LEADERSHIP UPDATE

Summer is just around the corner!

This edition of the Leadership Update contains valuable information to support you in the work that you do and to inform you of some ways you can access very high-quality professional learning activities for school leaders in Alberta throughout the year.

Professional Learning Opportunities and News

To obtain information about upcoming professional learning events and programs for school leaders, you need only remember the following URL—www.uLead.ca—to access up-to-date news about school leadership in Alberta, provincial and regional professional learning events, and the uLead conference that takes place every year. Several wonderful learning opportunities are coming up for Alberta's school leaders and aspiring school leaders. The annual Educational Leadership Academy will take place August 8–11 in Ghost River, Alberta; the Leadership Essentials for Administrators conference will be held November 20–21 in Calgary for school leaders in their first five years of service or new to Alberta; and, finally, uLead 2018 will take place April 15–18, 2018 in Banff.

The 2018 uLead event will be bigger than ever, with registrations opening later this month. Please mark your calendars—it's going to be amazing! Please visit uLead.ca on a regular basis as the events and news will change frequently, and up-to-date events are always listed there.

> "It is critical to ensure that we assess what matters or to count what counts in education."
>
> **Yong Zhao**

Council for
School Leadership

Upcoming Professional Learning Opportunities

ELA 2017
Educational Leadership Academy

Educational Leadership Academy – Agile Schools Master Class

This year's Educational Leadership Academy is focused on instructional leadership and will be led by Dr Simon Breakspear.

To ensure that the promise of deeper learning becomes a reality in our schools, educational leaders must develop the capability to effectively lead improvement, innovation and change that will lead to measurable changes in student learning. This world-class leadership program is evidence based, globally informed, practical and relevant. It connects theory to practice, and it ensures that leaders apply the conceptual ideas to the specific change they are seeking to lead in their school or division. Furthermore, the social learning environment ensures the development of a powerful network of like-minded educational leaders.

The 2017 Educational Leadership Academy will have a maximum of 50 participants and will take place in the Ghost River Wilderness Area near Banff National Park. The program is geared for an audience of school leaders—principals and assistant principals. If you are interested in participating, please contact Jeff Johnson at jeff.johnson@ata.ab.ca for more detail.

uLead 2018 Conference in Banff — April 15–18, 2018

About uLead 2018—The Summit of Educational Leadership

Planning for uLead 2018 has already begun in earnest, and the calls for proposals for both English- and French-language sessions has already begun. The theme for uLead 2018 is "Leading Schools by Design," and it seeks to be a provocation to attending delegates to think about those intentional actions taken by education leaders at a school or system level to bring forth particular learning outcomes. The resulting conversation will range from how we intentionally design the physical structures that we teach and learn in, to design theory in education, to how we might intentionally be thinking about transforming our education system to ensure a vibrant public education system as we go forward.

Registration for uLead 2018 will open in May, and the call for proposals for the conference has already begun. You are invited to share your story at uLead 2018, The Summit of Educational Leadership, April 15–18, 2018, at the Banff Springs Hotel.

English-language proposals can be submitted to tinyurl.com/present-at-ulead18.

Propositions pour les présentations en Français peuvent être partagées à l'aide de ce lien tinyurl.com/ulead18-en-francais.

We can't wait to see what you will have to share with school leaders from Alberta and beyond.

uLead
visionary leadership for today's learner

*NOTE: Registration for uLead 2018 will open in late May with special pricing for Alberta Council for School Leadership members.

Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Seminar

We are pleased to announce that the ATA will offer a Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Seminar in Edmonton, August 23–24, 2017. This seminar is integrally tied to the work of all Alberta school leaders and typically fills up quickly. The seminar is open to school- and district-based administrators only.

The provincial Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation (TGSE) policy (policy 2.1.5) deals with accountability and continuous professional growth and ensures that a teacher's professional practice is under ongoing supervision. The TGSE policy defines the process, and the Teaching Quality Standard defines the competencies for professional practice. This workshop focuses on the principal's critical role and the duties he or she must perform as outlined in the *School Act* and policy 2.1.5.

To register please visit https://event-wizard.com/events/TGSE0817/. You can also get more information by calling Member Services at 780 447-9400.

ATA Agile Schools Network (Networked Innovation Communities for K-9 Numeracy Achievement)

The ATA Agile Schools Network (formerly known as the Networked Innovation Communities or NIC) is a collaborative initiative that seeks to boost the quality and equity of Alberta's education system and increase our ability to create a learning ecosystem where *all* students can demonstrate their numeracy skills at a level that reflects their potential. More than 70 classroom teachers, together with their school leadership teams and a district lead teacher from each participating school district, have been engaged in a process that sees innovative networked teams come together in a design hub to create and contextualize targeted teaching practices to enhance K–9 numeracy outcomes for their students. The Agile Schools Network program is fully scalable—it will grow because, as teachers and school leaders learn the techniques involved in driving positive change in their schools, they, in turn, can train the next cohort (or innovation hub) and pass on the "how to" of the process.

Last August, the current Agile Schools Network cohort met at Barnett House to learn together and identify potential focus areas for each individual teacher for the 2017/2018 school year. They learned how to design and implement an "improvement sprint," a team-based method for improving student outcomes in their classrooms and schools. They also set goals for conducting an improvement sprint in their classrooms between August and November. An improvement sprint involves each teacher defining a teaching or learning challenge, understanding what is causing that challenge, designing a solution for the challenge, and implementing the designed solution in a sprint over one to four weeks. The teacher then engages in a review of the process and a subsequent reset.

If the solution works, it is scaled up within the school. If the proposed solution does not work, the teacher goes through another quick sprint process in an attempt to solve the challenge he or she identified. A key to the success of this process is that it is the teacher in the classroom who is identifying the challenges he or she wishes to address. These challenges are not identified for the teacher through district or provincial standardized tests, for example, but are set by each teacher in a way that makes sense for the teacher's classroom and school. School leaders are an integral part of each school team and participate fully in the process.

Teachers in the cohort are not just scaling up innovative solutions to the numeracy challenges they have been identifying in their schools and with their peers, they are also sharing them with colleagues from other schools in the cohort, and will also be sharing them provincewide. On Wednesday, November 23, 2016,

the cohort met again to review the work they have been doing with improvement sprints since the beginning of the school year. They discussed implementation challenges and successful approaches. The participants also discussed the impact of their work on student learning and on their own classroom practices. Finally, cohort members participated in a final meeting in April 2017 that allowed them to share successes with one another and to devise strategies to scale up good practices within and across jurisdictional lines.

There is a great deal of interest throughout the province in the Agile Schools Network program. One of the most positive elements of the program is that it represents teacher-driven change at the classroom level and incorporates classroom teachers, school leaders and district-level leaders working together collaboratively, by design. This interest grew dramatically through participation in preconference events at this year's uLead conference in Banff and in Calgary.

It's That Time of Year Again

By Sherry Bennett

The end of the school year means various things, but for many teachers and students, it means exams. The familiar loop of test prep is ages old.

Review

Take a practice test

Study some more

Take the test

Take the test

Repeat in another subject
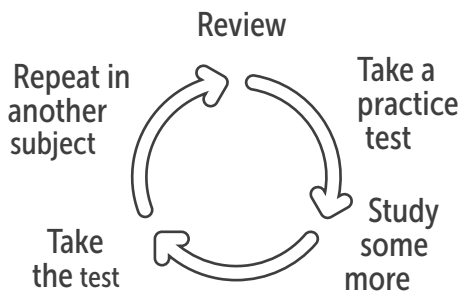
But perhaps there is another way to achieve the intended results of helping students prepare to "show what they know" without resorting to the predictable pattern of test prep.

The principles of formative assessment have been shown to improve student learning and increase student motivation and engagement. What if we could replace our entrenched patterns of test prep with formative assessment? Consider how the following three ideas can support teachers and students in preparing for year-end assessment.

1. The Best Evidence of Learning Isn't Always a Test

Check out the verbs in the outcomes, as they provide the blueprint for developing appropriate assessment items. Consider the following examples:

- An outcome with a verb such as *identify* is likely appropriate for a multiple-choice item. On the other hand, verbs such as *describe* and *explain* will require an open-ended response.
- Outcomes with verbs such as *demonstrate* and *construct* cannot be assessed through recall of factual information but will require observations of students at work.
- Multiple-choice items using source-based materials are often used to assess some of the higher order thinking skills in outcomes with verbs such as *analyze* and *interpret*. However, such items determine only if students can *recognize* a correct response; it would be important to know that students are able to *create* an appropriate response, and this requires a more open-ended format. And while we know that large-scale exams are mainly multiple choice in format, these items are extremely difficult to create for classroom use. There is no need to replicate the exact format of large-scale assessment within our classroom assessment plan.

Our late colleague Dale Armstrong had this advice for teachers: it's always better to ask students for open-ended responses that are at the correct level of cognition than to give students multiple-choice items that do not reflect what the outcome requires.

2. Not Everything Needs to Be Marked

While it's a good idea for students to be familiar with the test format, students do not need to experience multiple days of practice tests that count as part of their grades. Instead, consider using a number of review strategies that don't require the assignment of individual student grades and that have greater potential to engage students.

- Debates can engage students in reviewing big ideas and supporting details in preparation for stating and defending a position in a written response.
- Students can work in groups to answer a limited number of multiple-choice items. Ask students to determine what they think the correct answer is and why the other choices are not correct. This will provide valuable review along with some test-taking strategies.
- Students can develop their own test questions and answers, and then work in pairs or small groups to answer each other's questions, or possibly challenge the accuracy of the questions and/or answers of their peers.
- If students need to review key ideas from a large number of literary texts or a large number of concepts within a content area, consider how a division of labour using a jigsaw format can help make the task more manageable. When students realize the benefit of working together and sharing, they are often motivated to produce better quality work.
- While popular game show formats might be a way to engage students, be sure that the questions reflect the level of response required by the outcomes, and are not just trivia.

In all of these examples, students can be engaged in meaningful review without resorting to assigning individual student grades. Both students and teachers gain valuable information about what students know and what still needs to be learned. The formative function of these activities is

at the forefront, even while preparing for a summative assessment.

3. Mean What You Say

It's easy to say to students that the test is only one test, a snapshot if you like, and that they shouldn't be overly anxious about it. However, we also need to ensure that no single test is given inordinate weighting within a course.

If we say that we value growth, then we need to think about how we can create time for students to practice, receive feedback and then act on the feedback received. We also need to provide safe spaces for risk taking. When everything is marked, there is less time for learning.

This discussion lands us squarely into the realm of examining our personal beliefs systems as well as our school and district assessment and grading policies. It is important that we engage in critical thinking and dialogue with our colleagues and leaders towards the goal of developing/refining/ embracing grading and reporting practices to support student learning, and not just measure it.

Looking Ahead

While year-end tests are part of the current culture of schooling, it's important that we think critically about the extent to which the current testing format is appropriate for the new provincial curriculum that is currently under development.

If we truly are preparing our students for a future that we cannot yet see, we have to wonder why we are still using a decades-old format to measure student success. It's time for a courageous conversation about what success looks like and how we can gather and communicate evidence of student success.

Suggestions for Using this Article

As a school leader, consider providing this article to the teachers (and department heads where applicable) in your school.
- Involve teachers in small group discussions regarding each of the three suggestions for using ideas about formative assessment in preparation for year-end summative assessment.
- Encourage teachers to consider using one of the ideas presented in the article during the upcoming year-end review.
- Invite teachers to share their experiences, insights and the impact on student learning at the next staff meeting.

Sherry Bennett is the executive director of the Alberta Assessment Consortium. www.aac.ab.ca

Great Sources of News for School Leaders

Are you searching for interesting articles and ideas about school leadership? You will find some very timely articles in a range of school leadership publications that are available online.

Canadian Association of Principals (CAP) —*The CAP Journal* is published quarterly and is the official voice of the Canadian Association of Principals. The Spring 2017 edition contains interesting articles on diversity and also has information on using Alberta's school leadership competencies in practice. http://cdnprincipals.org/blog/2017/04/30/spring-2017-cap-journal/

European School Heads Association (ESHA) — The *ESHA Magazine* is published regularly throughout the year and contains very interesting articles that highlight issues Alberta school leaders share with their European colleagues. The most recent issue contains interesting discussions on the topic of entrepreneurial leadership. http://www.esha.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ESHA-magazine-February-2017.pdf

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) — *Principal* is a digital magazine produced five times per year by the NAESP. The most recent issue features a great article about incorporating technology into learning in interesting ways. http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/manifest/principal_20170304

You may also want to check out their principal's blog, which is full of great tips for school leaders, at https://www.naesp.org/front-page-blog-archive.

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) — Published September to May, *Principal Leadership* is an online periodical of the NASSP focusing on school leaders' real needs and offering them practical, hands-on strategies for improving their schools in a constantly evolving educational environment. https://www.nassp.org/news-and-resources/publications/principal-leadership/principal-leadership-archives/principal-leadership-volume-17-2016-17/principal-leadership-may-2017

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) — A massive, searchable and free collection of scholarly research materials on school leadership is available at AITSL's comprehensive archive. http://www.aitsl.edu.au/school-leadership-ecollection

iTunes U — **Alberta Teachers on iTunes U** — Each month, new courses and materials are added to the Alberta Teachers on iTunes U site at tinyurl.com/ATAiTunes. Currently, a range of new courses on Alberta's School Leader Standards is being added to the site.

Alberta Teachers on iTunes U

This month new courses to support leadership for French immersion have been added to the collection. Take a few moments to look at the great resources you will find from the ATA in the iTunes U collection to support your work. Watch for a variety of new courses in June and July to support you in your leadership role. To access the site, please visit tinyurl.com/ATAiTunes or scan the QR code on this page.

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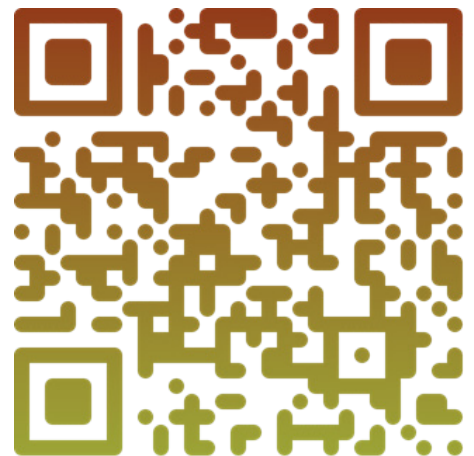
Council for School Leadership

As an Alberta school principal or assistant principal, you are encouraged to select the Council for School Leadership as your automatically renewing specialist council. If you are not already a member of the Council for School Leadership, please take a moment today to follow the link, bit.ly/joincsl, and complete the steps to join this school leadership specialist council. It is custom-made for school leaders and aspiring school leaders.