

PRAIRIE SPIRIT SCHOOL DIVISION

Nomination for Premier's Board of Education Award
for Innovation and Excellence in Education:

Sector Facilitators in Prairie Spirit School Division *Building a culture of adult learning*

Prairie Spirit School Division

Prairie Spirit School Division is the learning-centered rural and urban school division surrounding the City of Saskatoon. Prairie Spirit covers a wide geographic area: north to Leask, south to Hanley, east to Colonsay and west to Perdue. The school division includes nine Hutterite colonies and three First Nations communities. Prairie Spirit includes towns, villages and the new cities of Warman and Martensville.

The Division's 11,000 students are served by a team of over 1,200 professionals and support staff. Led by our dedicated staff, our students are achieving at high levels and our graduation rates are among the highest in the province.

Prairie Spirit is focusing on preparing students for the world after school, by exploring learning as it relates to a real-world context.

Our mission and vision statements support and reflect the Division's purpose and beliefs about learning. The mission statement captures the spirit of innovation, creativity and a global society.

Vision: Learners for Life

Mission: Learning without limits in a world of possibilities

Board Chair: Sam Dyck

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Introduction

Our beliefs about adult learning

In Prairie Spirit, we believe adult learning has the most success when it is embedded in the classroom. Prairie Spirit supports and provides classroom-embedded adult learning opportunities for teachers.

“The research has been clear and consistent for over 30 years — collaborative cultures in which teachers focus on improving their teaching practice, learn from each other, and are well led and supported by school principals result in better learning for students.”

Michael Fullan, 2011

“Research has shown that teachers successfully implement new teaching strategies learned in a professional development workshop about 15% of the time; but if the professional development is instead coaching for specific classroom instruction, in the classroom, this number reaches 85%.”

Cornett & Knight, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 2002

Research by Eraut & Hirsh (2007) found that learning occurs when professionals work alongside others, engaging in the processes of questioning, information gathering, observing and exchanging feedback.

John Hattie, 2015, has conducted research on influences on student achievement. His research has determined that professional development has a significant impact (.62 effect size) when it:

- Includes observation of actual classroom methods
- Occurs over extended period of time
- Challenges prevailing discourse and conceptions about learning
- Provides opportunities to talk with other teachers
- Has support of in-school administrators

The adult learning opportunities in Prairie Spirit align with the Division’s [Strategic Planning Framework](#) and work toward actualizing [My Prairie Spirit Classroom](#).

Sector Facilitators

Prairie Spirit supports and provides classroom-embedded professional development opportunities with the itinerant **Sector Facilitator** role, introduced at the start of the 2019/20 school year. Prairie Spirit’s Sector Facilitators continue to be classroom teachers part-time, while also having release time to work with and support other teachers in specialized areas.

The total FTE for Sector Facilitator positions is just over 2.5 FTE. This is used to provide time for six classroom teachers to serve as Sector Facilitators, in addition to their classroom responsibilities.

The Sector Facilitator role is designed to support teachers as they work with students in the goal areas detailed in the provincial Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP):

- Early Learning
- Reading/Writing/Math
- Graduation Rates
- First Nation and Métis Engagement and Graduation Rates

Although Prairie Spirit's student achievement results are very strong, we have not yet achieved all of the provincial sector plan goals. The Prairie Spirit Board of Education designated reserve funds to support the achievement of these sector goals. Using this funding, we have created part-time release positions to provide adult learning opportunities in the areas of early learning, literacy, numeracy, and First Nations and Métis Engagement.

The Sector Facilitator walks alongside teachers in their classrooms, getting to be in their environment, supporting them and creating excitement about adult learning. The impact at our schools is significant.

The purpose of the Sector Facilitator role is to:

- Enhance adult learning opportunities in the specific Ministry-identified sector areas, and therefore support student achievement.
- Continue to build a culture of adult learning in PSSD.

We chose the word **enhance** and not **increase** intentionally here. It's about the **quality** of learning opportunities, not just the quantity.

The Sector Facilitator role works alongside the Division's Learning Facilitator role, introduced in 2015. The Learning Facilitator is school-based learning leader, a teacher who serves as a reflective practitioner and a collegial, collaborative colleague. A Learning Facilitator has a portion of their time devoted to supporting other teachers in their own school. This role may include observing and collecting data, supporting with assessment, modelling and co-teaching.

Innovative nature of the program or project

The Sector Facilitator role is unique in the province. Prairie Spirit made a presentation about this innovative approach at the Provincial Leadership Team (PLT) in June 2020. We regularly receive inquiries about this role from other school divisions and educational leaders.

There is considerable strength in creating a **team** to address sector goals. This structure allowed for a new approach and moved away from silos of expertise. The Sector Facilitators are teachers from several Prairie Spirit schools and they reflect the diversity of the schools they represent. They meet on a monthly basis to create their team and find ways to work together to maximize their impact.

We soon realized we could approach the work in a cross-sector way, as a team! The analogy would be a teacher who approaches their curriculum with a cross-curricular planning lens. Sector Facilitators with different areas of expertise are co-planning learning events that targeted multiple sectors.

We needed to build our team and we needed to learn to support each other. Trust and vulnerability grew to be the norm. We discussed challenges and successes at every meeting. Another key process piece was creating shared vision, keeping in mind we were starting with a totally new position in the Division.

Once the vision was set, there were three main support initiatives:

1. Leading learning for groups within Prairie Spirit
2. Leading learning in teacher choice professional development
3. Leading learning in classroom spaces

1. Leading learning for groups within Prairie Spirit

We wanted to connect to the important provincial work in the sector areas, so our team spent a full day planning and leading professional reflection and learning in those sector areas with our school-based learning leaders, the Learning Facilitators. We dug into the data, and then spent time in break out groups with the provincial outcomes and rubrics, which led to exposure and planning of some rich student-centred classroom practices.

Our team was also invited to share our learning and growth with the Board of Education. This provided us with an opportunity to celebrate the work with the Board and receive feedback from the Board for the Sector Facilitator team.

We were also fortunate to engage in leading other adult learning. We were able to support an entire school staff through staff meeting learning time and professional development time.

2. Leading learning in teacher choice professional development

In our Division, teacher professional development sessions are called Inspired Learning Opportunities (ILOs). They can take many forms, such as half or full day PD learning, or most commonly, they will be incorporated in classroom-based site visits and reflective conversations with teachers.



Sector Facilitator bulletin board to track teacher visits and learning

Sector Facilitators hosted visits in their own classrooms or supported other host teachers. Prior to March, we ran **15** ILOs through all grade levels. As a rural division, these opportunities are a terrific way for our teachers to connect and network with others from across the Division. We have a wide range of schools in our Division, from Hutterite colonies to community schools to large urban schools. These ILO opportunities attracted teachers from all grade levels and from many subject areas.

We also provided multiple opportunities for our teachers in similar grade levels. One of the exciting developments this year was that we were able to address new trends and concerns coming from our teachers. As an example, we heard that there was a wish to have support in grade 1 and 2 math, so we created an opportunity for two Sector Facilitators to work together, an early years specialist and a numeracy specialist. Over 40 teachers registered for this learning opportunity. It was exciting to have the opportunity to do some of that strategic planning to see how we could best meet the needs of our teachers.

The other compelling component of the ILOs is that they are opt-in for the teachers. This allows choice and flexibility for our colleagues. Since the PD is opt-in, that also lends itself very well to teachers receiving some sort of follow-up support after the PD event is finished. That follow-up might look like phone calls to check in, helping to gather resources for a new unit or lesson the teacher now has the confidence to try, working alongside their school-based LF, or it might mean side by side planning and mentorship from one of our team members.

3. Leading learning in classroom spaces

The bulk of our work involved directly supporting teachers in their classroom, working alongside them as they reflected upon and made decisions about their classroom practice. You might say, “this is where we lived” as Sector Facilitators this past year, in our day to day work with classroom teachers. Perhaps this is unique among other learning leaders in rural divisions, to be engaged so closely with the work of classroom teachers to help support and build capacity.

Evidence of direct board influence and participation in the innovation

Although Prairie Spirit’s student achievement results are very strong, we have not yet achieved all of the provincial sector plan goals. The Prairie Spirit Board of Education regularly reviews the Division’s results in these areas at a data wall in the Division Office.

The Prairie Spirit Board of Education designated restricted reserve funds to support the achievement of these goals. In April 2019, the Board approved the use of \$1,180,000 of reserve funds to create some part-time release positions and the associated costs, including travel, substitute teacher costs, etc., to provide adult learning opportunities in the areas of early learning, literacy, numeracy, and First Nations and Métis Engagement. This commitment will fund these positions for up to three years.



Sector Facilitators presented to the Board of Education at the Sector Facilitator tracking bulletin board in January 2020

Cost of the innovation related to benefits achieved

The total FTE for Sector Facilitators is just over 2.5 FTE. The Board approved the use of \$1,180,000 of restricted reserves to fund these positions and their associated costs (including travel, substitute teacher costs, etc.) for up to three years.

We quickly realized Sector Facilitators can play a key part in supporting and promoting the Division's strategic plan, which is critical. The Sector Facilitator role is a strong support to the classroom teacher. When teacher efficacy is high, we know student achievement will be positively impacted.



The Sector Facilitators presented to the Board of Education in January 2020

In the 2020/21 school year, our Sector Facilitators will continue to work in their own classrooms in addition to their work as Sector Facilitators. This means they continue to explore strong instructional practices and it gives other teachers the opportunity to visit and see what the instructional practices could look like with real students. The Sector Facilitators work closely with each other, to create "cross pollination" across the goal areas.

Sustainability of the innovation within the present system or school

The Board approved the use of restricted reserves to fund these positions for up to three years. In that regard, this innovative approach has limited funding for the future. The Board may explore working towards on-going, sustainable funding for Sector Facilitators beyond the current three-year plan. However, this approach is building and supporting a culture of adult learning in the Division that can be maintained, with or without the Sector Facilitators role.

Evidence of improved student achievement

Because of COVID-19, the 2019/20 school year was obviously an unusual year without the sector data collection we would normally have for our students. We are looking forward to future sector data because that is an important part of triangulated data for this initiative.

The Sector Facilitator team wanted to honour and recognize that one of the starting points for this team was the provincial data. The team incorporated wall walks into our staff meetings. The data wall allows us to have so many different conversations! The wall walks gave such rich data in the forms of stories.

The following anecdotal data reflects the value of the Sector Facilitator in the classroom, supporting the classroom teacher in developing stronger practices:

More student engagement:

- Phones being out less
- Students being on time
- Working together in groups

Who is thinking?

- Students are working together to solve problems
- Students are excited for the next problem and for challenging problems
- Teacher circulating and facilitating conversation

Inclusion:

- All students are involved in the thinking and problem-solving process
- Students are thinking and learning not being told what to do

We accept the significant research that has determined that teacher professional development or adult learning embedded at the school level has a compelling impact on student achievement. When teachers feel more supported and confident in their practice, student achievement will be positively impacted.

- "...the biggest effects of student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and students become their teachers."

(Hattie, 2009, p.22)

- "The working relationships that teachers have with other adults are closely connected and deeply consequential for the teaching and learning relationships they in turn have with their students."

(Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p.41)

- "We know that the teacher is the most powerful influence on how much a student learns and that teachers can continue to make significant improvements in their practice throughout their entire careers."

(William, 2011, p.162)

- "Teachers and students go hand in hand as learners or they don't go at all."

(Barth, 2004, p. 23)

Client support for the innovation

We had many examples of teachers who gained confidence as they had time to co-plan with the Sector Facilitator, co-teach and learn from the Sector Facilitator. These teachers were also able to see their students excited and making new connections in their understanding.

The feedback from teachers and administrators after the first year of work has been consistently positive and supportive of this role. The following quotes reflect feedback from Prairie Spirit classroom teachers after working with a Sector Facilitator:

“... good teaching might just need to be done in a structure that is "smarter", in that we collaborate, we ask each other questions, we challenge each other, we bring ourselves and our views while still maintaining a foundational framework that we know works!”

“I appreciated the opportunity to plan collaboratively with English Language Arts colleagues across the division. It was great to have insight into how other teachers make their instructional decisions. I always enjoy the opportunity to share resources.”

“I think if we are not consistently in touch with like-minded individuals, returning to theory, our mentors and the relationships built with like-minded educators, we might allow things to slip or fall away as less important.”

It was important to our team to look for ways to track our impact with teachers, to ensure we are working with a wide cross-section of teachers within a wide cross-section of schools.

One Sector Facilitator working in numeracy reported 25 visits with teachers at schools from September to March. Another Sector Facilitator said their goal was relationship building with other senior math teachers, recognizing “relationships are at the centre of everything.” A Sector Facilitator in the area of early learning said their goal in their work was “to create more joy in learning for both adults and children.”

We tried to keep track of our work as best we could on a bulletin board. We recorded where our visits were and what the focus was. We often kept them general enough to be anonymous for the teacher, but still demonstrate what our take-aways from the time together were.

Our goal was not the “one and done” PD opportunity but rather an opportunity to make some lasting changes.

Sector Facilitators had a shared office at Division Office, which they never use, as they are always out in schools. This is a great data point in itself!

We believe that remote learning in the spring of 2020 allowed us to reach some of the teachers who would not normally participate. We are continuing to build our capacity in online learning to better support our colleagues.

We hoped the Sector Facilitators would bring:

- **alignment with other supports**
Sector Facilitators work alongside or in partnership at times with different teams to support the adult learning initiatives within the Division, school, and personal learning goals of the teacher.
- **an additional layer of support**
The Sector Facilitator provides additional support for the teacher. The teacher may have already been engaged in personal professional reading and discussions with their administrator about goal

work. The Sector Facilitator comes alongside and provides classroom-level supports to actualize that goal.

- **a different entry point**

The culture in our Division evolved over the past year to have teachers see the Sector Facilitators as colleagues in every sense of the word. Some teachers may not always feel comfortable reaching out to an administrator to say: "I'm struggling a bit in this area and need some support." However, they are willing to reach out to a safe colleague.

The Sector Facilitators also brought a Peter Liljedahl "low floor and high ceiling" approach to working with teachers. The team became very skilled at creating safe spaces and meeting teachers at their "readiness for learning" level. Sector Facilitators were not to be utilized by school administrators for supervision aspects. We felt this equal relationship would create the environment needed to allow teachers to be vulnerable and truly change practices.

Sector Facilitator personal experience:

"Our work is to walk alongside teachers to reflect upon what their vision is for their classroom and set up goals to reach this vision. Along the journey, we talk about a lot of topics such as: best practice in teaching math, culture, expectations, pedagogy, engagement, assessment, who is doing the thinking, and taking risks as a teacher (and expecting our students to do the same).

A student journal reflected that the student was able to see how much the teacher enjoyed teaching math after working on math pedagogy with the Sector Facilitator and so now the students did too.

This teacher shared she really does enjoy teaching math now, after working with a Sector Facilitator. When she thinks about planning for math, she thinks about it from a brand-new perspective and has so much fun planning learning activities for her students."

Sector Facilitator personal experience:

"This journey can best be outlined by the work I have been doing with a teacher. We started out talking about what his ideal vision of his math classroom was, then reflected on what his current classroom was like. All of this was done with both of us knowing the focus was on bettering student learning and not judging each other's suggestions or ideas.

We worked together about once a month implementing steps of change and continued to build, reflect, refine, and work on how these steps were going to help us reach that vision of his ideal classroom.

We worked together outside of the classroom looking at culture building and expectations, we co-planned and co-taught lessons, we talked about assessment, and the difference of starting a semester as opposed to the work we are doing within the semester."

Supporting resources:

- [My Prairie Spirit Classroom](#)
- Adult Learning in Prairie Spirit (attached) – fall 2019
- Learning Facilitators in Prairie Spirit (attached) – spring 2015
- [Prairie Spirit Strategic Plan](#)
- [Prairie Spirit Annual Report – 2018/19 \(includes ESSP results\)](#)



Adult Learning in Prairie Spirit School Division

Our Beliefs

The adult learning opportunities in Prairie Spirit align with the [Strategic Planning Framework](#) and work toward actualizing [My Prairie Spirit Classroom](#). Adult learning directly correlates to increased student achievement.

Adult learning is best supported through multiple pathways:

- Adult learning opportunities should align at multiple levels:
 - Individual professional learning goals
 - School goals
 - Division's Strategic Planning Framework
- Prairie Spirit supports and provides classroom-embedded professional development opportunities.
 - PSSD added **school-based Learning Facilitators** in 2015 to support this practice
 - PSSD added **itinerant Sector Facilitators** in 2019 to support this practice
- Prairie Spirit supports and provides Inspired Learning Opportunities (ILO's) for teachers and administrators at a system level.
- Prairie Spirit supports and provides funds to school staffs to allow the pursuit of external professional development opportunities which align with our aspirational learning goals.

Adult learning is best facilitated and maximized through a team approach involving both the school-based team and the available Division Office supports:

School-Based Team

- Teachers
- Administration
- Learning Facilitator (LF)

Division Office Team

- Learning Support Facilitators (LSF)
- Sector Facilitators (SF)
- Learning Support Services (LSS)
- Coordinators
- Superintendents

Communication

It is critical that open and ongoing communication occurs between the various team members supporting adult learning. The following communication patterns will support this belief:

Classroom Teachers

- Will develop individual professional learning goals with their administration.
- Will work directly with the school-based team on their goals and may choose to seek support from the Division Office team.
 - When seeking support from a Sector Facilitator, teachers should engage in a discussion with administration.
 - When teachers have arranged time with an SF, it is important that the school team is informed of their planned visit.
 - ◆ Early involvement and co-planning with the school team will also help with D-code distribution strategies at the school level.

Administrators

- Might reach out directly to Sector Facilitators if they wish to have them come work with large groups or the whole staff.
- Should not reach out to an SF to have them come work with a teacher. This communication should come directly from the teacher.
- Might choose to engage in conversations with teachers to further explore how their Professional Learning Goals have been impacted by their work with Sector Facilitators.

Learning Facilitators

- Can co-support teacher learning goals with an SF.
- Can recommend that teachers reach out to an SF.
- Can reach out to an SF on behalf of a teacher (the teacher should be copied in the email and be the one requesting the support).

Sector Facilitators

- Will operate with the understanding that the classroom teacher or Learning Facilitator has informed their school-based team prior to the request for support as well as prior to their arrival.
- Can connect directly with teachers.
 - Teachers should connect with their school-based team prior to the work progressing in order to inform them of the potential learning opportunity.
- Might connect directly with an administrator to offer supports to the school.
- Might connect directly with a Learning Facilitator to offer supports to the school and/or their work.

Supporting Adult Learning Time

It can be challenging to create the time needed for side-by-side adult learning to occur. An example might be found in how we create pathways to release a teacher from their regular classroom in order to have a follow-up conversation after a site visit or a co-teaching opportunity. All team members (both school and Division) are looking for ways to support these initiatives.

Please remember the following options exist:

- At times, it may be possible for admin to support the release of a teacher by coordinating internal coverage.
- Some schools choose to create time through the strategic supervision of school-wide events. It is important that administration closely monitor impacts when this scheduling approach is used.
- School-based LF codes have been provided by the Division to each PSSD school.
- Some schools choose to create time by accessing school-based PD funds to bring in substitute teachers for support during the day.
- Schools/teachers may also reach out to SFs for D-code support when internal options are not possible.

The Roles of Learning and Sector Facilitators in Adult Learning

Prairie Spirit supports and provides classroom-embedded Professional Development opportunities for teachers. In 2015, this model was expanded with the addition of a **Learning Facilitator** in each of our schools. In the fall of 2019, this facilitator model expanded with the addition of **Sector Facilitators**.

Role of In-School Administrator

- Work side by side with staff to develop a common understanding of *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* and support the implementation of the Division's Strategic Planning Framework.
- Support in the creation and monitoring of professional learning goals.
- Regularly engage in a reflective, side-by-side conversation with the Learning Facilitator as a coach to ensure the work aligns with *My Prairie Spirit Classroom*, school goals and our aspirational learning goals.
- Help develop and support the Learning Facilitator goals and their coaching skills.
- Work with the staff, Learning Facilitator and Sector Facilitators in designing learning opportunities (i.e., staff meetings, small group sessions, etc.).
- Collaborate and develop a structure that coordinates schedules to best suit the staff and Learning Facilitator in the work of classroom observations, modelling/co-teaching and reflective coaching conversations.
- Engage in the ALT learning time and make professional decisions about what and how to communicate learning to staff.
- Work in coordination with the LF and SFs to maximize adult learning opportunities in the school.

Role of Learning Facilitator

- Work side by side with staff to develop a common understanding of *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* and support the implementation of the Division's Strategic Planning Framework.
- Reflect with staff on their practices.
- Observe and collect evidence requested by the teacher for the purposes of supporting reflection.
- Support teachers to gather and share evidence of student learning.
- Support teachers through coaching conversations.
- Model and/or co-teach in classrooms.
- Provide school-based support for adult learners.
- Work in coordination with the admin and SFs to maximize adult learning opportunities in the school.

Role of Sector Facilitator

- Work side by side with staff to develop a common understanding of *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* and support the implementation of the Division's Strategic Planning Framework.
- Reflect with staff on their practices.
- Support teachers within a specific educational sector plan area (Literacy/Numeracy/Early Years/First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education).
- Provide Division-based support for adult learning.
- Support teachers with the Ministry-required sector data collection.
- Work in coordination with the school team (Admin/LF/teachers) to maximize adult learning opportunities in the school.

Learning Facilitators in Prairie Spirit schools

Prairie Spirit supports and provides classroom-embedded Professional Development opportunities for teachers. For the fall of 2015, this model will be further expanded with the addition of a **Learning Facilitator** in each of our schools.

The research has been clear and consistent for over 30 years — collaborative cultures in which teachers focus on improving their teaching practice, learn from each other, and are well led and supported by school principals result in better learning for students.

Michael Fullan

Background

Research confirms what many teachers already know: teacher learning is most effective when it is embedded in the classroom. Over the past several years, Prairie Spirit has offered a strong Learning Support Facilitator team, based in Division Office. The new **Learning Facilitator** position reflects that support and is embedded at the school level.

The **Learning Facilitator** will encourage teachers to explore instructional issues together and provides an opportunity for teachers to open up their classrooms and practice. This fosters collaboration and trust and encourages reflection and analysis of teaching practice.

The **Learning Facilitator** time at each school will be dependent on the teacher staffing and assignments will be shared with all schools by mid-June.

Learning Facilitator profile

The **Learning Facilitator** is a reflective practitioner and a collegial, collaborative colleague who:

- Has knowledge and can apply specific strategies for learning improvement that promote risk-taking
- Models and facilitates learning in a way that is personal and purposeful
- Works side by side with teachers in classrooms
- Builds relationships
- Supports/coaches teachers as they reflect on feedback and data
- Uses assessment for learning strategies

[Criteria for a Prairie Spirit Learning Facilitator](#)

Role of Learning Facilitator

- To work side by side with staff to develop a common understanding of [My Prairie Spirit Classroom](#)
- To reflect with staff on their practices
- To observe and collect descriptive data, using an observation guide, for the purpose of teacher reflection
- To support teachers to identify and teach towards the big ideas
- To support teachers to gather and share evidence of student learning
- To model and/or co-teach in classrooms

Role of In-School Administrator

- To coach **Learning Facilitator** through regular reflective conversations
- To assist in designing learning opportunities with staff and **Learning Facilitator**

Supports for Learning Facilitators

Professional Development: includes support in coaching conversations with staff; clear understanding of this role; deep understanding of the [My Prairie Spirit Classroom](#); networking with other **Learning Facilitators** and development of an observation guide

Resources: professional reading; Division Office contacts; monthly FAQ newsletter

Release time: teachers will be provided with release time to work with the **Learning Facilitator**

Learning Facilitator meeting

Tuesday, June 16, 1 - 4 p.m.

Division Office

The **Learning Facilitator** and one in-school administrator are invited to attend this meeting for an overview of the new **Learning Facilitator** position.