

Purposeful Hiring Practices and Leadership Development:

The Prairie Spirit Way

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What makes my job so exciting are the opportunities I have to be innovative in my teaching, to grow as an educator, to collaborate and connect with other educational professionals. . . I work in an environment where I am professionally flourishing. . .

T. Eaglesham, 2nd year teacher

Prairie Spirit School Division (PSSD; Prairie Spirit) is a central Saskatchewan school division which covers 15,000 square kilometres, an area roughly half the size of Vancouver Island. Its substantial geographical spread is the result of a 2006 amalgamation of three school divisions and includes nine Hutterite colonies and three First Nations communities. Today the division serves almost 12,000 students in 47 schools across 28 communities, employs 650 teachers and continues to see considerable enrolment growth each year. Prairie Spirit's vision of "learners for life" guides our mission "to learn without limits in a world of possibilities," supporting student learning and employee growth based on system-wide pedagogical learning beliefs and educational practices. Each school community, although distinctive, shares a common in-school administrator governance approach and each teacher is guided by the principles of the optimum learning environment of the My Prairie Spirit Classroom (MPSC) model. Rigor, relationship development, relevance, assessment for learning, and creativity undergird instructional design and influence teacher planning, instructional practices, student and adult learning opportunities in a My Prairie Spirit Classroom. With the classroom as the heart of our organization, we need to provide the most positive, capable and passionate teachers as student enrolment grows and teachers retire. About seven years ago, we realized a need to change the way we recruited, screened, hired and inducted new teachers and administrators. Not

only did we want to improve our HR practices, we also understood the link between targeted hiring, sustained professional development, employee well-being. According to positive psychology theorist, Seligman (2011), well-being is a key construct of flourishing. To flourish, one must have positive emotions, engagement, interest, meaning and purpose in life (Huppert & Timothy, as cited in Seligman, 2011). As Cherkowski and Walker (2014) have suggested, student learning is facilitated in positive learning communities where teachers feel they belong, they are working from their strengths, and are an important part of that community. Supporting new teachers and administrators is an investment in their well-being and a way to encourage flourishing of our students, classrooms, schools, and school division.

This chapter chronicles the transformation of Prairie Spirit's hiring and induction of new teachers, and senior leadership development in Prairie Spirit School Division. First, we look at our procedures for hiring teachers before 2009, what was working, what was not and then, how we built a new recruitment plan. The new practices undertaken, their theoretical underpinnings and beginning teacher professional development follow, with voices of these teachers sharing impressions of the induction methods. Next, we describe the changes made to our approach to succession planning and training for school administrators that unfolded parallel to our new teacher hiring redesign. Along the way, we consider the association between our emphasis on continuous improvement, learning, and flourishing schools, connections that we continue to refine.

Impetus for Change

Recruitment Redesign

The New Practice

What We Have Learned

Succession Planning for School Leadership

Perceived Need for Change Aligning

HR Practices with Division Goals

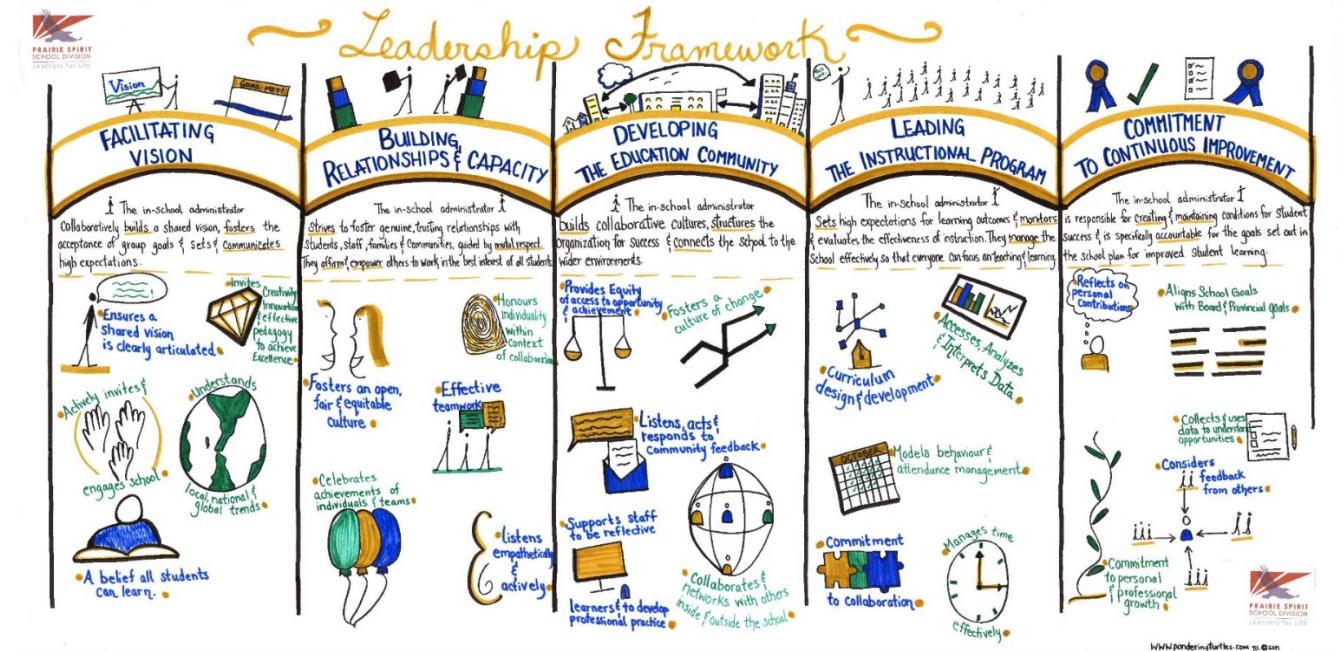


Figure 1. The Leadership Framework

Graphic Credit: Tara Shanks of Pondering Turtles

Aspiring Leadership Program

Our Interview Process

Flourishing Schools and a Flourishing Division

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