

# A Division Integrated Plan for Learning Improvement

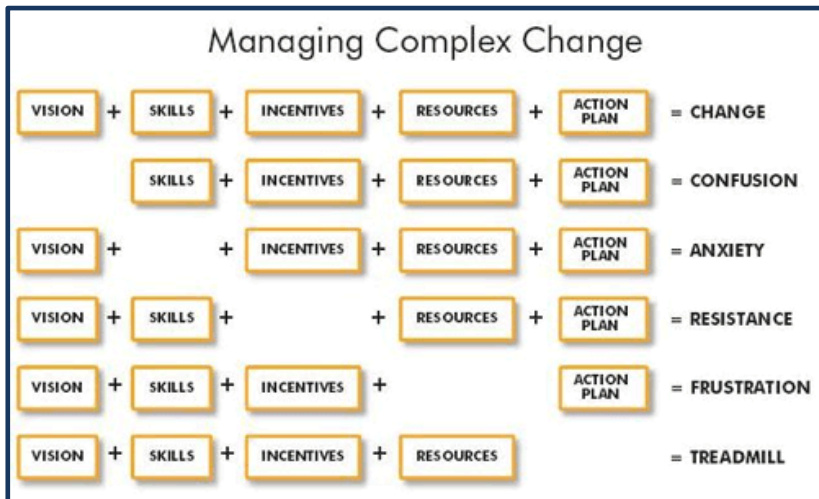
Nominated by: **Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Separate School Division #22**  
For the 2016 Premier's Board of Education Award  
For Innovation and Excellence in Education



September 2016  
Board Chair: Joann Blazieko  
Director: Geralyn Hall

## Goal: Vertical and Horizontal Alignment

Regardless of the source or well-intentioned plans for change, the impact is only meaningful when the change is focussed, built upon a culture of collaboration, that it engenders internal accountability and it deepens learning (Fullan, 2015). Holy Trinity Roman Catholic School



Division (HTCSD) Board of Education has, over the past ten years, integrated the various elements of the organization to create effective change using a well-aligned, coherent approach. This approach is based on the adherence to the components of Managing Complex Change (Knoster, 1991) and vertical and horizontal alignment of Vision, Skills, Incentives, Resources and Action Plan.

## Background: Grounded in Promising Practices

A growing field of research evidence since the turn of the last century has, in turn, changed the practices of HTCSD as it has strived to create a Saskatchewan-made response to learning improvement. Karen Hume (2010), Sharratt and Fullan (2009) and Reeves (2009) provided foundational work, drawing upon a multitude of success stories, to consolidate some important truths for leading effective change. These included:

- Deliberative planning to address potential barriers and to build the capacity of existing successful programs
- Fostering the collaborative engagement of all clients: students, parents, staff and the wider community
- Building a culture of change to realize a common vision and a collective purpose

Further to these principles, HTCSD has taken to heart two additional components that lead to effective change; these originally described by Sharratt and Fullan (2012) and elaborated upon by Fullan in 2015.

- Empowering and building internal accountability amongst the primary activators of learning, the teachers, by building excellence in teaching through attention to proven high yield strategies

- Assessing and responding to individual student’s needs as opposed to espousing a “one size fits all” attitude

HTCSD Board of Education viewed the need for a strong alignment that was connected through the five key areas identified to managing complex change.

## Innovation: Managing Complex Change

### **Vision:**

HTCSD Board of Education believes that learning improvement is actualized when the actions of the organization harness existing elements and adapt them to the theoretical constructs that promise effective change. HTCSD has adapted its existing elements of the organization including large-scale assessment, resources (both human and material), professional development, student support processes, and school-level strategic plans. Each of these elements have been aligned within the context of change theory to contribute to the overall system goals as established by the provincial Level I Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP).

The most well-documented focus of HTCSD Board of Education has been on literacy, particularly reading, although over the past years strategic plans have also been implemented for faith formation, mathematics, writing, student engagement, First Nations student achievement, kindergarten readiness and improvement of graduation rates. Since the development of province-wide strategic plans, the division goals have been built upon the ESSP. To demonstrate how HTCSD Board of Education has produced an integrated system-wide plan for change, the reading initiative will be a representative example since it typifies the attributes of the change.

### **Action Plan (Monitoring and Personalization):**

Reading assessment takes place for students in grades one through three in HTCSD three times during the school year; at the beginning to establish a starting point for each student, once during the year to monitor growth and correctly assign resources for students; and at the end of the school year as a measure of external accountability. A data wall covers an entire division office wall and includes data for approximately 600 students. Each grade 1 to 3 student (with no exceptions) is represented by a numbered child avatar.

The numbered avatar personalizes the data; it reminds all viewers that we are doing more than discussing numbers and percentages; we are talking about each child’s reading progress. School administrators meet with teams to track the students’ progress by moving avatars twice a year and discussing growth after each assessment. To provide deeper meaning and encourage discussion, sample passages for each level are shown as illustrative examples of the level of skill expected.

The data wall serves as the focus of “wall walks” for administrators, consultants, visitors, and Board members; a reference point to continue the conversations about what is working well and what else might need to take place. The focus is not so much on each school, but on each individual student and interventions that have taken place.

**Resources:**

Human resource allocation is also aligned with the strategic plans. The school division employs consultants, all who have training in reading instruction. The Board is committed to funding Levelled



Board Chair and Director share the HTCSD Data Wall with guests.

*The LLI program also has a significant impact on the parents/families of the children who participate. The homework component is designed to engage the parents in the process of reading development. By reading and completing homework sheets each night, parents experience the journey of reading acquisition with their children*

LLI Coach

Literacy Intervention (LLI) Coaches in each elementary school. LLI is a tier two intervention for students performing below grade level, and LLI coaches are trained and reminded of the importance of fidelity to this protocol intervention approach. Finally, instructional coaches who provide classroom level support in division level goals for reading, mathematics and technology use were provided to each elementary school. These instructional coaches worked along side teachers to build capacity through classroom level modelling, co-teaching and reading strategies, as well as the other strategic goals.

**Skills:**

Professional development for teachers takes place, for the most part, in schools. In addition to the classroom level support provided by instructional coaches, teachers in several schools are involved in professional learning teams which address aspects of the school learning improvement plans (SLIPs); these are aligned in turn with the action plans of the Division detailed implementation plan (DIP, also known as ESSP Level II plan) as they apply to the schools.

To provide classroom strategies that work and interventions that address cognitive or developmental needs, division level professional support is a key component in the success of the DIP. The Provincial Leadership Team-developed reading support, *Saskatchewan Reads* (2015) is a great reinforcing document for HTCSD and the continued professional development on the Gradual Release of Responsibility model and additional high yield teaching strategies (Hattie, 2009, 2012). Most schools plan common prep times for grade-alike teachers to meet, discuss reading strategies and meet with learning consultants who facilitate their learning. At

the division level, funds are allotted to provide workshops, conference participation, supplementary resources and training in DIP-related topics to individual teachers. HTCSD provides division-wide in-service days to all staff based on the DIP.

**Incentives:**

The incentives of the Division Integrated Learning Plan is shared by all levels including Board, senior admin, division office, teachers, students, parents and community. The incentive is that everyone shares in the success of the students’ achievement. In particular, when administrators buy in to the incentives, they play a pivotal role in aligning the activities and structures within the schools to achieve the DIP and create the drive to achieve action. Principals and Vice-principals are included from the beginning as owners of each outcome within the DIP. They help create the action plans, liaise with the staff members who enact the plans, collect, tabulate and analyze data and provide corrective measures if needed. At regular meetings administrators take part in wall walks of all outcomes as well as the reading data, plan professional activities for their teachers, engage student support personnel and carry out plans to communicate with parents and the general public. For their own professional learning, administrators take part in a study of *Saskatchewan Reads for Administrators* as it pertains to their role and to engage in actualizing the document.

This alignment also extends to individual teachers’ professional growth plans (PGPs) which must align with the action plans of the division’s DIP that is applicable to that teacher. Administrators will observe those skills and lessons in the classroom that correlate with the teacher’s PGP and provide the feedback for professional growth.

Administrators are also responsible to translate the DIP into their own school goals and action plans (the school learning improvement plan or SLIP). In most cases, parallel procedures such as data walls, SMART goals, monitoring assessments and other accountability measures are carried out at the school level much like they are on a larger scale at the division level.

**Action Plan (Classroom Support):**

Action plans associated with the DIPs and the SLIPs are only an exercise in paperwork if continual monitoring and corrective actions are not employed in response to less than expected performance. HTCSD has accomplished this in several ways:

- A second data wall showing Division One Year and Multiple Years plans including ownership, actions and the timelines associated with these actions.
- Using division assessments, classroom teacher concerns and diagnostic testing, so that students, who score below grade level expectations, can have their needs addressed by an inter-professional collaborative team (IPC). The IPC meet to touch base about struggling students; they discuss and develop an intervention plan and look at any testing that has been completed.

*My child has read to grandparents on Skype. She will take her LLI books and read to her baby sister a bedtime story. After school one day I said we had to go do errands. She said ‘Mom, can’t we go home. I want to do my reading’. It was like music to my ears.*  
Proud parent of a young reader

- Specialists work with school-based personnel in the classrooms to carry out the planned responses and to collaborate in the support of struggling learners.
- Changes are made to caseloads for inter-professional personnel, time and place allocations provided for individual classroom support and programming changes happen for individual students as further assessment data warrants

**Horizontal Alignment:**

A parallel process occurs at the school level. School administrators are responsible to respond when their school level data indicates that the school goals they've created in their SLIPs may fall short of reaching success. Reflection on their goals is built into admin meetings and into regular conversations between superintendents and school administrators; conversations that involve analysis of data, and possible alternate approaches and support systems that could be put in place. In many cases, administrators take an active role through their participation in guided reading groups and individual student intervention support.

*It has been an amazing experience to come together as a collaborative team to discuss each child's learning, in both French and English. As a team, we are all accountable to see growth in every child.*

-Principal

**Sustainability: Committing to Continued Growth**

**Vertical Alignment:**

The HTCSO Board of Education has been a primary driver to lead this integrated approach to system change. Each school year, reports are made to the Board to ratify the DIPs and to discuss implications for budget and how the Board will be involved through concrete actions. The Board has included within its own Strategic Plan, a commitment to annually review progress toward the achievement of student outcomes (HTCSO, 2015).

The Board has policy which requires each School Community Council (SCC) to co-construct and support the school's learning improvement plans and the Board meets annually with each SCC to hear about SCC sponsored activities, successes and challenges. The family-oriented activities undertaken by each SCC actively support student literacy and learning in each school.



A young reader shares her learning with family and a HTCSO Board member.

When interim reading data becomes available, Board members will do a “wall walk”, discussing the division data and the growth that is demonstrated for individual “avatars/young readers”. Board members are invited to attend schools’ Literacy Nights. When year-end data becomes available, accountability reports are provided to the Board for review.

A unique event takes place annually in early June. Eight young readers who have been involved in LLI programs are invited to attend, with their families, a Board sponsored family barbeque. There, each reader demonstrates his/her learning growth by reading two levelled books, one from the beginning of the school year and the second at the current level. They read to their family and a board member. This event serves to solidify the importance of the Board's support for literacy and to celebrate the students' learning.

The approach that HTCSD has taken to system-wide change isn't simply a one-off lucky break that has coincidentally created significant improvement in reading achievement. Mathematics teachers, like their Language Arts colleagues, are caught up in the same integration of ESSP action plans, professional development, support systems and community involvement.

## Stewardship: Responding to Fiscal Reality

An integrated plan for system wide change is more concerned with how existing funds are spent than it is with a need for additional funding of a special program. For example the attention to Reading, the curriculum resources, human resources and professional development would be provided regardless of the approach used. After an initial Board investment for Levelled Literacy Intervention kits and training in 2008 (\$400,000) subsequent budgets have covered retention of 3.75 LLI coaches, expansion of LLI kits and teacher training. Annual funding for literacy programs is protected within Board Budget Assumptions; the Board sees early literacy and support of ESSP as priorities.

Of more practical interest is the funding requirement for time; time for meetings at all levels from administration to SCCs, discussions, wall walks, professional development activities and for individual student support. Again, these activities happen regularly and as a matter of course.

HTCSD's focus on its DIP action plan for reading improvement isn't limited to classrooms but it reaches out to the community in a variety of ways. Participation in literacy-related community events is now entrenched in the DIP action plans as an important on-going component of student learning outside of the classroom. These include:

- An annual reading comprehension challenge, *Battle of the Books*. This inter-school competition is partially funded and supported by the Moose Jaw Chamber of Commerce and

Having my child in LLI has resulted in...a major improvement! Having him in a program like this gave us the kick in the pants we needed to encourage reading at home.

-Proud parent of a young reader



*Battle of the Books* with Moose Jaw Chamber of Commerce president, Corey Nyhagen)

by the Saskatchewan Festival of Words.

- Schools take part in the *Indigo Adopt a School* program to solicit support for school library collections. School communities respond well to this program and three HTCSD schools have been the recipients of Indigo Love of Reading Foundation Grants.
- Literacy Week involves city council members, Swift Current Broncos or Moose Jaw Warriors, HTCSD Board and Executive Council members and many parents in schools, reading to and with students.

## Student Achievement: Realizing Goals

Since amalgamation, HTCSD Board of Education has gathered student assessment data for the purpose of informing system needs, setting goals, allocating resources and demonstrating a measure of transparency to parents within the communities of Moose Jaw, Swift Current and Shaunavon. The following chart demonstrates the efficacy of the approach taken by HTCSD to achieve coherence of the forces they have to address their literacy targets:

HTCSD English Reading Results												
(% At or Above Grade Level Expectations)												
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Grade 1	59	60	71	84	76	82	66	71	80	85	81	80
Grade 2	65	62	71	81	73	80	85	83	90	81	81	82
Grade 3	76	76	77	89	93	80	84	89	90	84	87	84

The consistently high results from 2013 to the present are indicative of the success of the integrated model of system wide change that has been developed.

Note: In 2009-10, HTCSD began Levelled Literacy Intervention. In 2014, “grade level expectations” were defined through provincial consensus which impacted the standards for Grades 2 and 3, each up one level.

HTCSD Board of Education annually reviews trends and cohort achievement and have used regular monitoring of data to be responsive.

It has taken eight years of targeted visioning, adaptable action plans, resourcing, and developing skills at all division levels to meet the incentive and that was to give the gift of reading to emergent readers.

*Seeing first hand the improvement in reading levels by listening to students at the end of the school year reinforces the importance of monitoring. We all recognize the importance of reading in all aspects of life, so making sure we have strong readers is a way to ensure that the students achieve success in society.*

HTCSD Board Member



## Summary

HTCSD Board of Education sees a primary reason for the success of this integrated approach to school improvement to be scale. With seven elementary schools there is an intimacy within the division that supports shared decision-making and the attainment of a feeling that each teacher is personally invested in the success of the students under their care. Relationships between teachers are encouraged through grade-alike meetings, with division office staff who are visible in schools on a regular basis and with Board members who are present to the staff and parents at any public event that occurs. The future holds an even greater attention to the personalization of the student achievement data as an activity of structured conversations is being planned for administrators to further support their understanding of individual students' needs.

Fouts (2003) described how schools and school systems can only produce effective change—change that shifts the paradigm of how we think about what we do—if the underlying philosophical beliefs driving practice are altered.

HTCSD has developed an approach to learning improvement that re-vision the roles of their

personnel, the motivation for decision-making, processes for student support and engagement of their clients in a coherent and closely aligned manner.

HTCSD Board of Education continues to assure that the adherence to the five components of Knoster's Complex Change chart: vision, skills, incentives, resources, and action plan are in place both on the vertical and horizontal levels to effect positive change. Our board has learned that persistence to the action plan shows our commitment while creating the synergy in the division at all other levels.

*The illusion of change is created through a variety of activities, but the qualitative experience for students in the classroom remains unchanged when the ideas driving daily practice remain unchanged. (Fouts, 2003)*

And, as always, the Board has the last word:

*"I believe that the same template can be used for increased results in both writing and math. We will have to maintain levels of support with materials, professional development and stringent monitoring."*

(HTCSD Board Member)

## Works Cited

1. Fouts, J. T. (2003). School restructuring and student achievement in Washington state: Research findings on the effects of House Bill 1209 and school restructuring on western Washington schools. Seattle: Seattle Pacific University.
2. Fullan, M. (2015). *Coherence: The right drivers in action for schools, districts and systems*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
3. Government of Saskatchewan, Ministry of Education. Pre-K-12 Continuous Improvement Framework: A guide for school division strategic planning. November, 2011.
4. Government of Saskatchewan, Ministry of Education. Provincial Panel on Student Achievement, Executive Summary. Unpublished. February 2010.
5. Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning*. New York, NY: Routledge.
6. Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge.
7. Holy Trinity Roman Catholic School Division #22. 2015. Policy 2: Role of the Board. Online Resource:  
<https://www.htcsd.ca/public/pdf/board/policies/Policy%20%20%282%29.pdf>
8. Hume, K. (2010). *The Evidence-based School*. Toronto, ON: Pearson.
9. Knoster, T. (1991). Presentation at TASH conference, Washington, DC.
10. Reeves, D. (2009). *Leading Change in your School*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
11. Saskatchewan Provincial Leadership Team: Education Sector Strategic Plan for 2015-2016
12. Saskatchewan Provincial Reading Team. (2015). Saskatchewan Reads. Online Resource:  
<https://saskatchewanreads.wordpress.com>
13. Sharratt, L. & Fullan, M. (2012). *Putting Faces on the Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
14. Sharratt, L. & Fullan, M. (2009). *Realization: The change imperative for deepening district-wide reform*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.