultation process, which ran from Feb. 14 to Apr. 12, 2011. This edition also highlights some of the specialized student supports, unique programming opportunities, and professional practices that have emerged over the past three years.

To access a complete copy of our draft 2011-2014 Three Year Plan go to "What's New" on RVS' public website at rockyview.ab.ca and look for the Power to Enrich!



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# Opening the door to our communities

From Feb. 14 - Apr. 12, 2011, Rocky View Schools launched an extensive, multi-faceted, community engagement process for the purpose of developing its 2011-2014 Three Year Education Plan. Specifically, the Board directed the Superintendent to bring both large and small stakeholder groups together in face-to-face settings to refine RVS' current Three Year Plan and to provide input into strategies related to building a 21st Century learning organization. Additionally, the use of social media was approved to assist the jurisdiction in building awareness of RVS' 21st Century pursuit. Provided below is an overview of the process and the feedback received and used in building RVS' 2011-2014 Three Year Plan.

## 1 Goal, Outcome & Performance Measure Review

In November 2010, Rocky View Schools' leadership team, comprised of the Board of Trustees, Senior Executive, Directors, Principals and Assistant Principals, gathered for one day to review RVS' current Three Year Plan with the eye to revise, delete or add to the number of goals and outcomes. The day was transformational! Not only was the framework refined from six goals, 23 measures, to four goals, 16 outcomes, participants left the meeting with more conviction that RVS' 21st Century transformation was improving student success. In December, performance measures for the new framework were developed by RVS' Directors and circulated to school administrators for feedback.

## 2 Community Engagement Meeting

As the launch pad for the community engagement phase of Rocky View Schools' 2011-2014 Three Year Plan development, the jurisdiction held a Community Engagement Meeting on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14, 2011. The purpose of the meeting was to explore how parents, businesses and the greater community could play a more sustainable role in public education. Through the efforts of schools, RVS was able to secure the attendance of 70 participants. A zoomerang survey distributed to participants generated 51 responses. Of the 51, 94 percent said they would attend the May 12, 2011, Community Engagement Meeting and 93 percent expressed satisfaction with the overall experience.

## 3 Focus Groups

As demonstrated by the government through its Inspiring Education, Setting the Direction and Speak Out Forums, RVS believed it important to engage groups of stakeholders where they could provide feedback most appropriately. For example, classroom teachers would be best involved in discussions to develop strategies focussed on assessment and learning in the classroom, while service providers could offer advice on developing strategies for wrap-around child supports. To this end, 17 focus groups, involving over 200 staff, service providers, parents and students, were held from Feb. 23 to Mar. 31 to help identify strategies for one of RVS' four goal statements. The focus groups were hosted by Trustees and Directors from the Communications, Human Resources, Learning and Schools Departments. All feedback gathered formed the basis for the strategies which appear in the plan.

## 4 Speak Out Forums

Beginning Feb. 14, 2011, RVS asked its high school students and middle school student leaders to organize and participate in Speak Out forums at their individual school/home community. Speak Out is an Alberta Education initiative that encourages students to talk about their educational experience. Specifically, students are asked to talk about their learning styles, what is working for them, and what they would like to see happen in schools. Over the course of six weeks, seven out of nine high schools held Speak Out Forums. A middle school Speak Out Forum also was

held Mar. 10, 2011. Feedback gathered from these forums was shared with all schools and used to develop strategies in the plan.

## 5 Social Media

Through the use of a Twitter account (@rvsd), RVS shared its Three Year Plan journey and encouraged community participation on its Facebook Community Page and RVS Blog Site. Over the course of six weeks, RVS' Twitter account attracted 237 followers, generated a "klout" of 40, 45 being an indicator of "influential" on the web and tweeted 142 messages relating to RVS' 21st C pursuit. The use of Twitter at the jurisdictional level also led to over 30 staff members signing up to help Tweet about 21st C learning. RVS' blog site, which currently features 46 blogs covering 21st C teaching and learning, was visited over 13,503 times and its Facebook page, which proved to have minimal traffic, attracted 117 "friends of/like RVS", with 232 monthly active users.

## 6 School Education Plans

To bring all school communities into the fold, RVS' 2011-2012 School Education Plan (SEP) Manual was aligned with the jurisdiction's new goal structure and released Mar. 15, 2011. School Education Plans are built and shared with school councils and school communities each year. These plans are publicly available by June 30 and are available on the Rocky View Schools' website under Publications, at the schools, or on schools' websites.



# What we heard you say...

**A primary consideration of Rocky View's 2011-2014 Three Year Plan process was to provide an opportunity for the greater community to give input into RVS' education system, and more importantly the development of students. Over 70 community members joined RVS on Feb. 14, 2011, to discuss three primary questions. This is what we heard:**

## What skills do 21st C learners need?

Topping the charts, participants said critical thinking skills, solid social skills, and digital citizenry need to be priorities in education. As foundational skills, basic literacy and numeracy skills too were deemed very important. In reviewing RVS' Portrait of a 21st C learner, participants agreed the jurisdiction should stay on course with the development of these competencies:

- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Innovation
- Communication
- Global awareness
- Civic engagement
- Self-directed learning
- Information and media literacy
- Financial and economic literacy

**RVS' response:** Goal Two of RVS' 2011-2014 Three Year Plan is dedicated entirely to building 21st C competencies, whereby all stakeholders have an enduring understanding across disciplines. Strategies that will enable students to attain these skills range from the development of individual learner profiles to developing standards and assessment tools for each competency.

## What role can parents, businesses and the community play in building 21st C skills in students?

Parents, as partners in their child's educational journey, believe they need to serve as good role models by taking an

active interest in their child's education and development. This includes providing a sound value system, communicating regularly with the schools and embracing change by supporting technology and letting go of old paradigms.

Business and community representatives stated they need to invest in the future by placing greater emphasis on the value of education and the role students will play as future employees.

## What does RVS need to do to facilitate greater participation?

Parents want to feel valued, respected, and welcomed by school staffs at all levels, K-12. Further, all parents and staff need to share a common understanding of the importance of parental involvement from K-12 and its contribution to student success. Outside of feeling a sense of belonging, parents desire to have more communication from schools with regards to their child's education. Specifically they want to know what their child is learning on an ongoing basis, what 21st C teaching and learning is all about and what parents can do to contribute, whether that be at home or at school.

Parents also believe technology has the potential to enhance communication and encourage greater involvement, but they need assistance with its use and application. Greater consistency with the use of technology also is needed among schools.

Business and community leaders in attendance at the meeting also agreed communication is key to bringing greater community involvement in schools. Businesses need to know the needs of schools and how their workplace could support these needs. Equally as important is the need to make schools the community learning hub, where the entire community can come together to share, to connect, and to participate in the learning process.



Other emerging themes were:

- Define parental involvement
- Access parent/community expertise
- Promote student leadership
- Provide 21st C training and resources
- Engage students in citizenship activities
- Provide engaging flexible programming
- Provide technology infrastructure

**RVS' response:** Scattered throughout RVS' new goal structure are strategies that aim to ensure the greater community plays a more sustainable role in public education. For the 2011-2012 school year, community representatives will be asked to join the jurisdiction in defining three primary tactics: *Standards of Behaviour for the 21st Learner*; *Standards for Parental Involvement in a 21st C School*; and a *Jurisdictional Volunteer Program*, which aims to match school needs to community resources.

For a complete summary of RVS' Feb. 14, 2011 Community Engagement Meeting go to "A Made in RVS Three Year Plan", located on the jurisdiction's public website at < <http://www.rockyview.ab.ca/3yp>>.



# Draft 2011-2014 Three Year Plan

## Learners have their individual needs met.

*Goal One signifies the importance of drawing attention to identifying and meeting the individual learning interests, preferences and needs of learners. As outlined in Outcome 1, to be ready to learn, learners need to feel safe, valued, and part of the learning community. Outcome 2 recognizes that there is significant diversity amongst learners and that this diversity is valued as an opportunity to strengthen the inclusive learning community. Learning environments, therefore, are designed to be universally accessible, where all students have equal opportunity to be successful. Outcome 3 brings focus to ensuring district resources and programming options are designed with this universal access in mind, and addresses the continuum of supports and services. Outcome 4 further draws attention to the fact that parents and community partners play an integral and purposeful role in the design of universally accessible learning in RVS.*

### Learners feel safe and valued within RVS' learning community.

- Define, employ, and promote "Standards of Behaviour for 21st C Learners", giving consideration to multiple settings, i.e, classroom, online, on the bus, in the community.
- Redefine standards of parental involvement for a 21st C school.
- Expand student and peer mentorship programs.
- Provide professional learning opportunities for school communities to develop their attitudes, skills, and knowledge in addressing the social/emotional needs of students.

### Learning is universally accessible.

- Develop/implement standards, and provide professional learning for universally accessible classrooms
- Develop jurisdictional Learning Common standards that school communities can employ to build their understanding, access, and use of teaching and learning resources.

### Resources and programs ensure all learners succeed.

- Establish a universal screening process across Kindergarten to determine areas of need.
- Provide choice for students by investigating alternate programs/multiple learning pathways
- Investigate how RVS' Community Learning Branch could address the learning needs of disadvantaged families.

### Parents and community partners play a purposeful and sustained role.

- Develop an inter-agency website to facilitate greater collaboration and communication among service providers.
- Host, annually, an inter-agency fair for staff, parents, and school communities.
- Promote Policy JG Community Use of Schools, to establish schools as community learning hubs.
- Leverage emerging technologies to inform the community of 21st C teaching and learning.
- In cooperation with community partners, develop a framework for wrap-around services.
- Charge RVS' Learning and Community Learning Branches with offering community programming consistent with RVS' 21st Century culture.
- Launch a jurisdictional volunteer program to match school needs with community resources.

## Learners are self-directed, innovative, ecologically intelligent & entrepreneurial.

*Goal Two focuses on building 21st Century competencies, whereby all stakeholders have an enduring understanding across disciplines. Outcome 1 speaks directly to ensuring learners become self-directed, whereby they take personal ownership of learning, leading to a higher state of engagement, independence, and interdependence. As coined by the Metiri Group, Outcome 2 speaks to building 21st Century literacies, which include, but are not exclusive to: basic literacy, scientific literacy, economic literacy, technological literacy, visual literacy, information literacy, multicultural literacy, and global awareness. Outcome 3 points to the importance of global stewardship, which embodies the foundations of environmental education, global education, outdoor education, and civic involvement. It involves engaging people from a level of awareness to a point of action. It relates to educating learners about a diverse yet completely interdependent whole earth system, for which all citizens share responsibility. Outcome 4 sets a standard for all learners to flourish in RVS' learning environments; as Collins says, to move from 'Good to Great'.*

### Learners direct and feel ownership for their learning.

- Develop standardized individual learner profiles, using RVS' Learning Model, for students from K-12.
- Create jurisdictional and school-based digital environments to showcase student learning.

### Learners demonstrate 21st C competencies.

- Complete white papers on each of RVS' characteristics of a 21st C learner, teacher, and administrator.
- Develop standards, rubrics, and exemplars for each of RVS' characteristics of a 21st C learner.
- Define, promote and implement standards for 21st C literacy across RVS.
- Define, promote, and implement standards for 21st C citizenship across RVS.
- Establish a jurisdictional community service program to connect students/schools to the volunteer needs of the local/global community.

### Learners demonstrate global stewardship.

- Develop a jurisdictional awards program for schools/sites to employ effective global stewardship practices.
- Define ecological intelligence by building and promoting a repository of digital resources.
- Facilitate professional learning opportunities for all stakeholders in the areas of environmental education, global education, outdoor education, and civic engagement.
- Host an inter-divisional learning institute around effective stewardship practices.
- Build and promote a repository of inquiry-based, authentic learning models that exemplify the integration of global stewardship into the curriculum.

### Learners flourish in a culture of excellence.

- Continue to value a culture of risk-taking, focusing on individual exploration and the application of digital resources to enhance teaching and learning.
- Create a digital "Hall of Excellence, Creativity, and Innovation".
- Develop a jurisdictional excellence awards program for school achievement.

# Goals / Outcomes / Strategies

## Instructional design challenges & engages each learner.

Goal Three speaks to the importance of instructional design and practice. Outcome 1 defines that RVS will provide multiple learning pathways, empowering all learners regardless of where and when learning transpires. Outcome 2 highlights the need to purposefully design instruction that incorporates the tenets of RVS' Learning Model so that all learners are engaged through a variety of strategies, settings, and formats. Outcome 3 requires that instructional design and practice transcends the classroom and encompasses 21st C competencies, enabling learning to be authentic, in-depth, and in an area of student interest. Outcome 4 is designed to inspire learners to go beyond the learning environment to construct and deepen their knowledge and understanding.

**Learning occurs any time, any place, any path, any pace.**

- Establish jurisdictional standards for teachers' digital presence.
- Increase access to middle and high school programming by promoting alternate delivery models.
- Research, identify, and promote instructional practices and tools to support teachers in the creation of personalized learning environments.

**Instructional design engages each learner.**

- Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to understand and use RVS' Learning Model.
- Monitor the implementation of HK Assessment and Communication of Student Learning policy and procedures to better inform stakeholders of student learning, progress, and performance.
- Create a repository of effective strategies regarding the reporting of student progress.
- Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to effectively implement and assess individual learner profiles for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12.
- Develop a framework for Communities of Practice to document, report, and share promising teaching practices throughout the jurisdiction.

**Instructional design enriches the learning experience.**

- Build inquiry-based, authentic learning models that exemplify the integration of inter-disciplinary practices.
- Create and publish a repository of inquiry-based, authentic learning projects.
- Link schools to community resources through the jurisdictional volunteer program to facilitate authentic learning experiences.

**Instructional practices empower learners.**

- Provide seed funding for innovative 21st C instructional practices.
- Host an annual showcase of 21st C learning, based on students passion and interests.
- Engage school communities in the use of social media to promote 21st C teaching and learning.
- Create a student blog site for students to share, comment, and reflect upon their 21st C learning.
- Expand jurisdictional authentic learning experience for learners from across grades.

## Learning environments enable the acquisition of 21st Century competencies.

Goal Four pertains to the physical environment, infrastructure, and culture in RVS. Its purpose is to draw attention to the learning environments where we lead, work, learn, enhance learning, and maximize the efficient use of time and resources. Through Outcome 1 we envision a jurisdiction where learning and operational technologies are integrated, accessible through a wide range of devices, and provide real-time historical feedback and data to users. As expressed in Outcome 2, once achieved these will optimize the collection and value of information to support personal and organizational improvements and efficiency. Outcome 3 focuses on the manner and nature of learning for all stakeholders in RVS. Its purpose is to ensure we continue to build a culture that learns, unlearns and relearns. Outcome 4 brings focus to the critical nature of 21st Century transformational leadership of all learners – students, staff, parents and the community.

**Learners use digital technologies to enhance learning.**

- Provide seed funding for innovative 21st C technology projects.
- Adopt and implement ISTE Net standards for administrators, teachers and students.
- Create and provide professional learning on the use of digital resources for improving learning, with the aim of expanding the number of 21st C leads per school.
- Transition all Grade 5-12 students to a 1 to 1 format, through both personal and jurisdictional devices.

**Accelerate innovation, research, and organizational development to achieve operational efficiencies.**

- Develop a corporate grant application strategy, linking to key outcomes in RVS' Three Year Plan.
- Develop a system-wide, balanced, and integrated student information system that supports instant diagnostics of individual student achievement, as well as aggregated data at the classroom, school, and jurisdictional levels.
- Foster RVS as a research organization, ensuring innovative projects focus on action research as key stimulants to research and innovation.
- Host RVS research carousels to highlight and share research conducted in RVS.
- Undertake a review of business practices to identify operational efficiencies.

**Learning is generative, responsive, and multi-dimensional.**

- Create standards for RVS' professional learning plan for all members of the learning community.
- Create professional learning opportunities that are multi-modal.
- Meet with sponsoring education faculties to review student teacher cohort outcomes with the objective of identifying program improvements.

**Leadership capacity is built across the jurisdiction.**

- Launch a jurisdictional student leadership program.
- Clarify the criteria, procedures, and selection process for the Assistant Principal Pool.
- Develop a formal principal mentorship program to support leadership within the jurisdiction.



# HEALTHY EATING - a basic requirement

~ By Sarah McNab, RVS' Communications Writer

## Research suggests that a strong correlation exists between healthy eating and enhanced academic student performance.

Recognizing the substantial impact that nutrition can have on a student's likelihood of achieving success, Rocky View Schools (RVS), in partnership with Alberta Health Services (AHS), has developed a Healthy Eating Initiative designed to promote the optimal nutrition of students.

Initially a pilot project which ran from April, 2006 to March, 2009, RVS' Healthy Eating Initiative resulted in the implementation of several different initiatives that have had a significant impact on how RVS views healthy eating, and that are still being followed today. With a mandate to support the

health and well-being of its students, RVS now has approximately 90 percent of its schools engaged in specific activities related to promoting healthy eating.

## Healthy Eating Guidelines

One of RVS' most notable achievements resulting from its Healthy Eating Initiative, and also a driving force behind many changes seen today, is the development of a set of Healthy Eating Guidelines. These guidelines provide schools with specific recommendations to support optimal nutrition practices. Developed in response to a request from schools that were committed to promoting healthy eating at the local level, the Healthy Eating Guidelines lead schools and the jurisdiction in its decision-making process in matters related to nutrition and wellness.

## School Initiatives

Such changes include schools taking ownership of reviewing food kiosk and vending machines, and replacing high-sugar, high-fat food choices with healthier alternatives. Cafeteria menus now offer healthy options

served at a reasonable costs that meet the requirements specified by the jurisdiction's Healthy Eating Guidelines, following ongoing collaboration between schools and

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**“These guidelines have truly transformed Rocky View’s approach to nutrition and healthy eating,” says Project Coordinator Nikki Goodman. “RVS’ food programs are aligned with, and honour these guidelines, and we are seeing schools making big changes as a result of them.”**

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Chartwells, RVS' cafeteria contractors. Several schools from across the jurisdiction also are working closely with staff from the Education Centre to fulfill the requisite steps needed to implement breakfast programs that provide food and funding to provide healthy eating options.

## Community Partnerships

RVS attributes the success of its Healthy Eating Initiative to the partnerships that it has been fortunate to have formed. Relationships have been developed with various community partners, including Devon Energy, Breakfast Clubs of Canada, and Breakfast for Learning, Alberta, which has resulted in RVS being able to provide food, resources, and increased support to schools in need.

Wesley Oginski, Director of Learning – 21st C Instruction, is a member of the Health Promoting Schools Steering Committee, and collaborates with members from other Alberta Regional School Districts, members of AHS, and representatives from the Alberta Children's Hospital. Ongoing collaboration is a key component to being able to continue to implement initiatives that promote changes in school food environments, and make it easier for students to make healthy choices that will contribute to the success of their learning.



# FOOD FOR THOUGHT - a new link

**Statistics show that students who have a healthy breakfast score higher on standardized tests, have better daily attendance, and participate more in class than those who do not. Statistics also show that having a balanced breakfast can improve cognitive functions, attention span, and memory.**

But sadly, statistics also show that as many as one in 10 Canadian children live in poverty and are at risk of starting their day on an empty stomach, which is associated with behavioural, emotional, and academic problems.

It is because of these statistics that Rocky View Schools (RVS) has implemented Food For Thought, a program that provides students with a nutritious breakfast in a secure environment, to help them concentrate and improve their ability to learn.

Food For Thought came to be after RVS' Healthy Eating Initiative provided evidence of the need for a program that could provide students with healthy food options and also educate students and staff about the importance of making healthy eating choices.

## Serving Schools in Need

A collaborative effort involving various organizations within the RVS community, Food For Thought is considered the umbrella program that encompasses a variety of different initiatives dedicated to providing food and funding to schools in need. Fully funded by grants, donations, volunteers, and in-kind services, the success of the program comes from the support of various community partners.

## School Breakfast Clubs

A main component of Food For Thought are RVS' school breakfast programs that provide students with nutritious breakfast options. Sponsored by Breakfast Clubs of Canada, a national not-for-profit

organization, and the Airdrie Food Bank, these breakfast clubs adhere to the guidelines established as part of RVS' Healthy Eating Initiative, and are proving to have many positive outcomes. In order for a school to be eligible to receive assistance, it must be able to demonstrate a need, as well as the capacity to support a breakfast program, through independent and community funding and the support of parents and volunteers. RVS currently has four schools with breakfast programs in place, and two schools have recently submitted applications.

Food For Thought also has partnered with Breakfast For Learning, a national non-profit organization that provides nutrition grants to schools to help cover the cost of purchasing supplies and materials required to meet the needs of their school community. To date, Breakfast for Learning has provided more than \$15,000 in funding for 11 RVS schools.

## A Community Effort

Support at the local level also is an important component of Food For Thought. A major partnership between RVS and Cobs Bread sees schools benefiting from the bakery's "End-of-Day Giving" initiative, where they donate day-old bread to schools. Cobs Bread products, free of sugar and preservatives, meet the standards set by RVS' Healthy Eating Guidelines. The jurisdiction currently has seven schools from the communities of Airdrie, Beiseker, Chestermere, and Cochrane participating.

Other local businesses such as Costco, M&M Meat Shops, and Starbucks also have provided support to RVS' Food for Thought program, through cash and in-kind donations. Chartwells provides discounts to students have been identified by administration as being in need, at schools with fully-equipped cafeterias that are not eligible for a breakfast program.

"There is an unprecedented level of collaboration and dedication that exists within our community when it comes to

supporting our students," says Goodman. "This enables us not only to provide food for hungry children, but also helps us nurture strong minds, and provide students with the best chance of success possible!"



## Benefiting Schools

### Breakfast Clubs of Canada and Airdrie Food Bank Schools:

Chestermere Middle School, Glenbow Elementary School, Bert Church High School and R.J. Hawkey Elementary School.

Meadowbrook Middle School and Rainbow Creek Elementary School are currently in the midst of submitting applications.

### Breakfast for Learning Schools:

Beiseker Community School, Bert Church High School, Chestermere Middle School, W.G. Murdoch School, Crossfield Elementary School, Meadowbrook Middle School, and RVLC.

### Cobs "End-of-Day Giving" Schools:

R.J. Hawkey Elementary School, Meadowbrook Middle School, Bert Church High School, Beiseker Community School, Crossfield Elementary School, W.G. Murdoch School, Rainbow Creek Elementary School, Manachaban Middle School, Prairie Waters Elementary School, Chestermere Middle School, and Muriel Clayton Middle School.



# Learning in Engaging Networked Settings



~ By Sarah McNab, RVS' Communications Writer

**When speaking about R.J. Hawkey Elementary School's L.E.N.S. program, which stands for Learning in Engaged Networked Settings, Principal Dan Hoch almost always gets asked the same question: Where did the idea come from? His reply: "The desire to move from good to great - a mantra of Rocky View Schools".**

The brainchild of Principal Dan Hoch and his R.J. Hawkey staff, LENS was formally implemented in September 2010. The only program of its kind in Canada, LENS initially grew from a point of uncertainty and discomfort within R.J. Hawkey.

"Back in 2009, we began asking ourselves if there wasn't a better way to deliver education," reflects Hoch. "We knew that in order to go from good to great, we needed to improve engagement, achievement, and attendance. However, we weren't quite sure how to do that."

Around the same time of these discussions, there was an influx of published literature reinforcing the concept of 'transformational possibilities', which results from doing what you love. Inspired by renowned authors such as Sir Ken Robinson, Malcolm Gladwell, and Alfie Kohn, the literature suggests people experience greater levels of success when doing things they are interested in. When Hoch presented this concept to staff, there was both immediate enthusiasm, as well as some level of concern.

"The idea of grouping students according to interest and teaching through that interest isn't necessarily a new concept. What was different was having a whole class of students with the same interest, as well as providing a variety of interest areas. Bringing that into the classroom, on a school-wide basis, was certainly novel and required a lot of dialogue with parents and staff."

"For many, the idea really resonated. It offered a way to bring teaching and student engagement to a new level,"

explains Hoch. "There was staff excitement about the opportunity to share their passions with students, and bring their own interests to teaching on a daily basis."

The concept eventually developed into a program that places students in Grade 2 and up into a class with others who have a similar interest and who are led by a teacher that has experience, training and passion in the same area. The four areas of interest are: Humanitarian/ Environmental; Visual and Performing Arts; Scientific Inquiry and Innovation; and Sports and Athletics. In all of these class groupings, the mandated provincial curriculum for that grade is taught "through the lens" of that particular interest area.

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**LENS interest areas include humanities, scientific inquiry, sports and the arts.**

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Although the concept seems like a simple one, the program was not created overnight. Hoch credits ongoing collaboration among the entire school community for designing a program that met the learning needs of staff and students. Stakeholder consultations, including focus groups and information meetings, occurred along each step of the way and were instrumental in the development of the program. Hoch and Assistant Principal Andrea Craigie

also acknowledge how important it was having the support of Superintendent of Schools Greg Bass, RVS Executive and the area Trustees. This, in addition to positive feedback from other consultants and stakeholder groups, gave them the confidence to move forward in their planning.

"People's responses were ones of unbridled enthusiasm, and this just provided reinforcement that we weren't the only ones who thought we were headed in the right direction," says Craigie. "We saw this as permission to explore where R.J. could go, and we have



# ...honing in on student passions & interests

come a long way in the past two years!”

Since the official program launch, R.J.

Hawkey has successfully placed 80 percent of students in their first choice grouping, with the other 20 percent in their second choice, which in most cases wasn't far removed from the first area of interest. It is

important to note that the groupings are not based on ability, but strictly on interest. LENS does not serve to replace any curriculum, but instead successfully capitalizes on the interests of students, thus resulting in a higher level of engagement.

“The change we have seen in many students since the program started is tremendous,” says Hoch.

“Parents call to tell me how excited their kids are to come to school, and it is clear to see that they are more engaged and are experiencing a deeper sense of belonging.”

A visit to the school provides proof that this program has also created a new level of synergy between staff and students. As an example, instant bonds were formed between students in the Sports and Athletics group when they were encouraged to wear their team colors on Jersey Day. Another group of students from the Humanitarian/Environmental group speak proudly about ‘Me to We’, a school-wide assembly held in September, 2010, that ultimately resulted in the school raising monies to purchase 14 water filters for communities in developing countries.

And it is not only students that are

enjoying learning through their interest area. Sports and Athletics Team Lead Heath Klein says the program makes teaching more enjoyable, while Grade 2 Science teacher Nancy Cole says that LENS allows for a more unified curriculum and makes it easier to collaborate with other teachers - the end result being a more interesting and engaging lesson plan for students. For many teachers, LENS also represents a shift in teaching, because very often, teachers are learning alongside students, a practice endorsed by Rocky View Schools 21st Century pursuit.

For some, a concern arose that the program might result in segregating or pigeonholing students. Staff at R.J. Hawkey is committed to creating an environment that offers a balanced exposure. Over the course of the year, each interest group is charged with hosting a school-wide activity that serves to expose and educate the entire student body about a particular interest area. In addition, the practice of reading buddies, intramurals, choirs, and various leadership groups ensure students continue to have opportunities to mix and interact with each other. The end result is that students are learning more about each facet than ever before. As well, prior to the end of the school year, the placement process for the upcoming year allows students the opportunity to switch interest areas or remain in their current choice.

Although Hoch is pleased with success of the program so far, he acknowledges that it is a work in progress. As part of a research agreement with the University of Calgary, focus group meetings have been held with staff to identify how the program can be improved. Over the next few months, more surveys will be sent out to parents and students to identify their impressions of the program and how improvements can be made. As time goes on, the school will be better equipped to provide more statistical data as proof of the program's success.

For the time being, Hoch is confident that R.J. Hawkey has successfully moved beyond good, and is headed on the path towards great. As the program's greatest

champion, he is hopeful that other schools will soon follow suit, and welcomes the opportunity to dialogue with other schools and jurisdictions about LENS.

“I believe that we will have the success that will encourage other schools to inquire about what we are doing. The key is to put those programs in place that ultimately will be of benefit to the students.”

## Learning through the LENS of... Humanitarian/Environment

The goal of this LENS is to evoke kindness, benevolence and sympathy in the hearts of children to give them the confidence to initiate change. The hope is that these children will develop an intrinsic motivation to make change in their own world.

## Scientific Inquiry and Innovation

Learning through this LENS provides a framework for students to understand and interpret the world around them. The hope is that children will develop a sense of wonderment and active problem-solving skills, along with a respect for living things, environments, & commitment for their care.

## Sports and Athletics

Through this LENS, students will be taught using rich athletic stories, resources, and examples. It is not the intention to teach sports and athletics; rather sports and athletics will be used as a hook to engage students in each subject. Students will learn to become leaders in the classroom and the field of play, and in all endeavors in life.

## Visual and Performing Arts

Art, Music, Drama & Dance are key components of this LENS. The integration of the arts enriches all the core subjects, while maintaining the integrity of the arts. The Visual and Performing Arts LENS provides an expressive and academic environment where the creativity and individuality of each student is recognized and celebrated.



# EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES - a new world

~ By Sarah McNab, RVS' Communications Writer

**There is no doubt about it – the integration of technology into classrooms has made this an exciting time for education. An almost unstoppable force, technology is tearing down walls and building new relationships. It is changing the way teachers teach and students learn.**

Permeating almost every facet of education, technology is no longer seen simply as a communications tool in Rocky View Schools (RVS), but instead has become a learning tool that has been embraced by teachers and students in connecting curriculum to students' interests and experiences.

"Many of the programs and applications that we have rolled out have been brought to our attention by RVS teachers," says Principal of Learning Todd Kiernan. "We are discovering that RVS has many staff members who are really passionate about technology, and who are open to individual exploration and to using digital resources to promote and enhance learning. It is really encouraging and indicative of an organization that truly embraces a culture of learning."

The jurisdiction also draws inspiration directly from its students, actively seeking feedback through surveys such as Tell Them From Me and from Student Speak Out forums. Regardless of the avenue, the feedback always remains the same: students want to play a more active role in their education, and as seen in RVS' Learning Model, want to be able to learn at any time, any place, any path, or at any pace.

Over the last three years, RVS has implemented several technologically-based programs and applications that have proven to be instrumental in supporting the tenets of its Learning Model.

## weConnect

RVS' weConnect program, developed to provide students with increased access to more courses, helps satisfy the demand

for learning to be able to occur anywhere. Available at all high schools, weConnect classrooms offers students, under the supervision of a teacher, the opportunity to complete courses in a variety of online platforms, including D2L and Moodle, with tutorial support provided through video conferencing. With the alignment of high school timetables in 2010/11, 4,500 high schools students can now access programming via different delivery formats, allowing them to work toward a career pathway of their choice and interest. Further they can upgrade courses when they wish and structure timetables in a manner of best fit for them. Additionally, teachers can teach the course they are best-trained to teach, but in different delivery formats.

RVS currently offers 60 high school courses via weConnect, only 6 of which are still the Alberta Distance Learning material. All other courses have been created by RVS teachers, and can be offered using the RVS Moodle Learning Management system (LMS) or Desire 2 Learn (D2L).

## Elluminate

The jurisdiction also supports Elluminate, a virtual environment optimized for learning. A synchronous tool that enables learning to take place at any time and at any place, Elluminate can host up to 135 concurrent students in one session, and is used by students at the middle and

**"It is our belief that students who are supervised within their home school have a much higher completion rate and experience a greater degree of success," says Kiernan. "Our current high school data has shown completion rates that are 20 – 30 per cent higher in the weConnect program, than in a traditional distance learning system."**

high school levels. Frequently used by weConnect students, this tool allows for course instruction to be obtained from a teacher at a different location, as well as to facilitate breakout sessions. Elluminate also boasts a common whiteboard application and voice-over IP abilities. Sessions can be archived, thereby also enabling learning at any time.

## Podcast Capture

Staff members throughout the jurisdiction also are beginning to utilize Podcast Captures as another way for students to retrieve lessons outside of the regular classroom. Making use of their iBooks and RVS' Podcast Server, teachers record their lessons and later post them to a secure area on the internet. Students can then download these multimedia files for playback on a personal computing device.

"A Podcast Capture is helpful for a student who may have had difficulty understanding a certain math concept in class that day," explains Kiernan. "By downloading a Podcast Capture, they have the flexibility to listen at their leisure, and to pause and playback at their convenience – thus being able to learn at any time, any place, and at any pace."

## Google Apps

Another application that is quickly gaining both momentum and recognition in RVS is Google Apps, a cloud application which provides students and staff with access to customizable Google products under an RVS domain name. Introduced to all RVS high schools in the fall of 2010, Google Apps features several web applications with similar functionality to traditional Office suites, including Gmail, Google Docs, Google Calendar and so much more.

"Since it was introduced, all RVS high schools and several middle schools have rolled the application out officially, and others are following suit," says Kiernan. "Not only is this a cost-effective collaboration tool, in that it is an open source application that requires no hardware or software and needs minimal



## ...and they just keep coming

administration, it also has a support network that provides assistance with user training and custom application.”

### Moodle

Although all of the newly implemented programs and applications have been well-received by staff, students, and parents, none have created as big of an impact as Moodle. Moodle, or Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment, is a learning management system (LMS) that enables teachers to create an online presence by designing their own learning communities.

“Interest has grown exponentially since RVS introduced Moodle in early 2010,” declares Kiernan. “We’ve already had close to 200 teachers across the jurisdiction participate in Moodle 1 & 2 training sessions, and the interest continues to grow, particularly as teachers realize the impact a Moodle course can have on student engagement.”

Moodle offers teachers a platform in which they can house course content, host discussion forums, store databases, and create wikis. Used primarily to administer online courses, Moodle also is ideal for teachers in building online environments with their classes. Also an open source application, Moodle has proven to be a very cost-effective means of building richly collaborative communities of learning that are engaging students on a deeper level. The most widely used LMS in Alberta, Moodle enables RVS to collaborate on curriculum-based projects with schools in other jurisdictions.

### Assistive Technology for Learning

RVS also has embraced technology as a means of supporting individuals with special needs achieve their curriculum-based or individual learning goals. Assistive Technology for Learning (ATL) refers to devices, media, and services used in learning environments to help students with physical, sensory, cognitive, speech, or learning special needs overcome barriers and actively engage in learning. During the 2009/10 school year, RVS

As of May 10, 2011, Rocky View Schools has launched and supports the following online tools for learning:

Application	Accounts Created	Users/month
ePearl	14 schools, 82 teachers, 3762 students	+500
Mahara	4,936	+900
Moodle	10,311	+5,000
Google Mail	13,000	+2,500

Did you know?

Over 2,000 Google docs are accessed every day by more than 2,000 RVS users. RVS has 2,923 Podcast users and runs 600 Google sites.

implemented Premier Literacy Suite into all of its schools. A major strategic initiative related to ATL, Premier’s In-School and AT Home programs provide students with access to a complete suite of literacy tools that address reading, writing and information-transfer needs for individuals of all abilities.

“ATL devices can range from something as simple as a pencil grip, to something as complex as a talking dictionary or calculator,” explains 21st Century Learning Specialist Barry Allen. “ATL is really about making information more accessible and providing learners with the tools they need to be successful.”

### On the Horizon

While technology has proven an effective tool to support special needs students, applications such as ePearl and Mahara also are helping all students to become more self directed. Through the use of these open source e-portfolio systems, students can showcase their work, which provides an opportunity to take authentic ownership of their learning. RVS anticipates that these applications also will be used for staff in the near future.

Launched in February, RVS also provides the platform for staff members to blog about topics related to 21st Century learning, teaching, and leadership, and foresees the development of a student blog site where students will be able to

share, comment, and reflect upon their 21st Century learning experiences.

Because of the positive impacts it has had on so many different facets of education, RVS has come to regard technology as a catalyst for change, collaboration, and cohesiveness.

“We are seeing more collaboration within the classroom than ever before, in large part due to technology,” states Kiernan. “There was an initial fear that the integration of technology would serve to isolate people, however it is clear that relationships, particularly student-teacher relationships, are still equally, if not more important than they have ever been, especially as the role of the teacher has evolved into that of facilitator of knowledge.”

He continues on to acknowledge that technology also has been a driving force in creating a more unified organization.

“As technology becomes more embedded in education, every person within RVS has an important part to play in adapting to and embracing it, whether it is as a researcher, instructor, administrator, or learner,” emphasizes Kiernan. “No matter what your role is, the common goal at the end of the day is to effectively utilize technology to make a profound difference in our schools and transform teaching and learning so that is the best it can be for students.”





~ By Sarah McNab, RVS' Communications Writer

**With more than 750 students using personally-owned computing devices on a daily basis, Springbank Community High School (SCHS) is an example of a public school that has successfully engaged its entire learning community in a ubiquitous computing environment.**

Launched in September, 2010, the One-to-One program promotes the use of different digital devices such as laptops and smart phones, which can be integrated with other ubiquitous computing devices, to transform the act of learning from a simple knowledge acquisition process to an active social interaction activity.

For SCHS, the concept of implementing a ubiquitous computing environment began to evolve around the same time as Rocky View Schools (RVS) introduced its new Three Year Planning process, back in 2008.

"RVS' new mission and vision provided us with direction, and prompted us to re-evaluate how successful we were at meeting our own mission and learning principles," recalls SCHS Principal Leslie Collings. "There was definite concern that we were not hitting the mark."

Collings also recalls there being a consensus from all teachers that more emphasis needed to be placed on adequately preparing students for their post-secondary education, by teaching them to adapt to a continually changing information and media literate world.

"We were worried that many of our students were starting University without the requisite skills to operate in a post-secondary learning environment, where technology is a constant," says Collings. "Our objective became to be able to provide students with the tools beforehand that would help them develop a new skill set, that would see them leave high school better prepared for their future!"

### **Developing infrastructure**

At first glance, this seemed like an impossible feat. Even with divisional evergreen funding, SCHS could afford to purchase only 30 new computers. Upon realizing this, Collings and her team decided that the best use of the funds would be to put the money towards developing infrastructure in the building that would support increased access, and ask that students purchase their own laptops. Acknowledging that this might be more feasible for some students than others, SCHS and Apple Canada struck a partnership that would see students receive an educational discount from Apple Canada. For those students that could not afford to purchase a laptop, SCHS had, and still has, loaners for use.

"When the idea of a ubiquitous

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**"Asking students to purchase their own laptops was never a roadblock to the implementation of the One-to-One program," says Collings. "We currently have about 90 percent of students with personally-owned devices."**

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computing environment was introduced, we weren't exactly sure what it would look like," confesses Collings. "What we did know was that we needed to engage staff, students, and parents for their input."

After several months of stakeholder consultation that included information sessions, focus groups, and one-to-one consultation sessions, One-to-One evolved into a unique program that was directly aligned with RVS' Three Year Plan objective of creating a 21st Century learning environment.

### **Addressing appropriate use**

While support for the program was primarily positive, some parents expressed a concern that with the advent of social media, this increased access to personal computing devices might impede their child's learning, as opposed to enhancing it. This was a concern that SCHS took very seriously, and thought long and hard about the best way to approach it.

"In the end, we were all in agreement that it would be more beneficial to empower students, as opposed to simply policing their internet usage," says Collings. "Part of our role in providing students with tools is teaching them how to use them responsibly."

SCHS has since begun to promote the concept of digital citizenship as a way to teach students, staff, and parents what is considered an appropriate use of technology.

"Digital citizenship was an enigma at first. As I learned what an enabling philosophy this was, I couldn't believe how it was coming at such a perfect time for the school," says Collings. "Being a digital citizen means being well-versed in responsible use and taking ownership of your own learning, which were messages we wanted to convey."

Addressing nine different elements pertaining to digital use, including access, commerce, communication, literacy, etiquette, law, rights and responsibilities, health and wellness, and security, the concept of digital citizenship is one that has become firmly implanted in the minds of both students and staff at SCHS, and it is clear that everyone has taken pride in becoming a digital citizen.

Representatives from SCHS recently spoke in favour of the One-to-One program at a 3YP Student Speak Out forum. While some students cited the opportunity for increased collaboration and teamwork as favourite outcomes of a ubiquitous computing environment, others have welcomed the opportunity to exercise their own unique learning styles with the help of personal devices. Although students acknowledged that the opportunity exists to abuse the access, the majority of students have taken ownership of their learning, and understand that irresponsible use would compromise their success.

SCHS teachers also are well-versed in digital citizenry, after being schooled in the concept through various professional learning opportunities. Encouraged to promote responsible use within their classrooms, teachers are given the freedom to embed the principles as they best see fit.

### Tracking success

Although still in its early stages, the program is proving to be very successful. Baseline measurements collected from SCHS' Tell Them from Me survey administered in October, 2010, outline a big difference in the comfort level of both staff and students, just from first to second semester. A follow-up survey is scheduled for May, 2011, and adjustments will be made to the program as necessary based on the results. In the meantime, informal feedback has been very positive.

Students are reporting that the increased use of technology in the classrooms has made it easier to complete their work any time, any place, any path, any pace. SCHS has several students involved in elite athletic programs who are required to travel, and this ubiquitous computing environment facilitates their active participation in class.

Teachers too are reporting that the opportunity to use technology in a more meaningful way has enhanced their day-to-day experiences, and that the One-to-One program is proving to be as much of a learning experience for them, as it is for students, representative of RVS' goal to operate as a community of learning.

### Keeping parents informed

SCHS also has made it a priority to keep parents well informed, through frequent program progress reports that are communicated via the school website and newsletter. SCHS has hosted several evening sessions where parents are invited to the school to see what their children are doing with this increased access to technology.

SCHS also has gained Provincial recognition, and was asked by Alberta Education to participate in a Community of Practice dedicated to student-owned devices. A two-year commitment that will provide an opportunity to share ideas with other jurisdictions, the One-to-One

## Encouraging responsible use



### Responsible Use Agreement

RVS' Responsible Use Agreement exists to foster the independent use of the network to facilitate educational and professional growth objectives, while ensuring that users are compliant with procedures and standards for appropriate network behaviour and communication.

The guidelines are intended to:

- protect the privacy of students by asking them to not give out personal information, and let someone in authority know if they come across information that you makes the uncomfortable;
- prohibit the downloading and transferring of copyrighted materials to or from any RVS computer without the consent of the copyright owner; and
- prohibit use of the RVS network for defamatory, inaccurate, obscene, profane, sexually-oriented, or racially offensive activities, or to engage in illegal or unethical acts.

The Responsible Use Agreement - Network, Computer and Email can be found on the RVS website, accessed at [http://www.rockyview.ab.ca/forms\\_and\\_templates/form-templates/technology\\_services/TS04\\_responsibleuseagreement\\_student-staff.pdf](http://www.rockyview.ab.ca/forms_and_templates/form-templates/technology_services/TS04_responsibleuseagreement_student-staff.pdf).

program will be featured in a book about best practices for personally-owned devices and schools.

### Addressing challenges

Although things have been running relatively smoothly since the launch of the program, Collings cites the accelerated pace of technology as being one of the main challenges.

"While we might be a bit ahead of the crowd with regards to being able to provide access to the technology, it is clear that we will always be behind technology," admits Collings.

SCHS has embraced the challenge however, and sees it as one more thing that is helping make students and staff more accountable for their own learning. All SCHS teachers are required to complete mandatory Moodle training, and are encouraged to participate in individual

professional learning opportunities. And even as technology is playing a larger role in learning, thereby rapidly changing the face of education, classroom learning still appears to be the preferred choice for most students and teachers.

"Contrary to the beliefs of some, students aren't on their laptops all day," emphasizes Collings. "We promote a blended learning environment, because that is what is proving to work best for students."

However Collings cannot deny the powerful impact that increased technological access has had on learning.

"We feel so fortunate that our students have such democratic access," Collings reflects. "The Internet is the most powerful tool since the printing press! This truly is an amazing time to be a student, and an amazing time to be an educator. And this really is only the beginning!"



# WE ARE ALL LEARNERS ...



~ By Sarah McNab, RVS' Communications Writer

**In years past, professional development initiatives were designed as static, one-off seminars hosted by facilitators who disseminated information in a top-down manner. Surveys responses garnered post-event often suggested that while many of the participants found the material presented to be interesting, they felt ill-equipped to bring about any real change upon returning to their classrooms.**

Fast forward to today's 21st Century learning environment and you'll see a much different picture. Re coined "professional learning" by RVS back in 2008, staff learning initiatives reflect the jurisdiction's desire to create customized learning opportunities, which are accessible 'any time, any place, any path, and at any pace.'

"Just as teaching is no longer about simply delivering content to students, but rather making the content come alive by going to places where learning is exciting, so too is our approach with professional learning," says Director of Organizational Learning Manny

Ferreirha. "Professional learning needs to be about creating inspired spaces for learning. It is truly about drawing on and igniting the passions of everyone in the organization to create and share

knowledge!"

As a self-described architect of learning, Ferreira said RVS has developed and implemented various professional learning initiatives, including self-selected Communities of Practice, a Teacher Plus Series, Learning Symposiums, an Excellence in Learning program, and a soon-to-be-launched professional webportal, all of which serve as affirmation that professional learning has changed. Each initiative is designed to support learning, collaboration, and engagement, yet also targets a specific audience and has specific goals and outcomes associated with it.

## Growth Plans

Since September 2008, all staff, both certificated and non-certificated, are asked to develop an Annual Growth Plan (teachers) or an Annual Individual Learning Plan (support staff). These plans, which are to be aligned directly to RVS' Three Year Plan or the School Education Plan, are reviewed annually with supervisors, and guide the professional learning of all staff members.

## Communities of Practice

In support of individual growth plans, self-selecting Communities of Practice (COP) have been established with the aim of creating an organizational synergy and systematic study to build the capacity and agility of all employee groups within the jurisdiction.

Meeting formally three times a year in a face-to-face setting, and electronically through a COP webportal, communities engage in meaningful, intentional and ongoing dialogue with the purpose of

exploring practice. Self directed and organic in nature, this model encourages not only the acquisition of knowledge, but the creation of knowledge. By providing a powerful mechanism to solidify, enrich, collect and organize information, staff can improve practice by engaging in exemplary, cutting-edge learning.

## Teacher Plus Series

Launched last spring, RVS' Teacher Plus Series offers staff the opportunity to explore the complex challenges of their practices through exchanges with colleagues. Through a 21st Century lens, topics and sessions explored in after-school hours settings include: instructional and curriculum design, planning, assessment, differentiation, creating optimal learning environments, student engagement, working effectively with parents and other stakeholders as partners, and inclusive education. Through these discussions, participants have gained a more vested interest in their practice, which ultimately benefits students.

## Administrative Leadership Development Program

RVS also places a great deal of emphasis on developing leadership capacity, and strives to provide learning opportunities which are distinct, continuous and systematic to support it. RVS' Administrative Leadership Development program provides those administrators who aspire to a different level of leadership with an understanding of the role of the principal both as a leader and manager, and with some of the tools necessary to become an effective leader at a future time.

## Learning Symposium

On Jan. 22, 2011, RVS hosted a Learning Symposium based on the theme "Engaging Minds, Enriching Learning, Empowering Lives." The symposium, which featured three distinguished speakers including the University of Calgary's Dr. Denis Sumara, Former Executive Director



# Building capacity throughout RVS

for the Canadian Educational Association Penny Milton, and Educational Consultant David Warlick, reflected a continued evolution towards a 21st Century learning approach that is constructivist in nature. Open to administrators, teachers, support staff, trustees and parents, RVS saw 71 staff members participate in the symposium. Feedback from staff indicated that participants felt that it was very relevant to RVS' current learning needs, that the information shared had the potential to deepen an understanding of RVS' Learning Model, and that a diverse cross-section of learners provided insightful, interesting and informative views on learning in the 21st Century. RVS anticipates hosting other Learning Symposiums in the future.

## Excellence in Learning

RVS' Excellence in Learning program has provided school communities with the opportunity to actualize specific aspects of 21st Century learning. To date, RVS has provided close to \$100,000 in funding to seven schools across the jurisdiction that proposed innovative projects designed to improve learning, and that were connected to 21st Century learning and RVS' Three Year Plan. Funds have been used to support the development and/or implementation of: two 21st Century learning commons; a repository of technological instructional materials; infrastructure to support a one-to-one computing environment; a Podcast-dedicated server; a curriculum framework for international education; and a collaborative research model. The following schools were recipients of the Excellence in Learning program: Springbank Community High School, Prairie Waters Elementary, Crossfield Elementary, Cochrane High School, Bert Church High School, Meadowbrook Middle School, and Rainbow Creek Elementary.

## Masters Cohorts

RVS has taken the idea of building leadership capacity through professional

learning to the next step, through its Masters cohorts with the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge. Developed in collaboration with administrators at RVS and specialists from the universities, these cohort-based degree programs were designed especially for RVS, and will provide an opportunity for participants to apply their studies to professional practice through courses, practicums, or internships, and develop their leadership skills and attitudes. RVS, in partnership with Bow Valley College, also will be offering an Education Assistant Certificate program. Through the integration of theory and practice, this one-year certificate program will provide an opportunity for school assistants to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to work with children and adolescents with a range of exceptionalities in inclusive and specialized settings.

## Digital Technologies

Another important facet of professional learning, particularly as RVS moves towards becoming a 21st Century learning organization, is building staff recognition and understanding of the use of many emerging digital technologies that are becoming more prevalent in classrooms. RVS' Learning Team, in conjunction with other departments, is committed to developing customized training opportunities designed to help staff become more proficient users of assistive technologies. Staff members are provided with opportunities to engage in professional learning initiatives that can help them master learning management systems such as Moodle, comprehend cloud computing, and become proficient in managing online portfolio tools such as ePearl and Mahara.

## Personal Growth

In addition to providing opportunities for professional growth through professional learning initiatives, RVS also is committed to helping staff achieve their personal

growth goals. More than 350 staff members have participated in training sessions inspired by Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, with 14 staff trained as session facilitators.

## Professional Learning Portal

To help keep staff informed on these initiatives and many more, RVS' Learning Team also has developed a Professional Learning Portal that can be accessed via the division website. It houses a collection of resources, an up-to-date list of professional learning opportunities, information regarding Communities of Practice, and much more.

## Research and Development

Moving forward, RVS remains committed to applying a research design to its practice, and focusing on data to ensure that what it is doing is having a major impact on all learners. Results from professional learning initiative surveys, participation in COPs, and APORI results, suggest that staff are embracing the development of a professional learning plan, and are continuously seeking opportunities that will allow for growth and development.

As RVS continues to see a pedagogical shift in teaching and learning, accompanied by changes to instructional practices, including differentiated instruction, distributed learning, and assistive technology, the face of professional learning also will continue to change.

"Professional learning is all about creating an authentic and relevant learning experience that will foster immersive leadership qualities in staff," says Ferreirinha. "By adhering to a flexible design model that allows us to be responsive to the ebbs and flows, we anticipate being able to create inspired learning spaces that reflect the changing needs of our learners."





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