

**Professional Learning Communities: A Means to Support  
Quality Teaching and Student Learning**

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### **Abstract**

This capstone paper is set within the context of my role as a teacher and educational leader in Fort McMurray, Alberta and a student in the Master of Education program at Thompson Rivers University. Within my career, I have been lucky to be surrounded by colleagues who value collaboration and engage in ongoing learning to meet the evolving needs of their students. Through my experience and learning, I now understand the role professional learning communities play in improving educational practices and outcomes through enhanced communication and collaboration among teachers. As a result, I claim that well-structured professional learning communities lead to quality teaching and optimal learning for students. This is due to the focus on learning, collaborative culture, and a results orientation that professional learning communities are based (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997), resulting in increased collective efficacy and student achievement. Evidence will be presented through a review of the literature and an analysis of a real-world example of professional learning communities within the Fort McMurray Public School Division. The resulting implication is that professional learning communities positively impact teaching and learning and schools should take the steps necessary to incorporate them into their practice.

*Keywords:* professional learning communities, quality teaching, student learning, collaborative culture, collective efficacy

**Table of Contents**

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	5
My Learning Evolution.....	5
Defining a Professional Learning Community.....	7
Presenting My Argument.....	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
The Rationale for Professional Learning Communities.....	8
Quality Teaching.....	8
Collective Efficacy and Student Achievement.....	9
Professional Development Within Professional Learning Communities.....	10
Characteristics of a Well-Structured Professional Learning Community.....	10
A Focus on Learning.....	11
A Collaborative Culture and Collective Responsibility.....	12
A Results Orientation.....	12
The Impediments of Professional Learning Communities.....	13
Time.....	13
Value Placed on Praxis.....	14
Absence of a Growth Mindset.....	14
Arguments Against Professional Learning Communities.....	15
Top-Down PLCs and Teacher Autonomy.....	15
Over-Structured PLCs.....	16
Summary.....	16
Chapter 3: Professional Learning Communities in Action.....	17

Scholarly Examples of Successful PLCs.....	17
Evidence of Collective Efficacy.....	17
Evidence of Student Achievement.....	19
Professional Learning Communities in Fort McMurray Public School Division.....	20
Designing High-Quality PLFs.....	21
Evaluating PLFs.....	23
Summary.....	25
Chapter 4: Conclusion.....	26
Cumulative Review.....	26
Implications.....	28
Final Thoughts.....	29
References.....	31
Tables.....	38
Figures.....	42

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Until I became a teacher, my experience with education was my own. Upon entering my first grade one classroom in 2001, I realized that the educational experience I was embarking on was no longer mine, but that of the 22 little faces looking up at me. Any beginning teacher who tells you that they are not terrified on that first day in the classroom is lying. It is at that moment that you realize you have the greatest responsibility; to meet the diverse needs of every young heart and mind in your classroom. Not until I was a month or two into that first year of teaching did I discover what a daunting task it was. Every moment of every day required me to engage in quality teaching. I needed to build positive relationships, follow curriculum and policy, as well as differentiate instruction and assessment, all while creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment conducive to learning. Not only was it a big responsibility, but at times it was an overwhelming one. Lucky for me, my first years of teaching were at an especially collaborative school. Seasoned and beginning teachers worked together regularly to reflect on where our students were and where they needed to go. The teachers that I worked with in those early years not only showed me the value of reflection and collaboration, but also the importance of being a lifelong learner. They helped me recognize that to be a quality teacher you needed to be continually learning and growing and that your pedagogy needed to evolve with your students. Without realizing it at the time, they introduced me to my first professional learning community.

### **My Learning Evolution**

The understanding that quality teaching requires reflection, collaboration, and ongoing learning has stayed with me throughout my educational career. As an elementary teacher, I continued to work with my colleagues in collaborative environments. I focussed heavily on assessment for learning and the Understanding by Design framework. I also took on new roles

such as lead teacher and acting administrator to support my colleagues more formally. Then I took these experiences into a secondary environment where I applied what I had learned in elementary to my secondary classroom. I began collaborating with new colleagues and I learned from them as they learned from me. I began to expand my knowledge regarding how to engage my learners by using educational technology as well as by creating inclusive environments with 21st-century tools. This led to me becoming the head of educational technology at my school and a part of a variety of local and provincial initiatives in educational technology. It was at this point that I decided to enroll in the Master of Education program at Thompson Rivers University. The reason was two-fold; not only did I recognize that in order to advance further within my career I would need a postgraduate degree, but I also knew that by participating in graduate work I would have access to ideas and experiences outside of my existing community and understanding.

As I have worked my way through the Master of Education program, specific courses have spoken to me. Diversity: Constructing Social Realities helped me delve deeper into understanding the diversities within classrooms and how individual experiences impact how one learns. It strengthened my existing belief that to engage in quality teaching for all learners I needed to be open to various ways of knowing and had to meet learners where they were. The Principles and Processes of Educational Leadership course helped me understand the role distributed leadership plays in developing collective efficacy within schools. It also led to reflection regarding what it looks like to model a commitment to professional learning, lead a learning community, and provide instructional leadership. The Educational Management course allowed me to reflect on the struggles that educational leaders have in finding the necessary time and resources to support teachers and build capacity. Overall, the coursework allowed me to identify that without opportunities to engage in ongoing learning as an educator, one cannot truly

ensure quality teaching within the classroom. Furthermore, I recognized that as an educational leader, it was my responsibility to create collaborative and responsive learning communities to ensure optimum learning for all students. As a result, I have become an ardent believer that the professional learning community (PLC) framework is vital in fostering quality teaching and learning in schools.

### **Defining a Professional Learning Community**

“A professional learning community is a group of connected and engaged professionals who are responsible for driving change and improvement within, between and across schools that will directly benefit learners” (Harris & Jones, 2010, p. 173). They “operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators” ( Dufour et al., 2016, p. 10). True PLCs have shared values and norms and a clear and consistent focus on student learning. They also engage in reflective dialogue about curriculum, instruction and student development. Lastly, they strive to deprivatize the teaching practice and create a culture of collaboration and inquiry. (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008, p. 81).

Both school divisions I have worked for have been blessed to have time for professional learning communities embedded in the school calendar. Fridays within both divisions have come to be known as Professional Learning Fridays (PLFs). The intent of these days has always been to improve student learning outcomes. However, their effectiveness has ebbed and flowed over the years depending on division and school leadership and policy regarding their structure. Although I have always strived to use PLF time effectively and meaningfully, I have been in some schools where PLFs have flourished under school leadership and others where they have faltered. In those schools where PLFs flourished, teachers developed collective efficacy which positively impacted teaching and learning. Where they have faltered, many teachers fail to

commit to the process, leading to lacklustre results.

### **Presenting My Argument**

As a result, I claim that well-structured professional learning communities lead to quality teaching and optimal learning for students. In chapter 2, through reviewing the literature, I will explore the rationale for PLCs as well as discuss the role professional development plays within PLCs. I will examine the key characteristics of well-structured PLCs; a focus on learning, a collaborative culture, collective responsibility, and a results orientation. Lastly, I will investigate the impediments facing PLCs. In chapter three, I will explore PLCs in action. I will first give scholarly examples of successful PLCs that have led to increased collective efficacy and improved student learning outcomes. Then, I will examine how structured, sustained, and highly-focussed professional learning communities within the Fort McMurray Public School Division impact quality teaching and learning. Finally, in chapter four, I will summarize my findings and observations as well as discuss the implications.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

When examining the literature regarding professional learning communities and their impact on teaching and student learning outcomes, there are key themes that arise. The first is the difference between PLCs and professional development. Next is the structure of successful professional learning communities and the barriers that limit teacher engagement. Lastly, there are arguments against PLCs that exist and need to be recognized. Before examining these themes, however, it is important to first look at the rationale for PLCs.

### **The Rationale for Professional Learning Communities**

#### ***Quality Teaching***

One of the rationales for implementing professional learning communities lies within the



belief that quality teaching results in optimal student learning and that PLCs are an impetus for quality teaching. But what is quality teaching? Within the province of Alberta, the competencies required to engage in quality teaching are outlined in the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS).

According to the TQS, quality teachers (1) foster effective relationships, (2) engage in career-long learning, (3) demonstrate a professional body of knowledge, (4) establish inclusive learning environments, (4) apply foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, and (5) adhere to legal frameworks and policies (Alberta Education, 2020). The document also states that “quality teaching occurs best when teachers work together with other teachers in the common interest of helping all students succeed in diverse and complex learning environments” (p. 1).

### ***Collective Efficacy and Student Achievement***

The second rationale for PLCs relates to the relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement. Teachers who work together develop collective efficacy. Collective efficacy is “the shared beliefs of teachers within a school that they can collectively, significantly, and positively influence student learning” (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017, p. 2). Professional learning communities, which can be defined as “a group of committed educators working collaboratively in an ongoing process resulting in better student achievement” (Hoaglund et al., as cited in Brown et al., 2018, p. 54) are a vehicle for developing collective efficacy. A direct correlation between collective efficacy and student achievement has been well studied (Goddard et al., 2015) as has the connection between teacher collaboration and improved student learning outcomes (Goddard et al., 2007). This correlation supports the rationale for the implementation of professional learning communities as “PLCs have student achievement at the heart of their work” and “as teachers work together, . . . the ultimate reward is improved student learning”

(Reynolds, 2016, p. 9).

### **Professional Development Within Professional Learning Communities**

According to the Teaching Quality Standards, quality teachers must engage in ongoing analysis of the educational context to adapt and grow to meet the ever-evolving needs of their students (Alberta Education, 2020). Through effective collaboration, teachers can build on their distinctive experiences and pedagogies to engage in professional development that focuses on acquiring necessary skills and knowledge (Goddard et al., 2007).

When reviewing the literature one can see that professional learning communities have long been championed by educators as an effective structure for providing professional development to teachers (Bausmith & Barry, 2011). Desimone (2009) identifies content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation as the features that constitute successful professional development. There is also evidence that professional development impacts teacher efficacy and student achievement if it includes: (a) training over an extended period of time, (b) a focus on subject matter content and how students learn that content, and (c) opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively on strategies to support student learning (Bausmith & Barry, 2011). All of these features of professional development can be attained through the successful implementation of PLCs which have “the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning” (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008, p. 80).

### **Characteristics of a Well-Structured Professional Learning Community**

Professional learning communities “operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators” (Dufour et al., 2016, p. 10). Beliefs on what this looks like vary among scholars, but there seem to be two

key models that are most prevalent: the Hord (1997) model and the DuFour and Eaker (1998) model.

According to O'Neil (1995), both models stem from Peter Senge's learning organization theory which states that "a learning organization is an organization in which people at all levels are, collectively, continually enhancing their capacity to create things they really want to create" (p. 20). The goal of both models is to develop collective efficacy and increase student achievement, but their characteristics vary, particularly concerning four areas: (a) membership, (b) leadership, (c) orientation to organizational culture, and (d) knowledge sharing (Blankenship & Ruona, 2007). Table 1 summarizes how both models address these four areas. No matter the model, three main ideas drive the work of a successful PLC: (a) a focus on learning, (b) a collaborative culture and collective responsibility, and (c) a results orientation (DuFour et al., 2016).

### ***A Focus on Learning***

Successful PLCs maintain an unrelenting focus on learning for both students and staff. As educators, we know that "the purpose of schools is *student learning*, and that the most significant factor in whether students learn well is *teaching quality*. Further, teaching quality is improved through *continuous professional learning*" (Hord, 2009, p. 40). This focus on learning for both students and teachers is not possible without staff first developing a clear vision of what the school must become to help all students learn. Then they need to create shared values and goals which outline how the PLC members will work together to maintain that vision (Dufour et al, 2016; Hord, 2009). Once the vision, values, and goals are in place, school staff can examine the "instructional process and focus on the practices that can be more effective for student achievement" (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017, p. 16).

### ***A Collaborative Culture and Collective Responsibility***

The second underpinning of the PLC process is that to ensure all students learn at high levels, educators must engage in collaborative work and take collective responsibility for the success of each student (DuFour et al., 2016). Collaborative teams are probably the most impactful part of the PLC process. “Working together to build shared knowledge on the best way to achieve goals and meet the needs of those they serve” (DuFour et al., 2016) is basic teacher pedagogy. Collaboration leads to the “sharing of practical applications among teachers who have different levels of experience and knowledge” (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017, pp. 16-17) and encourages “a spirit of professional respect and trust [that] motivates teachers to work together on school improvement initiatives” (Morrissey, 2000, p. 36). When staff are focused on collaboration that impacts their individual and group practice, it leads to a sense of collective responsibility regarding student learning. By having the time, resources, and support needed to effectively collaborate (Hord, 2009) as well as the systematic processes put in place, PLCs can lead to a greater understanding of the work that needs to occur to achieve better results for student learning (DuFour et al., 2016).

### ***A Results Orientation***

“A professional learning community produces high levels of achievement for all students within an environment of continuous inquiry and improvement if it is focused on student results” (Morrissey, 2020, p. 7). Therefore, for PLC work to move forward, educators need to gather evidence of student learning. This evidence then drives their professional learning and practice as well as allows for the development of measurable improvement goals. DuFour et al. (2016) layout the following cyclical process to create conditions for perpetual learning:

- Gather evidence of current levels of student learning

- Develop strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning
- Implement those strategies and ideas
- Analyze the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not
- Apply new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement (p.12)

By cyclically reviewing and interpreting the data, educators can engage in both an active and reflective process which leads to continuous improvement (Hord, 2009).

### **The Impediments of Professional Learning Communities**

Although professional learning communities have been proven to positively impact quality teaching and improve student learning outcomes, there continue to be obstacles to their implementation. These impediments seem to revolve around three main areas; (a) time, (b) the value placed on praxis, (c) and the absence of a growth mindset.

#### ***Time***

The biggest impediment to professional learning communities is time. Teachers and leaders already have a lot on their plates. Long hours are already put in outside of the regular school day planning, creating resources, and assessing. There are also staff and parent meetings, extra-curricular activities, and supervision, all of which take up a great deal of time. Government has requirements regarding instructional minutes and contracts have assignable time limits. Therefore, finding time to engage in PLCs seems daunting.

Various studies report on the impact time has on professional learning communities. In their study of a failed professional learning community, Sims and Penny (2014) identify “insufficient time . . . allocated to allow for sufficiently rich and robust work in the PLC setting” (p. 43) as one of the key reasons that the PLC they studied failed. According to Bolam et al.

(2005), one of the main facilitators and inhibitors to ensuring effective PLCs was “time to carry out collective learning” and that clear systems and structures allowing for time and space for collaboration were paramount (p. 139). Lastly, Chua et al. (2020) reported that inconsistency in practicing PLCs was a key factor affecting staff buy-in. Therefore, unless leaders can find sustainable ways to dedicate consistent time to engage in PLCs, they will not have the desired impact.

### ***Value Placed on Praxis***

Praxis is the educational practice of reflecting on context to make positive educational change (Mahon et al., 2020, p.15). It is the necessity to recognize that to engage in quality teaching one must constantly be evaluating the ever-evolving educational context. Within professional learning communities “educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 10). That is, within PLCs, educators engage in praxis. The issue becomes those who do not see the necessity to grow or evolve. It is those that are using the same materials today that they used when they first started teaching and those who have tried and true methods and do not see value in changing what they believe works. Instead of engaging in praxis, they use the teaching practices that they are most comfortable with and resist learning new ones (Gutierrez & Heui-Baik, 2017). Praxis is also lost when educators engage in professional learning that they do not find relevant or has no practical application (Chuckry, 2019). Thus, to ensure praxis within PLCs, teachers must be involved in setting goals, choosing what they want to learn and be actively engaged in transforming their teaching together.

### ***Absence of a Growth Mindset***

Successful professional learning communities rely on their participants to have growth

mindsets. Participants need to recognize that failures will happen and that positive change can occur if we reflect on those failures and act accordingly. They also recognize that through effort, learning, and persistence, their abilities and pedagogy can grow (Heggart, 2015). A fixed mindset, on the other hand, can impede PLCs. Individuals with a fixed mindset believe they are either incapable of growth or that they are unable to enact positive change (Heggart, 2015). For teachers, this is often due to feelings of powerlessness about things that are out of their control. Like policy and governance, for example. As a result, teachers may not feel as though it is worth their time or effort to engage in ongoing learning and their lack of effort and negative attitude can impact growth (Chuckry, 2019). The challenge, therefore, becomes helping teachers to recognize that although they cannot control every aspect of education, there are many elements that they do have control over. It is through reflection, planning, action, and observation that they can drive change and improvement.

### **Arguments Against Professional Learning Communities**

Although the literature proves that professional learning communities positively impact teaching and learning, there are still many in the field that argue against them. All of these arguments seem to stem from the fact that at times, professional learning communities do not align with their true intent and instead become top-down and overly structured. As such, it is important to explore these arguments in order to address them.

#### ***Top-Down PLCs and Teacher Autonomy***

Teachers often argue that professional learning communities take away their autonomy. An online search of teacher views regarding PLCs came up with comments such as: “many administrators use the PLC movement as a guise under which they can mandate conformity among their faculty” (Meeks, 2013) and “to treat teachers professionally is to acknowledge that

they aren't all the same, and may not want to do the same things in the classroom" (Nunnery, 2021). Although these are valid points, if PLCs are structured in the way the research says they should be, then autonomy should still be intact. PLCs should focus on a shared vision (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997) and teachers need to have autonomy in how to meet the vision. Therefore, PLCs need to include personal choice, collaborative decision-making, and the freedom to make professional choices (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

### ***Over-Structured PLCs***

Another argument regarding PLCs is that they can be over-structured. Sometimes leaders assign teachers to groups or roles, give specific topics for collaboration, spend an inordinate amount of time on data, and mandate professional development that does not align with everyone's needs (Provini, 2013; Mielke, 2015). This usually stems from an educational leader's desire "to serve as "engaged instructional leaders" (Wallace Foundation, 2006) who can develop effective teams in their schools to drive sustained improvements in teaching and learning in every classroom" (as cited in Humada-Ludeke, 2013, p. 15). Instead, in regard to PLCs, leaders need to engage in distributive leadership, that is, engage in an "inclusive leadership approach that fosters collaborative and ethical practice (Wright, 2008, p. 7). Through distributed leadership, school administrators build an "infrastructure that holds the community together, as it is the collective work of educators, at multiple levels who are leading innovative work that creates and sustains successful professional learning communities" (Harris & Jones, 2010, p. 174).

### **Summary**

In reviewing the literature, it is apparent that well-structured professional learning communities impact quality teaching and optimal learning for students. "Communities that engage[d] in structured, sustained, and supported instructional discussions and investigated the



relationships between instructional practices and student work produce[d] significant gains in student learning” (Supovitz & Christman, as cited in Vescio et al., 2008, p. 87). Also, to counteract impediments to and arguments against PLCs, they must be structured such that both leaders and teachers “combine [their] mission, vision and values into a collective commitment” (Waterhouse, 2003).

### **Chapter 3: Professional Learning Communities in Action**

To further demonstrate that professional learning communities play a role in ensuring quality teaching that benefits student learning, it is important to examine PLCs in action. To do this, I will first examine the conclusions that other scholars have come to in their studies of professional learning communities. I will then do an analysis of my own context and the PLCs that run within the school division where I work. Through this analysis, I will show that well-structured professional learning communities lead to successful ones. That is, they “improv[e] the quality of teaching and contribut[e] to sustainable progress in student learning” (Hallam et al., 2015, pp. 193-194).

#### **Scholarly Examples of Successful PLCs**

##### ***Evidence of Collective Efficacy***

As discussed in the literature review, collective efficacy is “the beliefs that organizational members hold about their work groups’ capacity to organize and execute a plan of action necessary to reach desired goals, that is, enhanced student learning and performance” (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017, p. 5). Within a professional learning community, the stronger the sense of collective efficacy, the more the members will engage in the sustained effort and persistence necessary to meet the overall vision (Goddard & Skrla, 2006) and “the more efficacious teachers are the better they perform, impacting on the quality of teaching” (Dimopoulou, 2014, 1474).

In their multilevel analysis of the impact of a professional learning community, faculty trust in colleagues, and collective efficacy on teacher commitment to students, Lee et al. (2011) surveyed 660 teachers from 33 schools in Hong Kong. Using hierarchical linear modelling, they determined that PLCs significantly and positively affected teachers' collective efficacy. Gray and Summers (2015) conducted a quantitative study on the role of enabling school structures, trust, and collective efficacy in relation to PLCs. They surveyed 193 teachers from International Schools using American curriculum and found that schools whose staff demonstrated collective efficacy, had established school structures, and had high trust in school leadership and colleagues, were more likely to develop a successful professional learning community.

Robert Voelkel (2011) conducted a mixed-methods study using a quantitative survey exploring PLC characteristics and a qualitative interview of teachers. The participants included in his study were 310 teachers and principals from 16 schools in one district. He found that teachers had increased collective efficacy in the presence of a positive PLC experience. Voelkel later joined with Janet Chrispeels (2017) on a mixed-method study focussing on the link between professional learning communities and teacher collective efficacy. Drawing from the data collected in Voelkel's 2011 study, they used structural equation modelling to determine that higher functioning PLCs predict higher levels of teacher collective efficacy.

As demonstrated by the four studies above, increased teacher efficacy is positively correlated with professional learning communities, which demonstrates an element of success in regard to PLCs. To show further evidence of successful PLCs in action, I will now examine the scholarly conclusions made concerning the impact of increased collective efficacy developed through PLCs on the overall goal of improving student learning outcomes.

### ***Evidence of Student Achievement***

According to Moolenaar et al. (2012), collective efficacy is a predictor of increased student achievement. As evidenced by the research in the prior section, PLCs act as a conduit for developing collective efficacy. Effective PLCs also “align student achievement with school and system goals, and maintain appropriate student data-driven conversations” (Reynolds, 2016, p. 11). Staff prioritize student achievement within PLCs by asking questions such as (a) What areas do students need to be knowledgeable in?, (b) How will we know what they have learned?, (c) What do we do about what they have not learned?, and (d) What can we do for learners who have already mastered the necessary content? (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

Vescio et al. (2008) conducted a literature review that examined the impact of PLCs on student learning. They reviewed 11 studies, 10 from the United States and one from England. Eight of the 11 studies found that student learning improved when teachers participated in professional learning communities. As collaboration is a key component of PLCs, Ronfeldt et al.'s (2015) study on teacher collaboration and student achievement is also relevant. Through a two-year quantitative study which used survey and administrative data on over 9,000 teachers in 336 Miami-Dade County schools, they determined that schools that reported better collaboration also had higher student achievement outcomes in both reading and math. Lastly, Lomos et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of five quantitative studies with participants from secondary schools. Using conceptual and methodological criteria to analyze the selected studies they were able to ascertain that there was a significant summary effect ( $d = 0.25$ ,  $p$  less than 0.05), meaning that within a school, PLCs could enhance student achievement.

All three of these studies align with the assertion that professional learning communities have a positive impact on student achievement. Combined with the evidence that PLCs

positively impact teacher efficacy, which in turn builds teacher competency, it is evident that the application of the professional learning community is an excellent strategy for ensuring both quality teaching and student growth.

### **Professional Learning Communities in Fort McMurray Public School Division**

The Fort McMurray Public School Division (FMPSD) is a learning community dedicated to educating all students for personal excellence and aims to provide high-quality learning opportunities for all students leading to excellence in student learning outcomes (Fort McMurray Public School Division, n.d.). To support their mission the Board of Trustees has outlined four areas of priority:

1. Promote Growth and Success for All Students
2. Maintain Safe and Caring Learning Environments and Supports
3. Effective Stakeholder Engagement
4. Strengthen Quality Teaching and Leading

The Board recognizes that professional learning communities are a proven way to fulfill these priorities. Thus, they have allotted 13 Professional Learning Fridays (PLFs) within the annual school calendar (Fort McMurray Public School Division, 2022). The Board of Trustees recognizes that PLFs

provide regular opportunities for exchange of teacher expertise to increase student achievement. Areas of professional growth needs are identified and planned out at the teacher and school level using common planning tools across the division. Staff collaborate in system-wide grade-level teams and school-based instructional teams to enhance teachers' skills for educating a diverse student body and holding high

expectations for student achievement. (Fort McMurray Public School Division, 2021, p. 30)

As such, they have tasked educational leaders with designing high-quality structured PLFs that align with FMPSD and school goals as well as support quality teaching and optimal student learning.

### ***Designing High-Quality PLFs***

The Leadership Quality Standard in Alberta requires school leaders to model a commitment to professional learning as well as “nurture and sustain a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning” (Alberta Education, 2020, p. 3). As such, Fort McMurray Public Schools leaders have been tasked with leading a learning community through high-quality PLFs.

To support leaders at the school level, a lot of work first happens at the division level. To start, following board approval of the annual calendar, the Education Department develops the Collaborative Learning Cycle (Figure 1) based on the prior year’s stakeholder engagement data. The cycle includes information about division-wide goals, PLFs, professional development, and school division and provincial assessment and reporting. The cycle also includes the Teaching Quality Standard and Leadership Quality Standard braids to reinforce that the standards are a key component of the collaborative learning cycle.

Following the release of the collaborative cycle, school leaders come together to examine division-level data regarding student achievement and make connections to their school-level data. Time is also given to refresh leaders on PLF’s purpose: to create a community of engaged professionals who focus on “improv[ing] student achievement through changing teaching and classroom practices” (Harris & Jones, 2010, p. 173), and the common structure: an 8:30 to 3:30

schedule, with 60 minutes being allotted to division-wide collaboration at the beginning of the day and the last hour of the day focusing on mental health learning. For new leaders, mentorship opportunities are also provided.

Following the work at the division level, school leaders go back to their schools to begin planning the professional learning cycle for their individual schools. They begin by collecting and analyzing the current year's data and stakeholder feedback. Using that data, leaders work with their staff to generate school goals for the following year. This step is imperative as, without staff engagement in goal setting, praxis is less likely to occur. Using the data compiled and the devised goals, school leaders develop their education plans.

Once the school's education plan has been created, school leaders must begin the process of creating their comprehensive PLF plan for the upcoming year. Many create a collaborative team to support the PLF development and delivery. Team members may include teachers, learning assistance coordinators, school counsellors, and division coordinators and supervisors. Through their combined expertise and using the school's education plan as a guide, a fluid outline of the following year's PLFs is created (Figure 2). These documents are then synthesized into the School Comprehensive Learning Cycle document that is shared among division leaders in order for divisional collaborative opportunities to be identified (Figure 3).

Once the school year begins, school leaders are tasked with not only ensuring that PLFs align with school and division goals and follow the collaborative cycle but also with protecting PLFs. PLF is not a time for staff meetings, outlier professional development, or classroom work. That does not mean that existing PLF plans are not fluid and cannot evolve. Instead, it means aligning changes with existing goals and ensuring that PLFs have a focus on learning, a collaborative culture, and a results orientation (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997).

As leaders, school administrators are at the helm of PLFs, however, teachers and educational assistants are the linchpins of the collaborative process. Using the Collaborative Response Model developed by Kurtis Hewson, Lorna Hewson, and Jim Parsons (2016), teachers identify the key issues in their classrooms in relation to school goals and create action items necessary to support students. During collaborative time, teachers then work together on action items to increase their knowledge and expand their repertoire. During this time teachers also identify supports they may need to further their learning. School leaders then collaborate with other schools and Division Office in order to locate supports and provide delivery opportunities at future PLFs. The key is, PLFs are always based on a cycle of continuous improvement where staff evaluate, learn, plan, and act.

### ***Evaluating PLFs***

If, as I have argued, the role of PLCs is to support quality teaching and improve student learning outcomes, how do educational leaders know if they are hitting the mark? According to Killion (2017):

Standards-aligned professional learning requires the use of data for continuous formative and summative evaluation to measure its processes and progress toward identified short- and long-term outcomes and to make data-informed decisions about midcourse adjustments to increase the likelihood of positive results. (p. 26)

Professional learning, like learning in the classroom, needs to be evaluated. In the classroom, we do not know if our students are meeting the educational objectives without assessing where they are or what understandings they have come away with. Educators engaging in professional learning are no different. Through evaluation, “important insights [can be made] about the

strengths and challenges of the professional learning and how current efforts can be improved” (Breslow & Bock, 2020, p.1).

When evaluating professional learning, Killion (2017) identifies three main areas of focus. The first is merit, which is whether the professional learning meets the standards for professional learning identified within the literature review: a focus on learning, a collaborative culture, and a results orientation (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997). The second is worth. Worth refers to the perceived value of professional learning. Does it involve praxis (Mahon et al., 2020)? Does it increase efficacy (Voelkel & Chrispeels., 2017)? Lastly, impact needs to be evaluated. Is the professional learning contributing to the desired outcomes? Are quality teaching standards met? Are student learning outcomes positively impacted?

Within FMPSD, evaluating PLFs not only allows educational leaders to ensure they are on the right path but is also mandated by the school board to justify the time allocated within the school calendar. Teachers are surveyed three times a year to ensure PLFs continue to support professional practice capacity resulting in optimum learning for all students. Staff are asked to answer strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree to the following statements:

1. During FMPSD PLF days, professional learning time at my school meets the criteria of the Alberta Assurance Framework and the research on professional learning time.
2. The PLF Cycle contributed to my understanding of teaching/leadership practices.
3. I plan to apply my learning.
4. During PLF time I was able to focus on my learning goals.

Staff are also asked to answer or provide examples for the following:

1. Identify an aspect of the learning opportunities that made it meaningful.
2. Identify an aspect of my learning opportunity that might be improved.



3. One thing that I require to further support my professional learning.
4. What evidence do you have that professional learning has had an impact in your classroom?

Lastly, staff are required to identify their school and whether they are an early learning/division one/two/three/four teacher, a learning resource team member, or a school-based administrator.

Results are then analyzed at the division level by a team versed in data collection and response coding (Table 2). Results are then compiled at both the division and school levels and an infographic is created to share the data division-wide (Figure 4). Division-level results are first discussed and analyzed at a Division Leaders Meeting and collaboration occurs between leaders regarding changes that need to be made or supports that are required. Individual school results are then taken back to schools for discussion and analysis at the school level and processes are modified as necessary in order to strengthen results.

### **Summary**

Within the first portion of this chapter, the application of professional learning communities within scholarly studies shows that successful PLCs lead to collective efficacy and increased student achievement. The second portion of the chapter discusses the PLC, or PLF in the case of FMPSD, framework in action. As evidenced by the data collection completed by FMPSD (Table 2), PLFs are well structured, meaningful, increase teacher understanding, and positively impact students. Thus, both the scholarly evidence and the real-world example of professional learning communities in action support my assertion that well-structured PLCs leads to quality teaching and optimal learning for students.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

“Professional learning communities offer an infrastructure to create the supportive cultures and conditions necessary for achieving significant gains in teaching and learning. Professional learning communities provide opportunities for professional staff to look deeply into the teaching and learning process and to learn how to become more effective in their work with students” (Morrissey, 2000, p. 3). As a result, positive student learning outcomes are achieved through responsive and pedagogically sound teaching developed through well-structured professional learning communities. Within my capstone paper, I have strived to support this claim through my personal experience in chapter one, scholarly evidence in chapter two, and real-world examples in chapter three.

### **Cumulative Review**

Throughout my educational career, I have always valued learning and collaboration. As both an elementary and secondary teacher, I strived to learn new ways to support my students and to build connections with colleagues who also recognized the positive impacts that collaboration played on teacher pedagogy and student outcomes. Through my post-graduate coursework, I came to realize that it was not just collaboration that led to these changes, but it was the intentional work of professional learning communities that was the impetus for quality teaching and improved student learning.

The literature review allowed me to not only clearly establish what quality teaching entails, but also led me to have a better understanding of the key elements of successful professional learning communities: focusing on learning rather than teaching, working collaboratively, and being accountable for results (Dufour, 2004). I was also able to identify impediments to PLCs: time, a lack of praxis, and a limited growth mindset as well as counter

arguments against them. The review clearly reinforced the understanding that “successful implementation of PLCs requires that an organization of teachers and administrators work collaboratively in an ongoing process of structured inquiry and action research for the purpose of achieving better results for their students by ensuring high levels of learning for all” (as cited in Battersby & Verdi, 2015, p. 24).

Once I reflected on why professional learning communities were a topic of interest and focused on the elements of, impediments to, and arguments against PLCs, I was better able to examine PLCs in action with a critical lens. In the scholarly examples I shared, I have shown that collective efficacy and improved student learning outcomes are indeed correlated with successful PLCs. In examining the PLF structure within Fort McMurray Public School Division, I was able to prove by the data collected that professional learning communities that align with Division and school goals and the standards associated with quality teaching, positively impact student learning outcomes.

Through the proceeding three chapters, I believe I have successfully supported all aspects of my argument. First, through the literature review, I present the characteristics of a well-structured PLC (Dufour et. al. 2016; Hord, 2009; Morrissey, 2000). Fort McMurray Public Schools also recognizes the importance of ensuring PLCs are well structured, and as such, during the 2021-2022 school year, began asking staff to respond to the following using a four-point Likert scale: During FMPSD PLF days, professional learning time at my school meets the criteria of the Alberta Assurance Framework and the research on professional learning time. The data (Figure 5) shows that over 90% of teachers either strongly agree or agree that PLFs align with both the research regarding PLC structure and assurance models. In regard to quality teaching, the scholarly evidence I presented showed the impact that collective efficacy developed

during PLCs has on quality teaching (Lee et al., 2011; Gray & Summers, 2015; Voelkel, 2011; Voelkel and Chrispeels, 2017) and teachers in FMPSD have overwhelmingly reported that PLFs have a meaningful impact on teacher learning and understanding (Figure 5). Lastly, optimal learning for students as a result of professional learning communities has been proven within the scholarly studies I reviewed (Vescio et al., 2008; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Lomos et al., 2011). Within FMPSD, teachers profusely reported their intent to apply their learning within their classroom as well as evidence of positive impacts on students (Figure 5).

### **Implications**

This paper contributes to the overall conversation regarding the value of professional learning communities and whether the time and effort spent has a positive impact. Scholarly research shows that there is a positive correlation between PLCs, quality teaching, and student learning outcomes and this paper further supports the research with the data reported from FMPSD. This paper also shows how professional learning communities can be a supporting structure for schools to analyze and respond to an ever-evolving educational context through their internal capacity. That is, through PLCs, schools can be “capable of productively responding, not only to such current initiatives in today’s environment but to the needless number of initiatives, including new definitions of school effectiveness, that inevitably will follow” (Leithwood & Louis, 1998, p. 6)

The success of incorporating time within a school calendar to allow for professional learning communities is clearly evident in the data that has been compiled by the Fort McMurray Public School Division (Figure 5). FMPSD acknowledges this success, and the reason for it, in its 2022-2025 Education Plan (2022):

The Board’s forward-thinking desire to ensure staff are well equipped has led to this

dedicated set of time for collaboration and professional learning. The belief is that for staff to be as effective as possible for our students, they must have ongoing, data-supported, opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills. Through this planning and work, we have seen an impact on student learning and achievement. By establishing professional learning time to create a culture of excellence, we ensure our staff as a whole continue their lifelong learning journey. (p.21)

By compiling all of this evidence within my capstone paper, I would love to see other school divisions learn more about the increase in quality teaching and positive learning outcomes as a result of professional learning communities within Fort McMurray Public Schools. Perhaps, information about FMPSD's successful implementation of well-structured PLCs could be shared with other educational leaders through the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Alberta School Boards Association, and the Alberta Teachers' Association. Ideally, educational leaders outside of FMPSD would see that successful PLCs are "a balance between organizational structure and productive, substantive use of that organization and time" (Morrissey, 2020, p. 43) and lead to teachers embracing a growth mindset which supports student achievement.

### **Final Thoughts**

Writing this capstone paper has further cemented my belief that professional learning communities are key in ensuring quality teaching that leads to positive learning outcomes for students. I think the following quote from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) says it best:

If adults don't learn then students won't learn either . . . The school operates as a learning community that uses its own experience and knowledge, and that of others, to improve the performance of students and teachers alike . . . They must be a place where learning

isn't isolated, where adults demonstrate they care about kids but also about each other. In such places, learning takes place in groups. A culture of shared responsibility is established, and everybody learns from one another. (p. 5)

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**Table 1***Comparison of Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities*

Model	Theory Base	Membership	Leadership	Organizational Culture	Knowledge Sharing
DuFour & Eaker (PLCs)	Organizational Learning	Membership is a forgone conclusion by virtue of status as a faculty member; teachers are assigned to a collaborative team to work on substantive school issues	Principal; shares decision-making; provides staff with information and training; model behaviors congruent with vision and values; results-oriented	Shared mission, vision and values drive the work; collaboration is key; innovation, experimentation and a focus on results are vital aspects	Discussion is limited; team members collaborate, but how teams create new knowledge and share it with the whole organization is not discussed at length
Hord (PLCs)	Organizational Learning	Membership is a forgone conclusion by virtue of status as a faculty member; size of learning teams varies (few people to whole faculty)	Provided by principal; should provide supportive conditions within the school	Shared vision and values drive the work; collaboration is achieved through shared practice; cultural shift is paramount to becoming a PLC	Teachers participate in reflective dialogue; peer coaching and feedback are also ways knowledge is shared

*Note.* Adapted from “Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice: A

Comparison of Models, Literature Review,” by S. S. Blankenship and W. E. A. Ruona, W. E. A., 2007, p. 4.

**Table 2***2021-2022 PLF Survey Results and Response Coding*

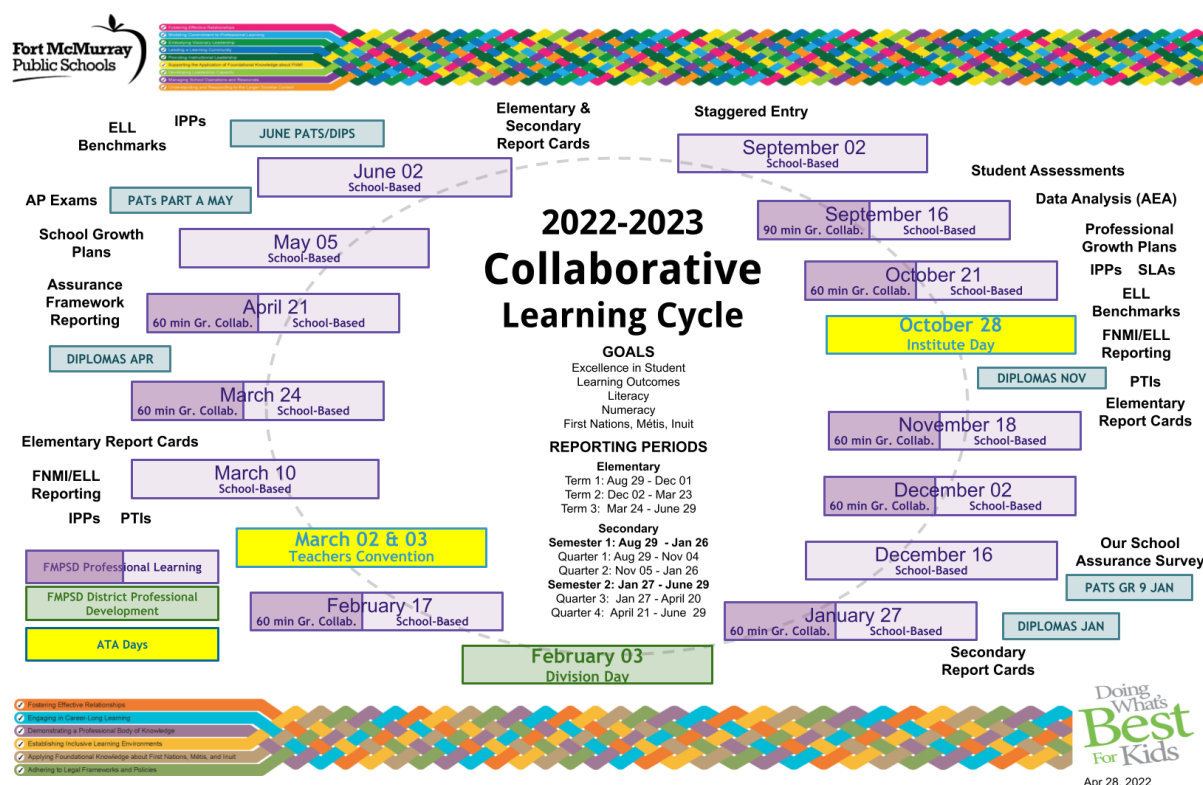
<b>Survey Questions</b>	<b>December 2021</b>	<b>April 2022</b>	<b>June 2022</b>
During 2/3 of the 2021-2022 PLF cycle professional learning time at my school meets the criteria of the Alberta Assurance Framework and research on professional learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 46%</li> <li>• Agree 50%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 96%</li> <li>• Disagree 3%</li> <li>• Strongly Disagree 1%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 4%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 40%</li> <li>• Agree 53%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 93%</li> <li>• Disagree 7%</li> <li>• Strongly Disagree 0%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 7%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 37%</li> <li>• Agree 59%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 96%</li> <li>• Disagree 3%</li> <li>• Strongly Disagree 1%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 4%</li> </ul>
During PLF time I was able to focus on my learning goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 25%</li> <li>• Agree 58%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 83%</li> <li>• Disagree 13%</li> <li>• Strongly Disagree 4%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 17%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 29%</li> <li>• Agree 56%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 85%</li> <li>• Disagree 12%</li> <li>• Strongly Disagree 3%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 15%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 28%</li> <li>• Agree 62%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 90%</li> <li>• Disagree 9%</li> <li>• Strongly Disagree 1%</li> <li>• Disagree combined 10%</li> </ul>
PLF Cycle contributed to my understanding of teaching and leadership practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 32%</li> <li>• Agree 57%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 89%</li> <li>• Disagree 8%</li> <li>• Strongly Disagree 3%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 11%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 36%</li> <li>• Agree 57%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 93%</li> <li>• Disagree 5%</li> <li>• Strongly Disagree 2%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 7%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 37%</li> <li>• Agree 59%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 96%</li> <li>• Disagree 4%</li> <li>• Strongly Disagree 72%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 4.5%</li> </ul>
I plan to apply my learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 40%</li> <li>• Agree 55%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 95%</li> <li>• Disagree 2%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 46%</li> <li>• Agree 48%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 94%</li> <li>• Disagree 4%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Agree 42%</li> <li>• Agree 56%</li> <li>• Agree Combined 98%</li> <li>• Disagree 1%</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Disagree 3%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 5%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Disagree 2%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 6%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strongly Disagree 1%</li> <li>• Disagree Combined 1%</li> </ul>
An aspect of this learning opportunity that made it meaningful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration time with colleagues</li> <li>• Content and specific learning such as:</li> <li>• Collaborative Response Model</li> <li>• Mental health supports</li> <li>• Classroom management</li> <li>• Focus on literacy</li> <li>• Reconciliation Education</li> <li>• The support of Division specialists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration time with colleagues</li> <li>• Ability to focus on an area to grow</li> <li>• Focus on literacy, numeracy</li> <li>• Reconciliation Education and Indigenous focus</li> <li>• Focus on CRM has been beneficial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Content (Mental Health, CRM, FNMI, Empowering writers, diversity, inclusion, apply schools, literacy/numeracy, new curriculum, technology, assessment practices)</li> <li>• Resources and teacher practice</li> <li>• Student learning</li> </ul>
An aspect that might be improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased focus on Early Learning, French, Numeracy, and Literacy</li> <li>• Learning about time, classroom and behaviour management strategies</li> <li>• Limited time to apply learning due to PLF structure</li> <li>• Less mental health videos, more social emotional learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased focus on Early Learning, French, Numeracy, and Literacy</li> <li>• Ability to change groups part way through year</li> <li>• Wonderful resources and learning, now need more time to implement them</li> <li>• Less focus on mental health videos, more on how to help students with mental health issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Learning Design</li> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Time to implement</li> <li>• Just time</li> </ul>



One thing I require to further support my professional learning is:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time with colleagues</li> <li>• PLF time to have a clear structure, with clear goals and objectives</li> <li>• Mental health hour focusing on what we can use/do in our classrooms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time with colleagues to continue</li> <li>• Clear goals to time, but then time to work on those goals and items learned during CRM and other activities</li> <li>• Mental health hour have a wider variety of options to participate in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to implement or Time</li> <li>• Content 49/187 (curriculum, technology, leadership, math, mental wellbeing, literacy, classroom mgmt, diversity, music, early learning)</li> <li>• Professional learning design</li> <li>• Teacher practice and resources.</li> </ul>
What evidence do you have that professional learning has had an impact in your classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Reinforcement of knowledge and new learning makes me better equipped to meet student needs"</li> <li>• Positive relationships with students and families</li> <li>• Growth in student literacy</li> <li>• Positive student feedback regarding school/classroom experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are improving in areas I have focused on</li> <li>• Students are more engaged with areas I am working on</li> <li>• Growth in student literacy</li> <li>• Increased quality of assessments used in class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff approaches change resulting in student change</li> <li>• Focus on teacher practice</li> <li>• Student evidence - what's changing in students</li> </ul>

*Note.* This information was shared with the author of this paper as part of their educational leadership role within the division. Permission to share has been granted by the Superintendent (Figure 6).

**Figure 1***Fort McMurray Public School Division 2022-2023 Collaborative Learning Cycle*

*Note.* This graphic was created by the Education Department of the Fort McMurray Public School Division. Permission to share has been granted by the Superintendent (Figure 6).

**Figure 2***Sample Comprehensive PLF Plan*

Friday, September 2nd, 2022		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:00	PLF Process Review	PLF is cyclic Review 2021-2022 PLF Feedback Review Dr. Clark 2021-2022 PLF Goals (Literacy and Numeracy) based on PLF feedback and school results.
9:00 - 9:30	Literacy	Where are we with Literacy Where do we want to go? How are we going to continue?
9:30 - 9:45	Break	
9:45 - 10:15	Numeracy	Where are we with Numeracy Where do we want to go? Where do we start?
10:15 - 11:30	Curriculum	Review new report card standards and make connections to the new curriculum
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 2:15	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	Using physical activity to help with the regulation in the classroom

Friday, September 16th, 2022		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 10:00	Division Collaborative Time	
10:00 - 10:30	Travel/Break	
10:30 - 11:30	Numeracy/Literacy	Literacy/Numeracy Assessment Requirements at different grade levels
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	Review DC Continuum of Supports
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	School Based Regulation - Sensory Fidgets

Friday, October 21st, 2022		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:30	Division Collaborative Time	
9:30 - 9:45	Break	
9:45 - 10:30	CRM Review	Review CRM with Marilyn Schmitke from Jigsaw Learning
10:30 - 11:15	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
11:15 - 11:30	CRM Debrief	Debrief CRM with Marilyn Schmitke from Jigsaw Learning
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	Numeracy/Literacy	Making connections between knowledge, understandings and skills & procedures
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	School Based Regulation - School Functioning

Friday, November 18th, 2022		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:30	Division Collaborative Time	
9:30 - 9:45	Numeracy Moment	Numeracy puzzle to use in your classroom to support numeracy fluency
9:45 - 10:00	Break	
10:00 - 11:30	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
1:00 - 2:00	Numeracy	Mathology EL and Div 1, Hands on Math Div 2
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	Using art to support classroom regulation

Friday, December 2nd, 2022		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:30	Division Collaborative Time	
9:30 - 9:45	Numeracy Moment	Numeracy puzzle to use in your classroom to support numeracy fluency

9:45 - 10:00	Break	
10:00 - 11:30	Numeracy/Literacy	Based on Needs
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	Mental Health Podcast with Mellanie Fraser

Friday, December 16th, 2022		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:30	First Nations, Métis, Inuit	Reflecting on current First Nation, Métis, Inuit supports and how we need to adjust as we move forward this year
9:30 - 9:45	Numeracy Moment	Numeracy puzzle to use in your classroom to support numeracy fluency
9:45 - 10:00	Break	
10:00 - 11:30	Numeracy/Literacy	Based on Needs
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	Regulation after the break (WITS, Leader in Me, DC Mental Health Toolkit, etc...)

Friday, January 27th, 2023		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:30	Division Collaborative Time	

9:30 - 10:15	PLF/CRM Reflection	Reflect: -What happened? -How do you feel? -What went well? -What didn't go well? Learn: -Why have we had success? -Why didn't it go so well? Plan: -What do we need to do now? -How do we do it? -What are the steps?
10:15 - 10:30	Break	
10:30 - 11:30	Numeracy/Literacy	Based on Needs
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	School Based Regulation (Circle of Security/Roots of Empathy/Sensory/Non-verbal, Deaf, ELL/NVCI, 2SLGBTQIAA+ (star activity))

Friday, February 17th, 2023		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:30	Division Collaborative Time	
9:30 - 9:45	Numeracy Moment	Numeracy puzzle to use in your classroom to support numeracy fluency
9:45 - 10:00	Break	
10:00 - 11:30	Numeracy/Literacy	Based on Needs
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	School Based Regulation (Circle of Security/Roots of Empathy/Non-verbal, Deaf, ELL/2SLGBTQIAA+ (star activity))

Friday, March 10th, 2022		
Time	Topic	Details

8:30 - 9:30	GETCA Reflection	-Share sessions that were impactful as a staff. -Reflect on learning that occurred.
9:30 - 9:45	Numeracy Moment	Numeracy puzzle to use in your classroom to support numeracy fluency
9:45 - 10:00	Break	
10:00 - 11:30	Numeracy/Literacy	Based on Needs
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	School Based Regulation (Circle of Security/Roots of Empathy/Non-verbal, Deaf, ELL/2SLGBTQIAA+ (star activity))

Friday, March 24th, 2023		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:30	Division Collaborative Time	
9:30 - 10:00	School Assurance Plan	Initial reflection to support school assurance plan
10:00 - 10:15	Numeracy Moment	Numeracy puzzle to use in your classroom to support numeracy fluency
10:15 - 10:30	Break	
10:30 - 11:30	Numeracy/Literacy	Based on Needs
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	Using art to support student regulation

Friday, April 21st, 2023		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:30	Division Collaborative Time	
9:30 - 10:00	School Assurance Plan	Sharing current state of the plan to get feedback

10:00 - 10:15	Numeracy Moment	Numeracy puzzle to use in your classroom to support numeracy fluency
10:15 - 10:30	Break	
10:30 - 11:30	Numeracy/Literacy	Based on Needs
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	Using Yoga/Movement to support student regulation

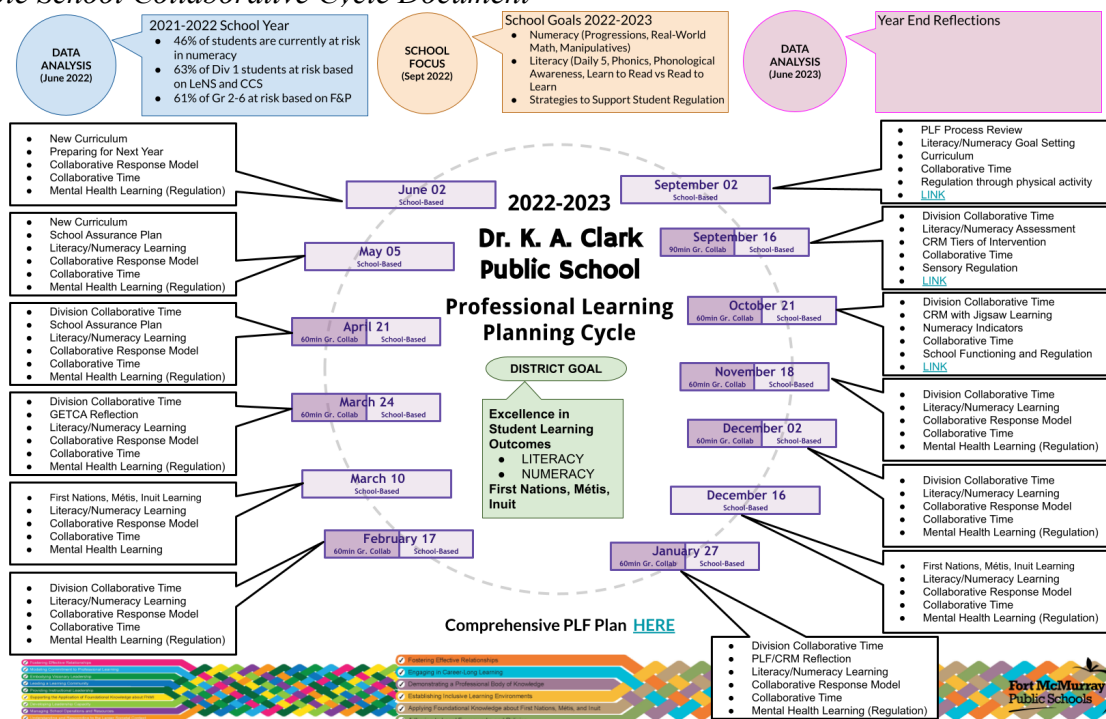
Friday, June 02, 2023		
Time	Topic	Details
8:30 - 9:45	New Curriculum	Based on Needs
9:45 - 10:00	Break	
10:00 - 11:30	Preparing for Next Year	Goals Transitioning
11:30 - 12:30	Lunch	
12:30 - 1:00	CRM	DC Collaborative Response Model Meeting Overview
1:00 - 2:00	Collaborative Time	Group goals that align with school literacy and numeracy goals. CRM action items.
2:15 - 2:30	Break	
2:30 - 3:30	Mental Health Learning	Mental Health 2023-2024 menu/planning

*Note.* This comprehensive PLF plan was created by the author of this paper as part of their role as Vice-Principal of Dr. K. A. Clark School. Permission to share has been granted by the Superintendent (Figure 6).



Figure 3

## Sample School Collaborative Cycle Document



### Dr. K. A. Clark Public School Professional Learning Cycle Detailed Information

#### Data Analysis (June 2022)

Our school wide results on the MIPI have identified that 46% of our students are currently at risk in numeracy

Based on LeNS and CC3 data collected, 63% of our Division One students are at risk, below grade level expectations.

Fountas & Pinnell data shows that 61% of Grades 2-6 Dr. Clark students are either not yet meeting or are approaching reading expectations.

#### School Focus (Sept 2022)

**NUMERACY**

Each of the four main numeracy topics of Numbers, Patterns and Relations, Statistics and Probability, and Shapes and Space will be areas of focus for professional development. The use of professional learning time, Collaborative Response, and grade-based collaboration will be used to identify areas of concern and focal areas supporting greater student learning in the area of numeracy. Working to better understand progressions, guided math, and better use of manipulatives will be paramount.

#### LITERACY

We have seen positive growth in student reading achievement as the year progresses. 51% of our students are receiving tier two and three supports. In order to support students and differentiate instruction, we will continue to focus on the implementation of Daily 5 in all classrooms and continue existing intervention strategies.

#### MENTAL HEALTH LEARNING

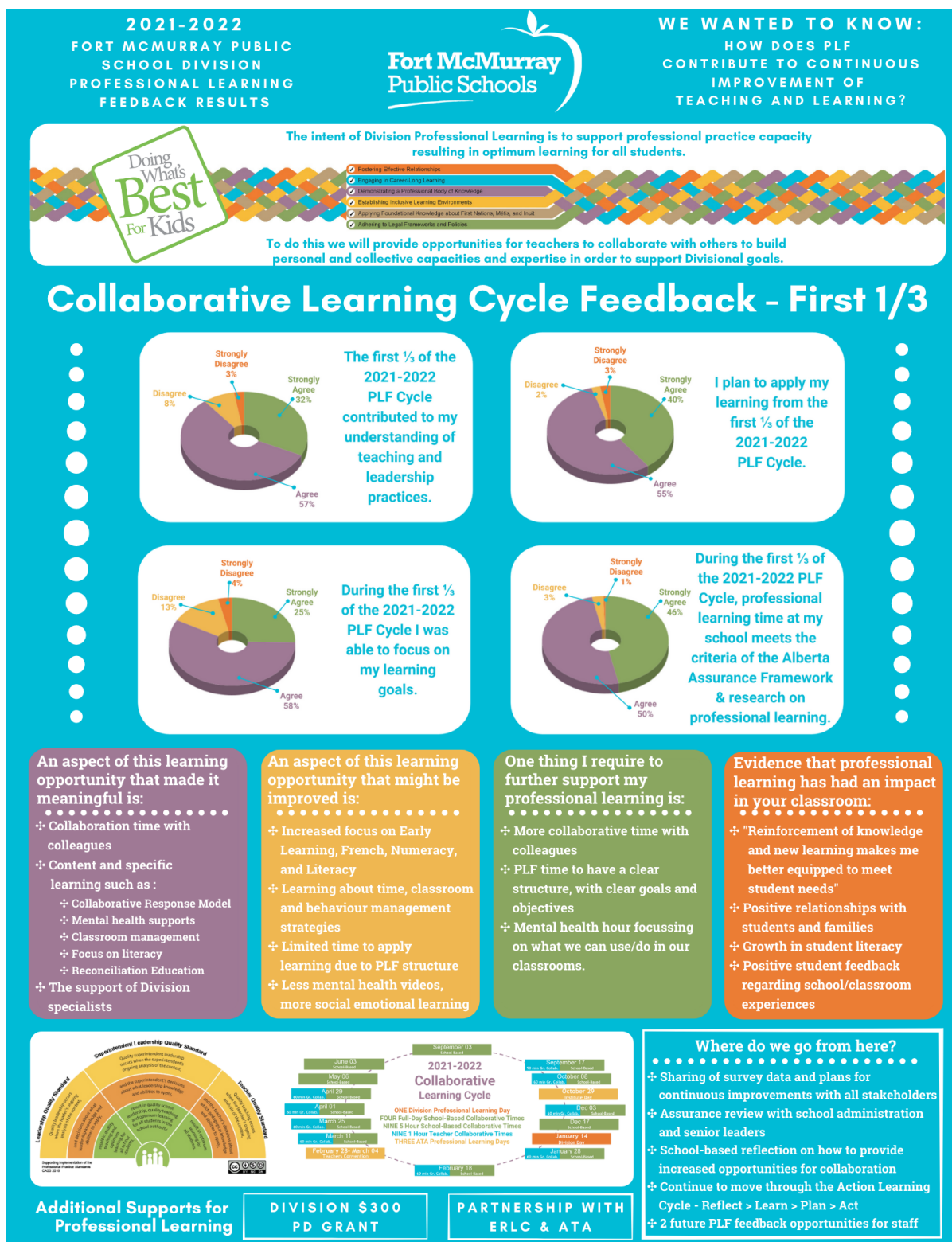
Students are struggling with regulation. There are a variety of ways to support students and teachers have chosen to focus on learning about various strategies to help students regulate (ie. physical activity, art, sensory, NVCI, WITS, Roots of Empathy, Circle of Security, Land-based Learning, etc.)

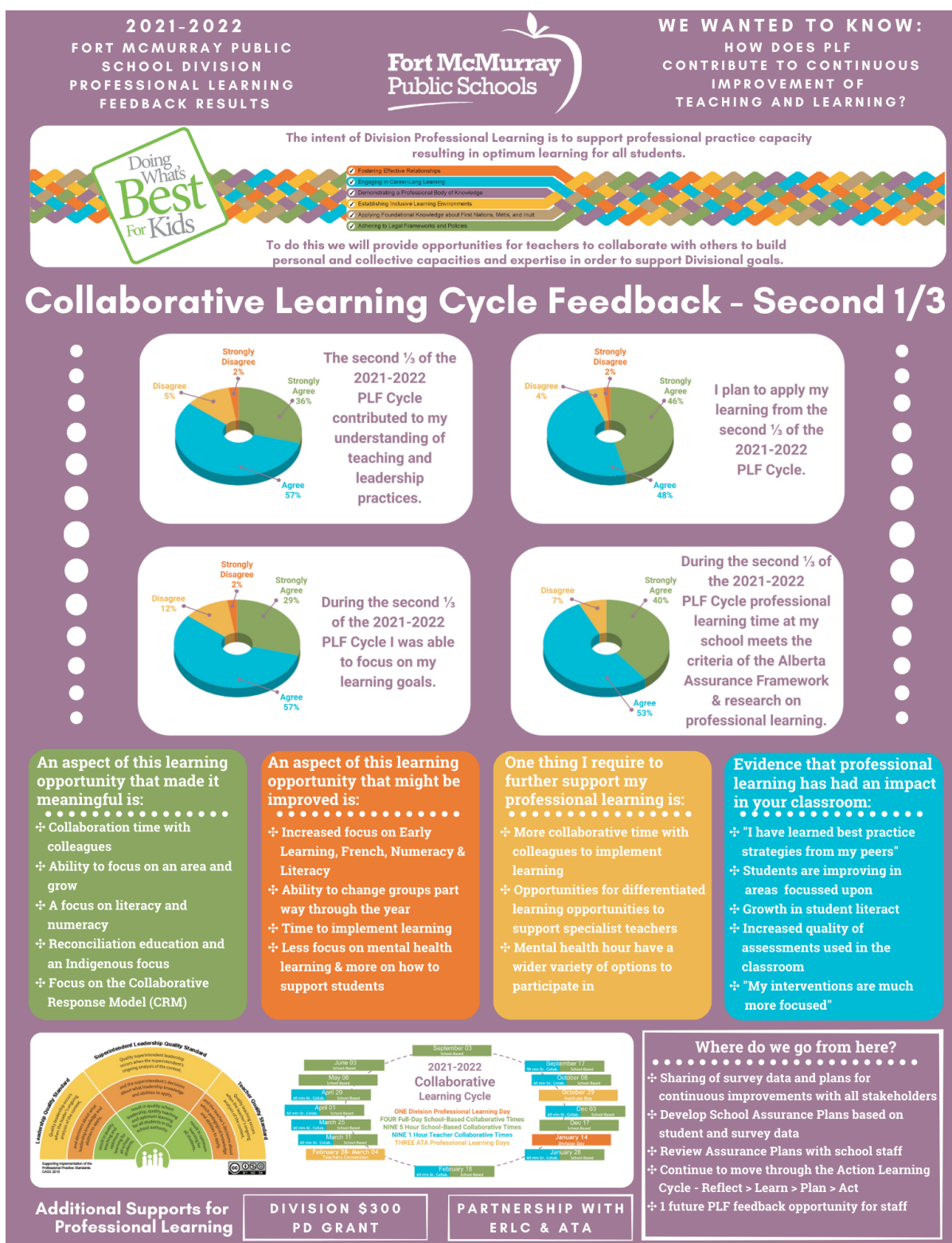
#### Data Analysis (June 2023)

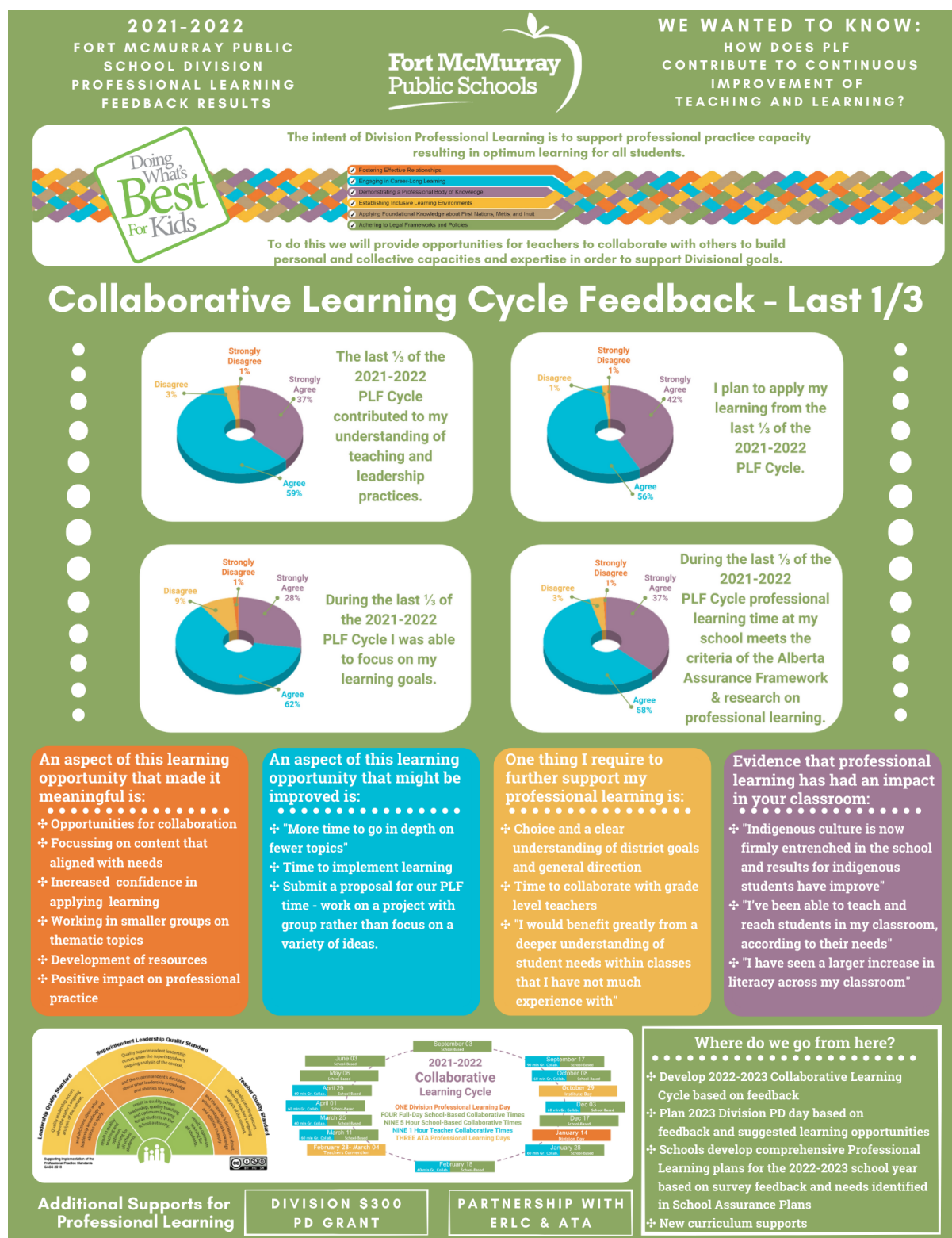


*Note.* Each school has the same pages in the shared document and school leaders are required to update as necessary. Permission to share has been granted by the Superintendent (Figure 6).

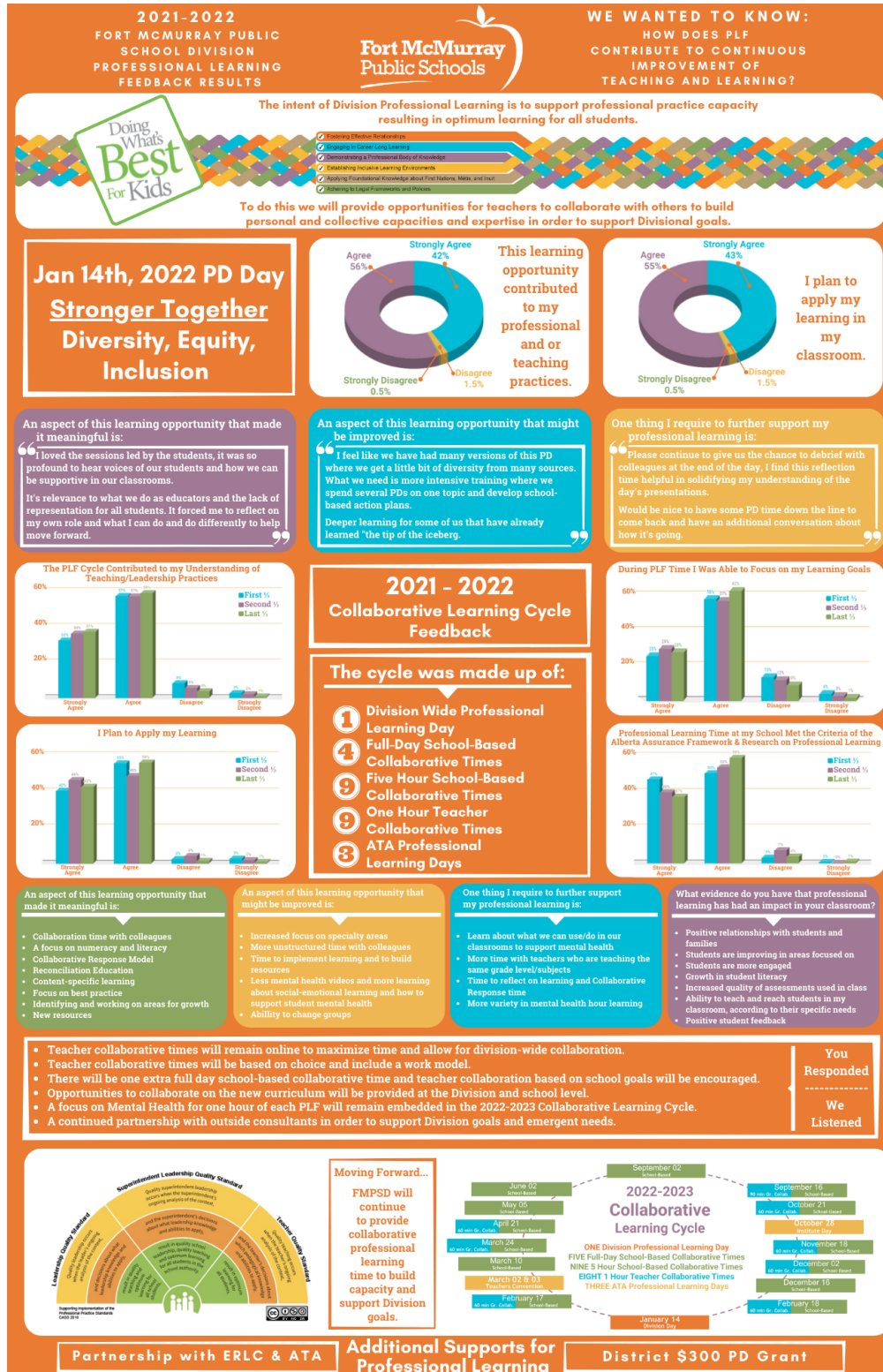
## 2021-2022 Infographics Based on PLF Survey Results











*Note.* All infographics were shared with all staff. Permission to share has been granted by the Superintendent (Figure 6).

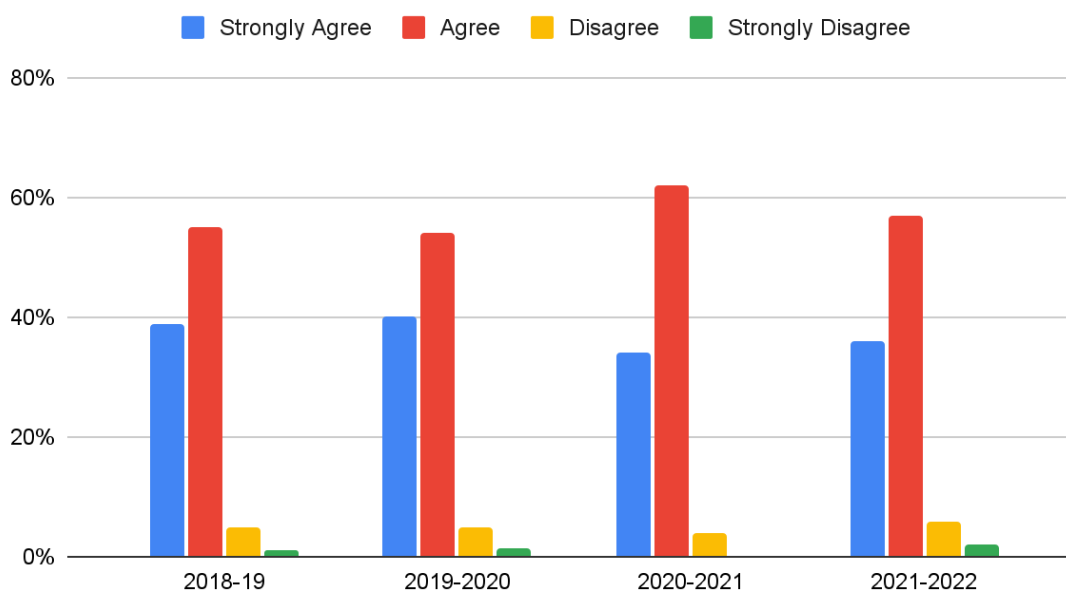
**Figure 5**

*Professional Learning Friday Trend Data from 2018 to 2022.*

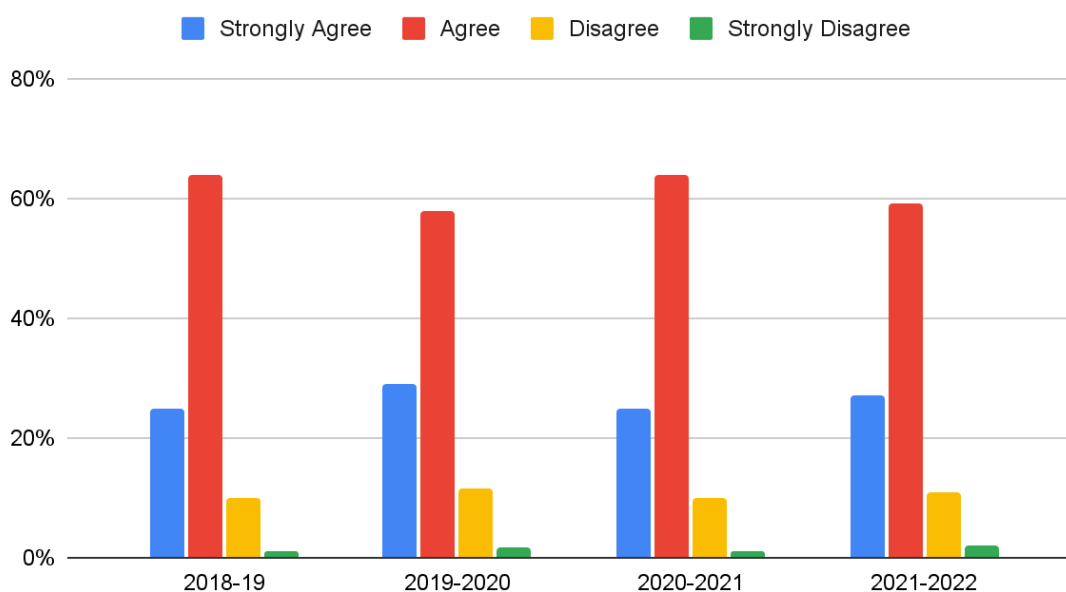
**Fort McMurray  
Public Schools**

**Professional Learning Friday Data  
2018 to 2022**

**The PLF Cycle contributed to my understanding of teaching/leadership practices.**



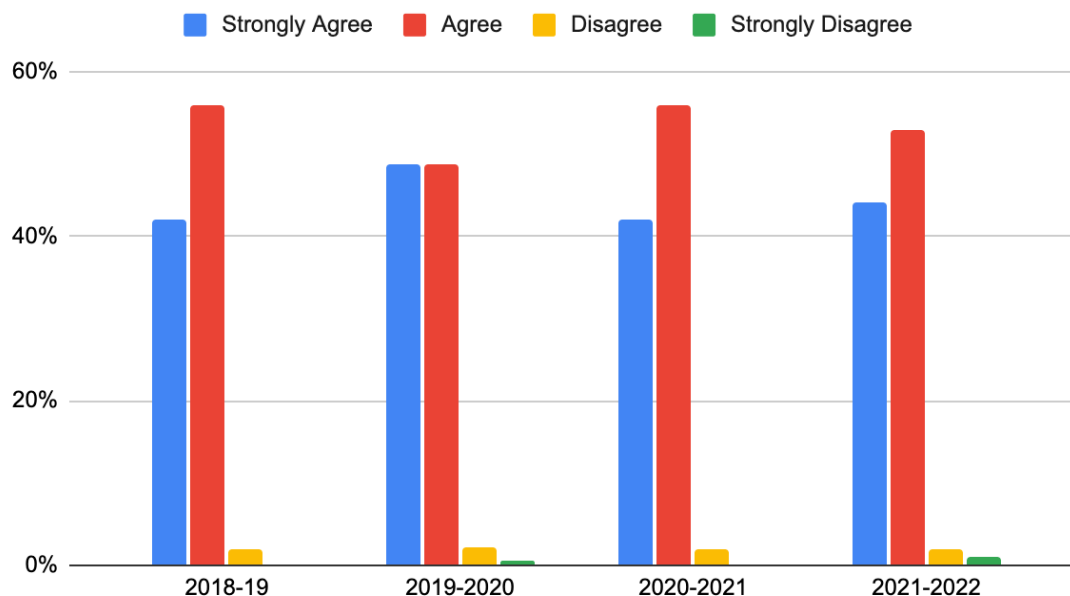
**During PLF time I was able to focus on my learning goals.**



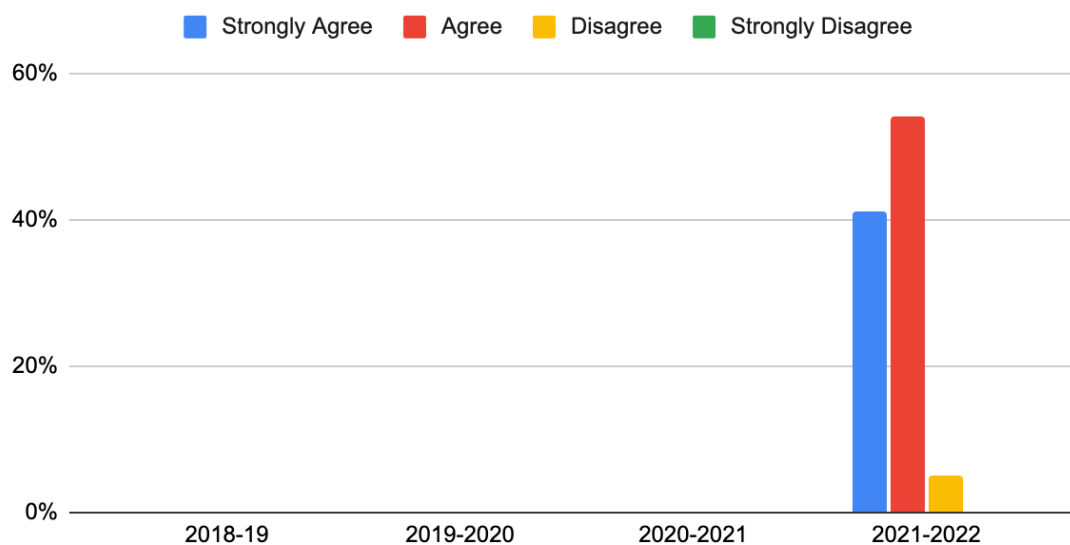


## Professional Learning Friday Data 2018 to 2022

### I plan to apply my learning.



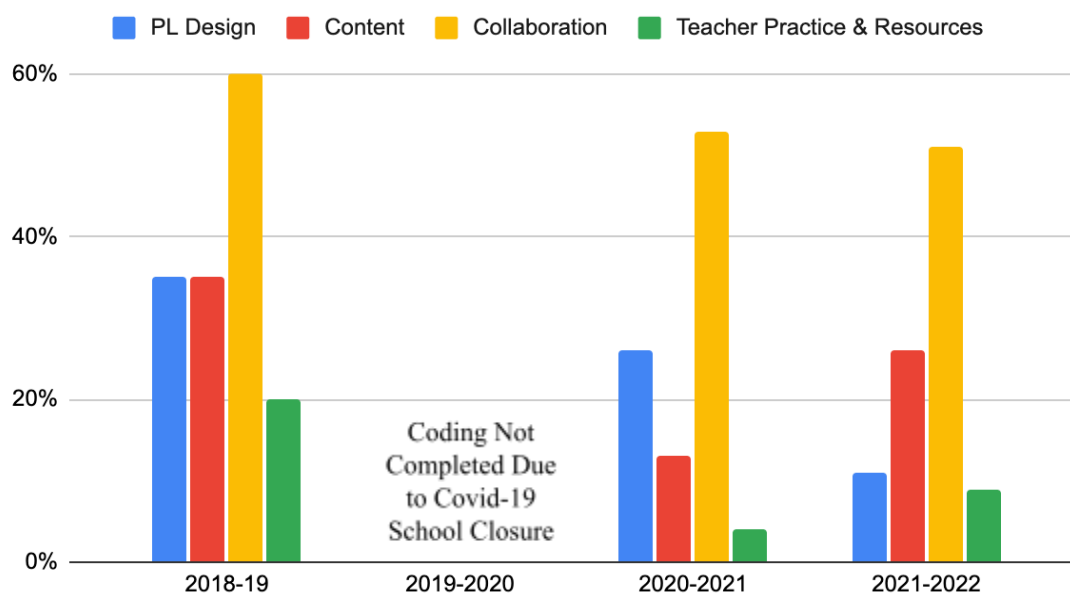
### During FMPSD PLF days, professional learning time at my school meets the criteria of the Alberta Assurance Framework and the research on professional learning time.



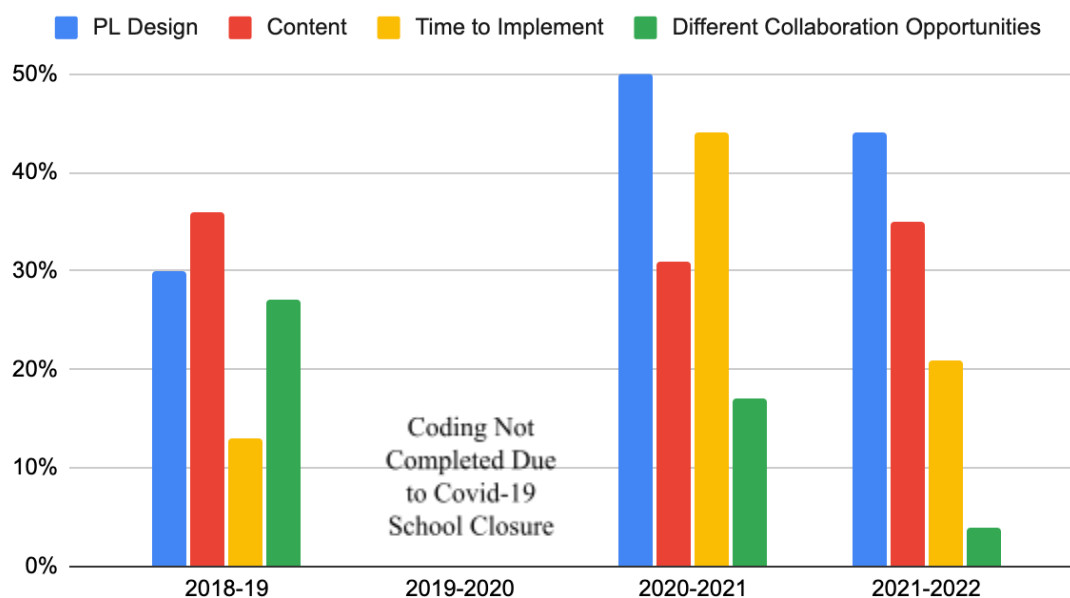


## Professional Learning Friday Data 2018 to 2022

### An aspect of this learning opportunity that made it meaningful.



### An aspect of this learning opportunity that might be improved.

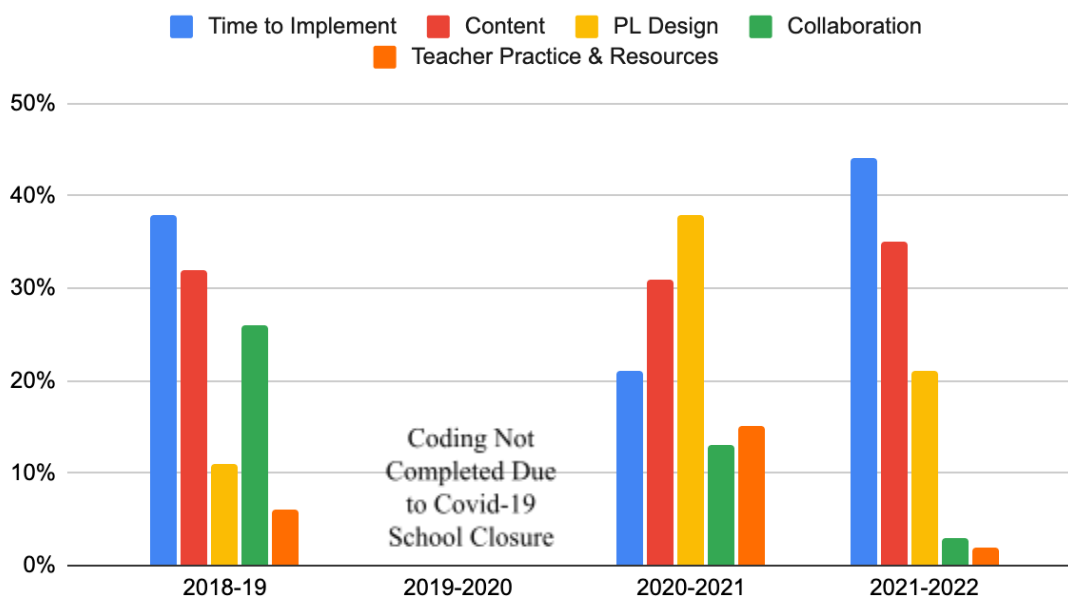




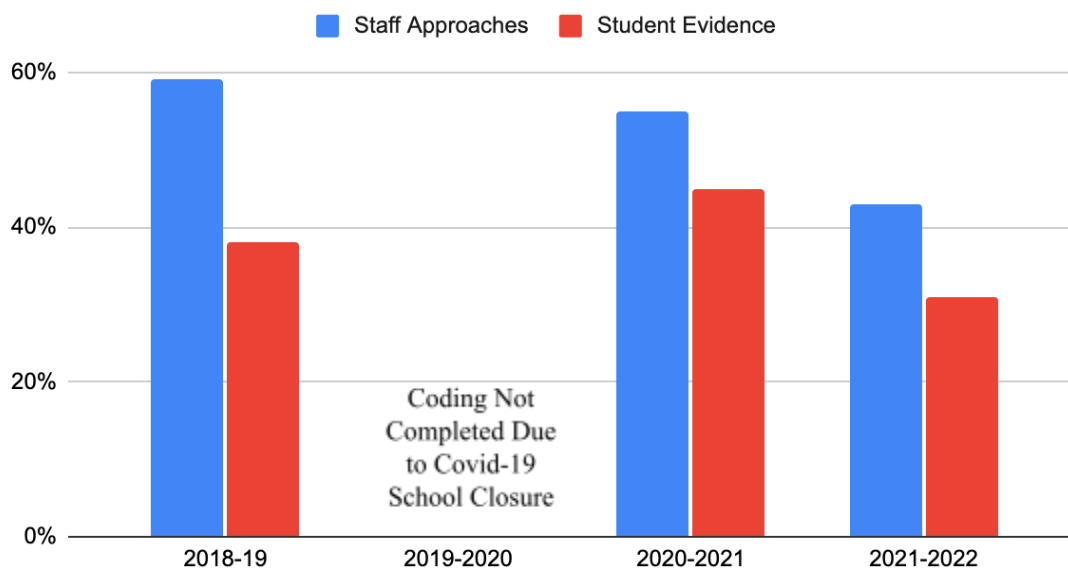


## Professional Learning Friday Data 2018 to 2022

### One thing I require to further support my professional learning.



### What evidence do you have that professional learning has had an impact in your classroom?



*Note:* Data compiled by FMPSD Education Department. Permission to share has been granted by the Superintendent (Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

*Letter granting permission to use FMPSD PLF data.*



**Fort McMurray Public School Division**  
231 Hardin Street  
Fort McMurray, Alberta T9H 5S1  
T: 780.799.7900 | F: 780.743.2655

November 7, 2022

Abbi Easton  
Vice Principal  
and Supervisor of Educational Technology  
Fort McMurray Public School Division

Dear Abbi:

I am following up on your request to be able to use the Division's Professional Learning story and data to complete your capstone. We have shared this data with multiple people and other school divisions over the years, and I have no problem allowing you to access it for your project.

I wish you the best as you proceed with your work and look forward to hearing the results of your capstone when it is evaluated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Annalee Nutter', is positioned above the printed name.

Annalee Nutter  
Superintendent of Schools  
Fort McMurray Public School Division

**"Doing What's Best For Kids"**

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