
**Supporting Leader and Teacher Growth
through Inquiry-Based Professional Learning and Generative Dialogue
2018 - 2021**

**Report Submitted to
Medicine Hat Public School Division**

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To learn. To grow. To build a better world.

INTRODUCTION

Correlating activities of teaching and leading with student learning has been elusive at best and continues to present challenges to educational leadership and school improvement. Research that purports panaceaic and episodic approaches has all but become extinct in favor of a large body of emerging literature lauding the effectiveness of sustained, purposeful, cohesive, and systemic foci on professional collaboration and pedagogical improvement, instructional leadership, and collective professional efficacy (see, for example, Adams, Braunberger, Hamilton, & Caldwell, 2021; Adams, Mombourquette, & Allan, 2020; Adams, Mombourquette, & Townsend, 2019; Chernowski, 2018).

The formation of functional teams of educators is both a powerful indicator and strategy in pursuit of increased effectiveness in teaching, leading, and learning throughout a school division. In addition, organizational and individual growth requires the skillful use of generative dialogue; clear messaging and commitment to establishing and achieving high expectations; attention to best practices in professional learning; and frequent consideration of the influence of trust and shared responsibility. That is,

.... when educators are provided site-embedded time and are *expected* to form functional teams, when those teams are able to convert their goals into guiding questions that form ongoing inquiry into an aspect of practice they deem important, and when supported through regular conversations with colleagues and leaders, organizational learning, competence, and efficacy are exemplary.¹

To Learn. To Grow. To Build a Better World.

Over three years (2018 - 2021), system leaders, school leaders, and teachers in Medicine Hat Public School Division (MHPSD) were asked to reconsider historical paradigms of student, teacher, and leader learning. This re-conceptualization involved examining and re-imagining the implications of nine foundational assumptions, including the tenets that:

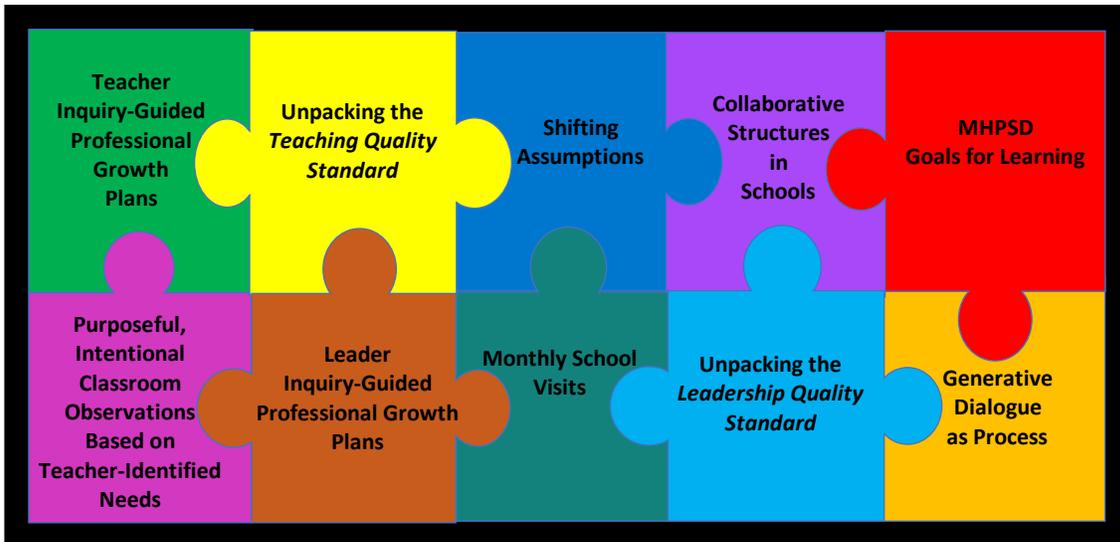
- learning is a process of growth rather than an episode or event;
- professional learning is a collaborative and constructivist process;
- authentic curiosity yields problems of practice that enhance professional growth;
- effective leadership is necessarily distributed and often democratized;
- the moral imperative of leading learning is to impact student learning as directly as possible through establishing a culture of shared responsibility;
- all educators are presumed competent;
- leading learning requires and causes reflective action that results in conscious competence;
- leading learning is not accidental. It is evidence-based, intentional, and sustained; and
- central office leaders have a critical role in modeling the leadership of learning.

Based on these assumptions and by adopting an integrated approach from the classroom to the board room, educational partners in MHPSD implemented a ten-element model in order to enhance systemic levels of learning. A variety of informal anecdotal literature (McDonald & Robinson, 2019) posits that this process is successful in various ways and to various extents in, among other things, the development of:

¹ Adapted from Adams, P., Mombourquette, C., & Townsend, D. (2019). *Educational leadership: The power of generative dialogue*. Canadian Scholars' Press.

- increased organizational capacity;
- system and school leaders' skills of generative dialogue that contribute to effective instructional leadership;
- conditions and processes for effective growth and supervision of teachers and leaders;
- deep understanding and effective enactment of the Alberta Quality Standards combined with reflective practice among all professional staff; and
- structures and conditions through which collaborative learning characterizes school and system culture.

Figure 1: Ten Elements Comprising the Three-Year Process



The Process of Growth and Development

Over three years, leaders at all levels of the division established conditions for purposeful, focused, learner-centric teaching supported by elbow-to-elbow instructional leadership.

In practical terms, this involved:

- teachers and leaders using inquiry-informed growth plans based on their respective provincial standard of practice;
- monthly site visits and conversations that were characteristic of generative dialogue between the system liaison and school leader and, eventually between the school leader and teachers; and
- monthly reflection and learning with and among system and school leaders during Administrative Team sessions.



Specific strategies were introduced using a purposeful implementation process. These strategies are described below:

Activities Undertaken in each Phase of Implementation

	Year 1: 2018 <i>Readiness and Awareness</i>	Year 2: 2019 <i>Partial Targeted Implementation</i>	Year 3: 2020 <i>Full Implementation</i>	Year 4: 2021 <i>Measured Release</i>
Purpose	To come to a shared understanding of the intent and vocabulary of leadership writ large and, specifically, vis-à-vis the <i>TQS</i> , <i>LQS</i> , and <i>SLQS</i> .	To provide monthly experiences with system and school leaders specific to the process, successes, challenges, and potential obstacles with inquiry-based professional growth.	To provide monthly experiences and support as system and school leaders infuse inquiry-based professional learning with teachers in multiple existing and new structures and processes.	Data collection to provide system and site direction for continued implementation; progress check to support the continued embedding of the generative leadership model throughout MHPSD.
Activities	<p>Workshops and System Retreats to examine answers to the questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the general descriptors, behavioral indicators, and competencies in the <i>TQS</i> and <i>LQS</i>? ▪ What literature supports generative leadership? ▪ What are the characteristics of professional development and professional learning? ▪ What site and system organizational structures and processes support enhanced teaching, leading, and learning? ▪ What is inquiry-based professional growth? ▪ What are provincial policies and leaders' responsibilities around educator growth, supervision, and evaluation? 	<p>Monthly site visits by the external team (Executive member and researcher) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Model the skills of generative dialogue with all school leadership teams. ▪ Enact a process of monthly reflection-for-action with school leaders. ▪ Share current practice and extend best practices and school sites through workshops during Administrative Team days. ▪ Support school leaders' professional inquiry. ▪ Examine existing processes for instructional growth and supervision leadership of teachers and explore new potential processes for undertaking this <i>LQS</i> responsibility. 	<p>Monthly site visits by the external team (Executive member and researcher) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue all activities of Phase II ▪ Begin classroom visits where requests for the purpose of practicing instructional leadership and generative dialogue. ▪ Begin the use of inquiry-based professional growth plans with all teachers. ▪ Integrate the activities of generative dialogue into all existing collaborative structures and process in all schools. 	<p>Engagement of research team involving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue monthly site visits by the Executive Team members to liaison schools. ▪ Co-design of qualitative and quantitative data collection with researchers, Executive Team members, and school leaders. ▪ Administrate data collection instrument, analysis of findings, and write final report to make recommendations for future considerations and system areas for need and action. ▪ Final site visit by the external team to support sustained enactment of the process.

Data Collection

Designing the data collection instruments that would meet the needs of the school division as well as provide data that could inform the larger research community comprised a lengthy process involving school and system leaders.

From the outset of this process it was apparent that data gathering should be aligned with the first four universal goals of Medicine Hat Public School Division: building an inclusive mindset; supporting optimal learning; nurturing a culture of wellness; and developing leadership capacity. In this way, we could begin to ascertain both the extent of, and the ways in which, involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue specifically influenced the achievement of divisional goals.

In order to accomplish this alignment, in early 2021 school and system leaders were asked to consider the following questions relative to each of the first four universal goals:

- In what ways will our learning community be different as a result of our work with inquiry-based professional learning and the use of generative dialogue?
- How will we know? What evidence will we gather?

Working in administrative teams, leaders discussed and recorded attitudes, dispositions, and behaviours they believed would indicate that school-wide involvement in inquiry-based professional learning with generative dialogue impacted the achievement of each universal goal. These ideas were then collated, common themes identified, and in April 2021 a small working group, including university facilitators, system and school leaders, drafted both quantitative questions and qualitative prompts seeking reflection explicitly designed to illuminate the relationship between inquiry-based professional learning and the achievement of the first four jurisdictional goals as outlined in the 2019 Three Year Education Plan.

In September 2021, an invitation was extended to all teachers, school and system leaders to provide their perspectives about the three-year process. The invitation read, in part:

We are interested in your experiences with the research and development work involving system and school leaders in Medicine Hat Public School Division over the past three years. Accordingly, we are seeking data to inform the question: *In what ways did implementation of inquiry-based professional learning and generative dialogue impact the MHPSD learning community?*²

It might have been expected that, administered as it was during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, voluntary participation in the survey might have been low. However, nearly 50% of MHPSD teachers and 100% of school and system leaders engaged with the survey and provided feedback specific to the first four system priorities: inclusive mindset, optimal learning environment, professional well-being, and leadership capacity. This response rate provides a high level of certainty that diverse voices and perspectives were heard representing a majority of educators in the division.

This report presents the results of the survey instrument (including quantitative and qualitative questions) and concludes with a number of questions for consideration.

² The data collection instrument is provided in the Appendix.

SURVY RESULTS

This portion of the report presents the results of the survey completed electronically by teachers, school, and system leaders in late August/early September 2021. Results are reported in three sections: first, general participant information; second, quantitative (Likert scale questions) and qualitative (open-ended questions) data aligned with MHPSD’s first four universal goals: building an inclusive mindset; supporting optimum learning; nurturing a culture of wellness; and developing leadership capacity. Finally, survey participants were asked summative questions related to the overall impact of this process as well as invited to share reflections, not addressed in the survey, about the influence of inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue on their practice or the culture of learning in MHPSD.

GENERAL PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Total Number of Respondents

Teacher	162
Vice-Principal	27
Principal	17
Executive Leader	5
Total	211

Reported Frequency of Generative Dialogue Conversations

	Teachers	School and System Leaders
Monthly	35.85%	59.09%
Every 6 - 8 weeks	47.80%	40.91%
Once/Twice	15.09%	0.00%
Never	1.26%	0.00%
Total	100%	100%

As indicated in the introduction, this project required generative dialogue conversations on a monthly basis, or, at the very least, every other month. 84% of participants indicated that they experienced conversations within this frequency range; however, over 16% of teachers indicated that they rarely or never participated in generative dialogue.

DATA ALIGNED WITH MHPSD’S FIRST FOUR UNIVERSAL GOALS

Goal One: Building an Inclusive Mindset

This section of the survey asked participants to focus on the divisional priority of “approaching all people with an **inclusive mindset**; seeking to ensure that all are engaged in the life of the school community in a manner that meets their needs.”

Likert Scale Questions: Building an Inclusive Mindset

The following three tables illustrate participants’ perceptions of the ways in which inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue contributed to their development of an inclusive mindset in teachers and school and system leaders.

Table 1: Impact on the Development of Inclusive Mindset - All Respondents

All Respondents (162 Teachers, 27 Vice-Principals, 17 Principals, 5 Executive Leaders)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my collaboration across existing structures to meet the needs of all students (for example, through CTM or department/grade level meetings).	21.36%	64.99%	11.28%	2.37%
my ability to collaborate with colleagues to meet the needs of all students.	26.27%	58.81%	12.24%	2.69%
my confidence to meet the needs of all students.	21.49%	64.78%	12.24%	1.49%
my capacity to respond to challenges to student learning.	22.16%	65.27%	10.78%	1.80%



Table 2: Impact on the Development of Inclusive Mindset - Teachers

Teachers (n = 162)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my collaboration across existing structures to meet the needs of all students (for example, through CTM or department/grade level meetings).	22.22%	64.20%	9.88%	3.70%
my ability to collaborate with colleagues to meet the needs of all students.	24.84%	58.39%	12.42%	4.35%
my confidence to meet the needs of all students.	24.22%	61.49%	12.42%	1.86%
my capacity to respond to challenges to student learning.	22.36%	65.22%	9.94%	2.48%

Table 3: Impact on the Development of Inclusive Mindset - School and System Leaders

School and System Leaders (n = 49)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my collaboration across existing structures to meet the needs of all students (for example, through CTM or department/grade level meetings).	43.48%	54.35%	2.17%	0.00%
my ability to collaborate with colleagues to meet the needs of all students.	50.00%	47.83%	2.17%	0.00%
my confidence to meet the needs of all students.	32.61%	63.04%	4.35%	0.00%
my capacity to respond to challenges to student learning.	39.13%	56.52%	4.35%	0.00%

Items to Note Regarding Quantitative Data for **Building an Inclusive Mindset**

- Over 80% of the teachers and 95% of the leaders indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed with each stem and its level of impact on the divisional goal: building an inclusive mindset.
- 95% of school leaders indicated the process supported their capacity to respond to the challenges to student learning. 87% of teachers indicated the same. These results affirm the imperative nature of leading and teaching to ensure optimum learning for all students as mandated in both the *Leadership Quality Standard* and the *Teaching Quality Standard*.
- One essential outcome of inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue is the impact on teacher and leader collaboration to meet the needs of all students. Almost 98% of school leaders affirmed this to be the case; 83% of teachers concurred.
- Approximately 12% to 15% of the teachers indicated that they ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ that inquiry-based professional learning impacted their inclusive mindset. This number was echoed in the 16% of teachers who said they never or rarely participated in regular generative dialogue.

Open-Ended Question: Building an Inclusive Mindset

Respondents were asked to “describe ways in which your involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue has contributed to developing your **inclusive mindset**.”

Teacher Responses: Most teachers who commented in response to this question indicated that involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue contributed to their professional learning by enhancing their inclusive mindset to meet the needs of students in their classrooms.

Specifically, teachers valued:

- the opportunity to share and collaborate with colleagues and leaders (57).
- developing specific strategies and skills to meet student needs - such as differentiation, global supports (25).
- the process of inquiry, specifically, a clear and sustained focus on the inquiry question (36).
- the opportunity to reflect on their growth and learning (12).

Our generative dialogues have promoted my inclusive mindset by establishing a team effort in meeting student needs through my personal professional development.

Honest conversations based on reflecting on my professional practice have enabled me to see areas of needed growth and enabled me to see that my plan to target that need have actually led to success.

Teacher

Other teachers highlighted the feeling of being valued in the inquiry process, the role of evidence in answering their inquiry question, and an increased confidence in their teaching practice.

Lastly, seven teachers indicated that the inquiry process reinforced their existing inclusive mindset and eight teacher comments stated that this process did not impact their inclusive mindset.

Through our generative dialogue goal we were able to identify ways to meet students where they were at and progress them further along their learning journey.

Teacher

Hearing the views of other colleagues, their focuses and approaches, allowed me to broaden my understanding of supporting all students.

Teacher

Our generative dialogues have promoted my inclusive mindset by establishing a team effort in meeting student needs through my personal professional development. Honest conversations based on reflecting on my professional practice have enabled me to see areas of needed growth and enabled me to see that my plan to target that need have actually led to success.

Teacher

School and System Leader Responses: Most leaders who commented in response to this prompt indicated that involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue contributed to their professional learning by enhancing their inclusive mindset to meet the needs of students in their classrooms.

Specifically, leaders valued:

- the opportunity to listen with purpose and support teachers in responding to student learning needs.
- making connections within the staff to help support inclusive practices in the school.
- sustaining focus on own inclusive goals.

It allowed me to listen with purpose to the challenges teachers were having when responding to student learning needs and provided another avenue to connect teachers' beliefs with evidence and practice.

Vice-Principal

This has helped me to support teachers and ensure that inclusion is alive and more than a mindset. Having regular conversations with colleagues about what they are doing to promote inclusion, then seeing it in action in the classroom, gives me great confidence in the supports and classroom instruction we are providing for our students.

Principal

Goal Two: Supporting Optimal Learning

This section of the survey asked participants to focus on the divisional priority of “providing a **quality learning environment** that attends to the needs of all students.”

Likert Scale Questions: Supporting Optimal Learning

The following three tables illustrate participants’ perceptions of the ways in which inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue contributed to the capacity of teachers and school and system leaders to provide an optimal learning environment.

Table 4: Impact Ability to Provide Optimal Learning Environment - All Respondents

All Respondents (162 Teachers, 27 Vice-Principals, 17 Principals, 5 Executive Leaders)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my level of reflection on practice.	40.79%	51.06%	7.25%	0.91%
growth in my teaching practice.	33.64%	55.76%	10.30%	0.30%
the frequency of my professional conversations with colleagues.	33.53%	50.45%	13.90%	2.11%
the quality of my professional conversations about student learning.	34.44%	51.36%	12.69%	1.51%
my curiosity about teaching and learning.	31.52%	54.55%	11.82%	2.12%



Table 5: Impact Ability to Provide Optimal Learning Environment - Teachers

Teachers (n = 162)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my level of reflection on practice.	41.98%	49.38%	6.79%	1.85%
growth in my teaching practice.	38.27%	50.62%	10.49%	0.62%
the frequency of my professional conversations with colleagues.	29.01%	54.32%	13.58%	3.09%
the quality of my professional conversations about student learning.	32.10%	53.09%	12.35%	2.47%
my curiosity about teaching and learning.	34.57%	51.85%	11.11%	2.47%

Table 6: Impact Ability to Provide Optimal Learning Environment - School and System Leaders

School and System Leaders (n = 49)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my level of reflection on practice.	72.09%	27.91%	0.00%	0.00%
growth in my teaching practice.	45.24%	54.76%	0.00%	0.00%
the frequency of my professional conversations with colleagues.	76.74%	23.26%	0.00%	0.00%
the quality of my professional conversations about student learning.	72.09%	27.91%	0.00%	0.00%
my curiosity about teaching and learning.	55.81%	44.19%	0.00%	0.00%

Items to Note Regarding Quantitative Data for **Providing an Optimal Learning Environment**

- Almost 85% of the teachers and 100% of the leaders indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed that the work of this project has positively impacted various aspects of providing an optimal learning environment.
- Reflection, conversation, and collaboration is at the heart of inquiry-based professional learning guided by generative dialogue. Teachers and school leaders recognized the impact of this process on their level of reflection (teachers 91%, school leaders 100%), the frequency of their professional conversations with colleagues about student learning (teachers 86%, school leaders 100%), and growth in their own teaching practice (teachers 89%, school leaders 100%).

Open-Ended Question: Providing an Optimal Learning Environment

Respondents were asked to “describe how opportunities for you to reflect on your practice through inquiry-based professional learning and generative dialogue has impacted your ability to **provide an optimal learning environment.**”

Teacher Responses: Most teachers who commented in response to this prompt indicated that involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue enhanced their ability to nurture an optimal learning environment in their classrooms.

Specifically, teachers noted that this involvement encouraged them to:

- understand and meet student needs (23).
- strive for growth and improved practice (19).
- reflect on teaching practice (18).
- think in new ways (13).
- strengthen their knowledge base (9).
- seek solutions to student learning challenges (8).

The reflection process allows me to think of all aspects of my classroom and teaching to ensure I am supporting all students and meet them where they are at. Having time to do this is very critical.

Teacher

Teachers also appreciated the individual and group conversations, the opportunities for self-reflection and assessment, and the cyclical structure of the inquiry process.

The questions asked in generative dialogue have caused me to reflect more on my practice, and where my time and energy is best spent.

Teacher

Reflection has motivated me to develop better numeracy practices; students have been more engaged and motivated.

Teacher

Lastly, six teachers indicated that the inquiry process reinforced their existing optimal learning practices and 11 comments stated that this process did not impact their focus on optimal learning.

I found it very purposeful to have an inquiry question that was able to guide my professional learning. It provided me with the opportunity to constantly be reflective of my teaching practice and if I was able to create an optimal learning environment for my students.

Teacher

School and System Leader Responses: All leaders who commented in response to this prompt indicated that involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue contributed to their professional learning enhanced their ability to nurture an optimal learning environment in their classrooms.

Specifically, leaders acknowledged that optimal learning was addressed through:

- consistent and predictable processes of reflection.
- frequent and focused conversations with teachers.

This opened the door to some great conversations that moved the needle in terms of teacher thought and practice with optimal learning.

Principal

The process has created a cadence that a) drives reflection and b) ensures that I am in schools meeting with leaders and teachers on a monthly basis.

Executive Team Member

Having time to discuss and reflect on my practice gave me the opportunity to see what I could be doing to better support teacher so that they could in turn support their students.

Vice Principal

This opened the door to some great conversations that moved the needle in terms of teacher thought and practice with optimal learning.

Principal

Goal Three: Nurturing a Culture of Wellness

This section of the survey asked participants to focus on the divisional priority of “effective, collaborative structures contribute to **well-being.**”

Likert Scale Questions: Nurturing a Culture of Professional Well-Being

The following three tables illustrate participants’ perceptions of the ways in which inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue contributed to the professional well-being of teachers and school and system leaders.

Table 7: Contributions to Professional Well-Being - All Respondents

All Respondents (162 Teachers, 27 Vice-Principals, 17 Principals, 5 Executive Leaders)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my level of professional efficacy.	24.01%	63.22%	11.25%	1.52%
my sense of professional well-being.	20.73%	56.40%	19.51%	3.35%
my willingness to share my professional learning.	33.43%	51.98%	12.16%	2.43%

Table 8: Contributions to Professional Well-Being - Teachers

Teachers (n = 162)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my level of professional efficacy.	24.07%	64.81%	8.64%	2.47%
my sense of professional well-being.	20.50%	57.14%	18.01%	4.35%
my willingness to share my professional learning.	33.33%	52.47%	10.49%	3.70%

Table 9: Contributions to Professional Well-Being - School and System Leaders

School and System Leaders (n = 49)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my level of professional efficacy.	45.45%	54.55%	0.00%	0.00%
my sense of professional well-being.	40.91%	54.55%	4.55%	0.00%
my willingness to share my professional learning.	61.36%	34.09%	4.55%	0.00%

Items to Note Regarding Quantitative Data for **Nurturing a Culture of Professional Well-Being**

- Over 75% of the teachers and over 95% of the leaders indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed that the work of this project has positively impacted various aspects of nurturing a culture of wellness.

- For multiple years, and most certainly through the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, wellness of students and staff has been a priority in the Medicine Hat Public School Division. Important to the concept of wellness is the shift away from privatized practice toward a culture characterized by conversation, collaboration, and community. On a monthly basis, generative dialogue brought teachers and school leaders together in small groups where they shared their stories of professional learning and its impact on their students and on themselves as teachers and leaders. It facilitated instructional collaboration and heightened a sense of community. The answers to these stems indicate that these opportunities for shared conversation:
 - Led to enhanced levels of professional efficacy (belief in their own ability to make a difference in student learning) with 89% of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing and 100% of school leaders acknowledging this impact.
 - Heightened teacher (77%) and school leader (95%) sense of professional well-being. Of additional note is that 22% of teachers did not agree their professional well-being had been impacted by participation in this process. Further exploration would be required to arrive at a clear understanding about the thinking underlying the responses of these educators.

Open-Ended Question: Nurturing a Culture of Wellness

Respondents were asked to “describe the ways in which your involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has contributed to your **professional well-being.**”

Teacher Responses: Most teachers who commented in response to this prompt indicated that involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue enhanced their perceptions of professional efficacy and well-being.

Specifically, they noted that involvement in this process supported professional well-being and efficacy by:

- offering a safe, accepting, and supportive environment in which to grow professionally (21).
It has helped me feel heard and valued as a team member.
Teacher
- creating opportunities to enhance professional competence and confidence (22).
- providing a structure to share with colleagues for professional support (25).
- facilitating learning about alternate ways of meeting students’ learning/social/emotional needs (10).
- opening up conversations with leaders who, then, became actively involved in supporting inquiry (5).
I feel like my passions and desires for further learning and growth as a professional can be supported, appreciated, and encouraged.
Teacher
- enhancing a sense of belonging - beyond the classroom - for the work of the school (3).

Lastly, 27 comments indicated that involvement in the inquiry process did not contribute to their efficacy and professional well-being due to the context of the school year; perceptions that the process undermined trust and professional autonomy; and the expectations of inquiry-based professional learning were already part of their practice.

I gained a level of confidence in sharing my goals and it kept me accountable to them. I felt more effective in my goal setting and revisiting these goals as a result of generative dialogue.

Teacher

Being met where I was at with understanding and proper support that was framed in a way that made me feel I was able and capable to reach my goal.

Teacher

There are no questions off limits and no wrong answers - this has provided a safe and supportive environment in which to grow professionally.

Teacher

School and System Leader Responses: Most leaders who commented in response to this prompt indicated that involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue enhanced their perceptions of professional efficacy and well-being.

Specifically, leaders perceived that:

- the nature of collaboration and reflection enhanced efficacy.
- authentic conversations contributed to a sense of well-being.
- the process revealed needs of teachers and how leaders could better support them.
- being heard contributed to a sense of confidence.

Being heard and talking about your practice gave me a sense of self-efficacy....

In conversations with my site superintendent, I was able to identify things I was struggling with along with successes and strategies that were working. Being able to reflect with another professional helped my well-being.

Vice Principal

I have more tools in the toolbox to engage in collaborative and reflective conversations with others, which has reduced the levels of stress I might feel....

Vice Principal

Having thoughtful, genuine, inquiry-based dialogue with experienced colleagues regarding my goals, actions, learning, and evidence has supported my practice and increased my self-efficacy.

Principal



Goal Four: Developing Leadership Capacity

This section of the survey asked participants to focus on the divisional priority of “developing **leadership** skills among all members of the school community by providing opportunity, mentorship, development and support.”

Likert Scale Questions: Developing Leadership Capacity

The following three tables illustrate participants’ perceptions of the ways in which inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue influenced the development of leadership skills among all members of the school community.

Table 10: Influence the Development of Leadership Capacity - All Respondents

All Respondents (162 Teachers, 27 Vice-Principals, 17 Principals, 5 Executive Leaders)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
how I plan for professional growth.	31.50%	53.21%	14.07%	1.22%
the quality of professional conversations between my principal/vice-principal and me.	37.42%	50.31%	9.51%	2.76%
my levels of relational trust.	25.85%	52.62%	18.15%	3.38%

Table 11: Influence the Development of Leadership Capacity - Teachers

Teachers (n = 162)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
how I plan for professional growth.	34.38%	50.63%	13.13%	1.88%
the quality of professional conversations between my principal/vice-principal and me.	40.00%	45.00%	11.88%	3.13%
my levels of relational trust.	25.32%	54.43%	14.56%	5.70%

Table 12: Influence the Development of Leadership Capacity - School and System Leaders

School and System Leaders (n = 49)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
how I plan for professional growth.	65.91%	34.09%	0.00%	0.00%
the quality of professional conversations between my principal/vice-principal and me.	74.42%	25.58%	0.00%	0.00%
my levels of relational trust.	65.91%	34.09%	0.00%	0.00%

Items to Note Regarding Quantitative Data for Developing Leadership Capacity

- Over 80% of the teachers and 100% of the leaders indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed that the work of this project has positively impacted various aspects of developing leadership capacity.
- Since 2018, school and system leaders engaged in a process of learning about inquiry-based professional learning and its support through generative dialogue. Two years ago, with the guidance of their school leaders, teachers were encouraged to craft inquiry-based professional growth plans and engage in regular generative dialogue. Responses from teachers in this survey indicate that not all participated in generative dialogue with a school leader. This small yet significant group of teachers would be more likely to disagree with the stems in this question area.
- School leaders actively participated in both inquiry and generative dialogue. The strong commitment of system leaders to engaging in monthly generative conversations with principals and vice principals led to 100% of these leaders indicating they strongly endorsed the process: it influenced how they plan, led to quality professional conversations, and positively impacted levels of relational trust.



Open-Ended Question: Developing Leadership Capacity

Respondents were asked to “describe how the process of inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue has influenced the development of **your own leadership capacity**”

Teacher Responses: Most teachers who commented in response to this prompt indicated that involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue influenced the development of their leadership capacity.

Specifically, they noted that involvement in this process supported the development of leadership capacity by:

- demonstrating within the school an enhanced level of trust and compassion and/or sense of team and collaboration (22).
- being empowered to grow in confidence and risk taking (21).
- allowing for individuals to take charge of their own professional growth and refined sense of intentionality (10).
- regularity of conversations led to increased focus on the work and its importance (7).

Learned how to ask more questions instead of giving solutions.

Teacher

Teachers also appreciated the opportunities to share their strengths with colleagues, the time being provided to make the processes associated with inquiry actually happen, and the help provided by leaders to support their work.

Lastly, 2 teachers indicated they were not included in the generative dialogue process and 16 of the teacher comments stated that this process did not, or were unsure about, impact [on] their leadership.

As I learned more, I was able to contribute more to my colleagues. I feel like I took a leadership role by year's end.

Teacher

I am able to proudly show the things I am doing with confidence, and willing to demonstrate skills and techniques to other teachers.

Teacher

I am learning to trust my professional judgement and trust that I know my kids and know what to do.

I am a better leader because of what I learn/reflect on during this process because I have a clear vision of what needs to happen to best support my students.

Teacher

School and System Leader Responses: All leaders who commented in response to this prompt indicated that involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue influenced the development of their leadership capacity.

Specifically, leaders believed their leadership capacity was developed in:

- building relational trust.
- fostering reflection and professional growth.
- responding to the professional needs of colleagues.

Regular meetings and observations have allowed me to become a more responsive and focused leader.

Principal

It has helped me develop professional relationships with the staff I am working closely with. It helps build trust and makes me accountable for my supportive actions.

Vice Principal

The opportunity to have conversations with staff increased relational trust, allowing us to explore the work together.

Vice Principal



DATA EMERGING FROM SUMMATIVE QUESTIONS

Overall Positive Impact of Professional Inquiry Supported by Generative Dialogue

Likert Scale Questions: Overall Positive Impact

The following three tables illustrate participants' perceptions of the ways in which inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue positively impacted various aspects of learning and professional practice.

Table 13: Positive Impact - All Respondents

All Respondents (162 Teachers, 27 Vice-Principals, 17 Principals, 5 Executive Leaders)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
the frequency of growth-linked classroom visits by principal/vice principal.	16.98%	49.38%	25.93%	7.72%
my level of engagement in professional learning.	24.54%	57.06%	15.95%	2.45%
the building of a school-wide culture of learning.	23.01%	55.83%	17.79%	3.37%
student learning.	26.61%	63.00%	8.87%	1.53%

Table 14: Positive Impact - Teachers

Teachers (n = 162)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
the frequency of growth-linked classroom visits by principal/vice principal.	14.47%	50.31%	25.79%	9.43%
my level of engagement in professional learning.	22.78%	58.86%	15.19%	3.16%
the building of a school-wide culture of learning.	22.01%	55.35%	17.61%	5.03%
student learning.	29.56%	61.01%	7.55%	1.89%

Table 15: Positive Impact - School and System Leaders

School and System Leaders (n = 49)				
Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
the frequency of growth-linked classroom visits by principal/vice principal.	45.24%	45.24%	9.52%	0.00%
my level of engagement in professional learning.	52.27%	45.45%	2.27%	0.00%
the building of a school-wide culture of learning.	53.49%	41.86%	4.65%	0.00%
student learning.	43.18%	54.55%	2.27%	0.00%

Items to Note Regarding Quantitative Data for **Overall Impact**

- Over 65% of the teachers and 90% of the leaders indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed with each stem and its level of impact.
- Close to 33% of teachers indicated the process followed did not impact the frequency of growth-linked classroom visits by principal/vice principal. Conversely, 90% of school leaders indicated the process did impact the frequency.
- 90% of teachers and 97% of leaders said the process involved in inquiry-based professional learning through generative dialogue positively impacted student learning. Of the items addressed in this study this finding is perhaps the most important. Alberta’s professional practice standards - the *TQS*, *LQS*, and *SLQS* - identify the outcome of professional learning as supporting **optimum learning for all students**. This stem and the responses to it clearly indicate positive impact on student learning.

Open-Ended Question: Overall Positive Impact

Respondents were asked to “describe how **professional conversations** with your school leader(s) have influenced your teaching practice.”

Teacher Responses: A majority of teachers who responded to this prompt indicated that involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue influenced their teaching practices and, indirectly, student learning.

Specifically, teachers noted that participation in the process contributed to their:

- frequency and depth of reflection that sparked ideas about their teaching practices (30).
- sharing with colleagues to re-consider and implement strategies to better support students (15).
- feelings of support in achieving collaborative and individual professional goals (13).
- clarity of focus and increased individual accountability for their growth and pedagogical choices (12).

Conversations and reflections have been meaningful in that I am held accountable to reach my goals and, at the same time, feel supported and assisted in meeting those goals.
Teacher

Teachers also perceived the process enabled them to better communicate their professional learning needs to their school leader, their relationship with the leadership team was enhanced, and their levels of teaching efficacy increased.

The frequent data-based conversations were a great starting point for reflection on my teaching practice. Conversations were rooted in what was best for student need based on real-time indicators of success. Seeing the data that I am often unable to gather when I am teaching allowed me to then develop different structures that were effective for students at all levels.

Teacher

I have become more flexible in my thinking about teaching and am more readily open to try new things and meet challenges.

Teacher

Six teachers indicated their teaching practices were not influenced by participation in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue.

Additional Reflections and Comments

Open-Ended Question

Finally, respondents were asked to “describe any other ways, not addressed in this survey, that inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue has **impacted your practice or the culture of learning in MHPSD.**”

Teacher Responses: When teachers were asked to provide additional comments about the ways in which inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue impacted their practice and/or the culture of learning, four themes characterized their responses.

They believed the process contributed to:

- meaningful, sustained conversations about their growth.
- positive relationships, collaboration and communication.
- a safe, supportive environment.
- a sense of responsibility and accountability.

I appreciate the sense of community being built within the school that supports the growth of teachers.

Teacher

Three suggestions for future consideration emerged from the data in this question:

- more conversations with teachers with similar goals.
- keep the conversations going.
- keep the process.

I have enjoyed being able to pursue my own research interests and have felt that taking responsibility for this has made me more engaged with developing my teaching practice.

Teacher

School and System Leader Responses: When leaders were asked to provide additional comments about the ways in which inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue impacted their practice and/or the culture of learning, two themes characterized their responses.

They believed the process contributed to:

- a sense of common direction.
- increased number of connections, professional sharing, and collaborative learning throughout the division.

This initiative has created a wonderful sense that we are all moving toward professional dialogue for growth.

Vice Principal

I appreciate how it facilitates conversation and instructional leadership. I feel connected to staff more than any other context.

Principal

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The purpose of gathering data in educational research is to inform action. In the case of this study, data provided evidence to answer the question:

In what ways did implementation of inquiry-based professional learning and generative dialogue impact the MHPSD learning community?

Teachers, school, and system leaders in MHPSD affirm that inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue has impacted their professional practice. These impacts are highlighted below and are accompanied by questions and considerations for policy and practice within MHPSD.

Increased Reflective Practice

Numerous studies point to the importance of offering sustained and frequent opportunities for educators to reflect for, during, and on their practice (see Loughran, 1996; Townsend & Adams, 2009). In the case of MHPSD, this need was particularly acute during the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. The vast majority of participants noted the value of reflection on their practice (92%) and the link between reflection and their evolving professional growth (89%).

- In what ways will the division ensure implementation of inquiry-based professional growth planning guided by generative dialogue in all schools so that every educator will benefit from reflective practice?
- What additional structures will the division develop to provide dedicated time for professional reflection?

Heightened Professional Autonomy and Shared Responsibility for Student Learning

One hallmark of functional educational cultures is the ways and extent to which agency and shared responsibility focus on organizational goals (Seashore-Louis, et al, 2010; Fullan & Quinn, 2015). Participants in this study identified this process as supporting professional autonomy, individual efficacy (87%), accountability, and individual and shared responsibility for student learning.

- How will the division ascertain educators' levels of efficacy on an annual basis?
- What evidence will the division accept that shared responsibility for student learning is occurring in all schools?

Facilitated Collaborative Practice

Contemporary studies continue to point to the value of collaboration (Adams, et al, 2018; OECD, 2018). In the case of MHPSD, participants recognized the positive impact of this process on their ability to collaborate with colleagues to meet the needs of all students (85%).

- In what ways will the division continue to use collaboration as a means to moderate privatized practice in order to meet the needs of all students?
- How will the executive team communicate the expectation that collaborative practice will be linked with professional growth?

Highlighted Differences in Understanding of Instructional Leadership

The Alberta *Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy* (2015) indicates the essential role of principals in supporting teacher growth and supervising all aspects of instruction to ensure optimum learning for all students through implementation of the *Teaching Quality Standard* (2020a). A vast majority of school and system leaders perceived that this process helped them more effectively support teacher growth and, through conversations, helped fulfill the requirements of instructional supervision (100%).

- What will be the broadly-agreed-upon and communicated MHPSD definition of instructional supervision?
- What role will inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue continue to play in this co-created definition of instructional supervision?

Revealed Uneven Enactment of Processes

Fullan and Quinn (2015) are clear about the importance of cohesive practices throughout a school division. In this MHPSD study, a lack of cohesion is highlighted in two ways. Close to 33% of teachers indicated that the process did not impact the frequency of growth-linked classroom visits by principals/vice-principals while 90% of school leaders noted that the process did impact the frequency. Furthermore, approximately 15% of teachers indicated they ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ with many stems related to inquiry-based professional learning; this number was echoed in the 16% of teachers who said they never or rarely participated in regular generative dialogue.

- What processes will the executive team establish to ensure consistent, frequent inquiry-based processes are implemented by all school leaders and teachers?
- What enabling structures will be put in place to support classroom visits based on the premises of growth and supervision?

Enhanced Trust

The Alberta professional practice standards expect teachers, school, and system leaders to foster effective relationships including elements associated with building interpersonal trust (Alberta Education, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). In this study, participants were specifically asked about the impact of this process on relational trust; 100% of system and school leaders perceived that trust was enhanced through the implementation of an inquiry-based model of professional learning, while 80% of teachers believed this to be the case.

- How will the division ascertain educators’ experience of relational trust on an ongoing basis?
- In what ways will inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue be used to further heighten levels of relational trust?

CONCLUSION

Throughout this report, we present data gleaned from conducting the end-of-study survey; we attempt to do so with minimal interpretation or commentary. We wanted to provide the verbatim voices of your executive team, principals, vice principals, and teachers as they reflected on their involvement in the process of inquiry guided professional learning supported by generative dialogue. Now, in this final section of the report, we add our thoughts and interpretations emerging from this data for the purpose of initiating a conversation in your division about future directions while also re-examining present policy and practice.

To begin, we believe a comment about the participation rate is warranted. A 100% survey participation rate among school and system leaders is commendable. Their response rate indicates the degree to which they valued the process and is indicative of their commitment to the goals of the organization. A 50% participation rate among teachers is also noteworthy in electronic survey completion as it is rare for 50% of a population to take the time needed to complete an extensive survey. This, too, is indicative of a process that is viewed to have made a difference in their professionalism and an impact on their instructional practice.

Second, in almost every category of both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the survey, school and systems leaders were often unanimous in *agreeing* or *strongly agreeing* with each area of impact. In many areas, a majority indicated they **strongly agreed** about areas of impact. A number of these include:

- my ability to collaborate with colleagues to meet the needs of all students (50%).
- my level of reflection on practice (72%).
- the frequency of my professional conversations with colleagues (77%).
- the quality of my professional conversations about student learning (72%).
- my willingness to share my professional learning (61%).
- how I plan for professional growth (66%).
- my levels of relational trust (66%).
- my level of engagement in professional learning (52%).
- the building of a school-wide culture of learning (53%)

It is rare in educational research for school leaders to overwhelmingly support an initiative and make public the ways in which they see it impacting their practice and those of their teachers. As researchers, we point to the significant lead time school and school system leaders had to learn the process of inquiry guided professional learning guided by generative dialogue; we referred to this phase of the process as creating Readiness and Awareness. During this time, leaders were able to engage with the relevant theory well in advance of working with their teachers. In addition, they were able to practice their skills under expert guidance. They had time to consider the implications of full implementation and how they would proceed with the measured release in Phase IV.

Third, teachers were brought into the inquiry-guided professional learning process in Phase III. Unfortunately, this timing turned out to be fraught with unplanned and unforeseen challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic influenced every school and every classroom. When many around the province stopped their deep and meaningful work of professional learning, your teachers, school leaders, and school system leaders dug in deeper. They made learning a non-negotiable and, in some ways, the work became a strategy for them to deal with many of the uncertainties of the pandemic. The students of MHPSD were the beneficiaries of this professionalism.

Nearly 50% of your teachers reflected on their involvement in this process and noted areas of impact on themselves as educators as well as on their students. Highlights of areas where teachers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* are that:

- 90% of your teachers agreed their participation in the process led to an impact on student learning!!
- 86% noted an impact on their curiosity about teaching and learning, with 91% indicating that this process positively impacted their level of reflection on their practice, and further, that 89% reported it led to growth in their teaching practice.

These numbers most certainly speak for themselves. Curiosity leads to reflection that results in enhanced teaching practice and improved student learning. When we began our work with Medicine Hat Public School Division, we did so with the hope that the process would positively impact teachers' teaching, leaders' leading, and, eventually, students' learning. Results from multiple studies we have conducted over many years led to our conviction that this process is effective in school improvement. We move through the measured release phase of the initiative confident that your teachers, school leaders, and school system leaders have experienced - and are committed to - achieving the success possible throughout the division if this process continues to be enacted over several years.

Finally, the Board of Trustees is to be commended for staying the course, for finding the financial and human resources to allocate to this important work, for supporting your executive team when questions were being asked about the process, and for never wavering in your support of inquiry guided professional learning supported by generative dialogue. We believe that the result of this work will have a lasting impact on your educational organization.

Congratulations on a job very well done.

Pam, Carmen, and Sharon

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Appendix
Survey Instrument

**Supporting Leader and Teacher Growth
through Inquiry-Based Professional Learning and Generative Dialogue**

Medicine Hat Public School Division
2018 - 2021

Researchers' Inquiry Question:

In what ways did the implementation of inquiry-based professional learning and generative dialogue impact the MHPSD learning community?

Medicine Hat Public School Division Educators:

As you know, the 2020-21 school year presented many opportunities, as well as challenges, for professional growth. During this past school year, you were introduced to and adopted inquiry-guided professional growth plans and experienced the use of generative dialogue to assist you in reflecting on your growth. Now, we encourage you to share your experiences with these processes in comparison to what you may have experienced in past years.

The data you provide us in this survey will help guide MHPSD with future directions related to teaching and learning. In addition, it will allow Drs. Adams, Mombourquette, and Allan to better understand how teachers and leaders experience inquiry-based professional learning. These understandings will support the identification of practices we can share with the broader research community.

This survey is structured around the four universal goals of MHPSD: building an inclusive mindset; supporting optimum learning; nurturing a culture of wellness; and developing leadership capacity. For each question in each section, you will be asked to choose a response of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. In addition, an open-ended question will be presented to provide the opportunity to expand on your experiences with inquiry guided professional learning.

Please indicate your primary role in MHPSD:

- Teacher
- Vice-Principal
- Principal
- Executive Leader

MHPSD Universal Goal: Inclusive Mindset

Approaching all people with an **inclusive mindset**; seeking to ensure that all are engaged in the life of the school community in a manner that meets their needs.

Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my collaboration across existing structures to meet the needs of all students (for example, through CTM or department/grade level meetings).				
my ability to collaborate with colleagues to meet the needs of all students.				
my confidence to meet the needs of all students.				
my capacity to respond to challenges to student learning.				

Please describe ways in which your involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue has contributed to developing your inclusive mindset.

MHPSD Universal Goal: Optimal Learning

Providing a **quality learning environment** that attends to the needs of all students.

Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my level of reflection on practice.				
growth in my teaching practice.				
the frequency of my professional conversations with colleagues.				
the quality of my professional conversations about student learning.				

my curiosity about teaching and learning.				
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Please describe how opportunities for you to reflect on your practice through inquiry-based professional learning and generative dialogue has impacted your ability to provide an optimal learning environment.

MHPSD Universal Goal: Culture of Wellness

Effective, collaborative structures contribute to **well-being**.

Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
my level of professional efficacy.				
my sense of professional well-being.				
my willingness to share my professional learning.				

Please describe ways in which your involvement in inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has contributed to your professional well-being.

MHPSD Universal Goal: Leadership

Developing **leadership** skills among all members of the school community by providing opportunity, mentorship, development and support.

Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
how I plan for professional growth.				
the quality of professional conversations between my principal/vice-principal and me.				
my levels of relational trust.				

Please describe how the process of inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue has influenced the development of your own leadership capacity?

General Reflections

Inquiry-based professional learning supported through generative dialogue has positively impacted:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
the frequency of growth-linked classroom visits by principal/vice principal.				
my level of engagement in professional learning.				
the building of a school-wide culture of learning.				
student learning.				

Please describe how professional conversations with your school leader(s) has influenced your teaching practice.

Please indicate the frequency most reflective of generative dialogue conversations focused on your growth plan and inquiry question you have had over the past school year with your principal, vice-principal, or supervisor:

- Monthly
- Every 6 -8 Weeks
- Once/Twice
- Never

Please describe any other ways, not addressed in this survey, that inquiry-based professional learning supported by generative dialogue has impacted your practice or the culture of learning in MHPSD.