Summer Leadership Gathering

Connecting Through the Spirit of Leadership

August 13-15, 2025

BCSSA Summer Leadership Academy: Agenda

Wednesday

Panel: Leadership in Context	4:30 – 6:30

Thursday

President's Welcome	8:30 – 8:40
PLC welcome and shape of the day	8:40 – 9:00
Competencies in Depth (Cross-District)	9:00 – 10:15

Break (10:15-10:45)

Competencies and Interconnections (Cross-District)	10:45 -11:30
Learning in place: reflective time outside	11:30 – 12:00

Lunch 12:00 – 1:00

Reflections on the Competencies	1:00 – 1:30
In-District Teams – Next Steps	1:30 – 2:00

Break (2:00 – 2:15)

BCSSA Strategic Plan – Supporting Your Work	2:15 – 3:25
Exit with a Commitment	3:25 - 3:30

The Spirit of Leadership: Guiding Values and Beliefs

To support the work of BCSSA and The Spirit of Leadership, five "Concept Papers" have been created, one for each competency. The intention of that work is to tease out discussion and to provide further impetus to continue the conversation about the nuances, celebrations and challenges of leadership. To support that dialogue, this paper has also been created with the intention of getting at the values and beliefs that guided the creation of The Spirit of Leadership.

Leadership as a Living System

In *The Spirit of Leadership*, leadership is defined not by hierarchy but by moral responsibility and relationship. It is a living, evolving practice rooted in care for children, communities, and the land. Strong school districts emerge from courageous leaders who act with integrity, clarity, and love.

The five competencies of this framework are interconnected and mutually reinforcing:

1. **Stewardship for the Future of All Children**
   The moral foundation of leadership. Stewardship centers our responsibility to create inclusive, just, and sustainable futures for all learners. It anchors every action in care, equity, and purpose.

2. **Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry**
   The leadership mindset. Inquiry is curiosity in action. It enables adaptation, reflective practice, and the pursuit of truth. Leaders foster environments where learning is ongoing and questions are valued.

3. **Growing the Capacity of Self and Others**
   The practice of empowerment. Leadership is a shared responsibility. Leaders support ongoing professional learning, distribute leadership, and cultivate the strengths of all members of the system.

4. **Contextual Literacy**
   The lens of wisdom. Leaders "read the land" by understanding their systems, histories, and relationships. They align local realities with broader educational, political, and cultural dynamics.

5. **Aligning Structures with Vision for Learning**
   The strategic backbone. Leaders ensure that governance, operations, and resources are in harmony with district learning goals. Alignment transforms vision into reality.

Interconnected Leadership Practice

These competencies form leadership connections and interconnections, not a checklist or hierarchy. The competencies weave continuously through reflection, action, and adaptation:

• **Stewardship** grounds leadership in moral purpose.
• **Inquiry** propels reflection and learning.
• **Capacity building** scales impact.
• **Contextual literacy** ensures relevance and responsiveness.
• **Alignment** turns ideas into systems.

Together, they build ethical, relational, and systemic leadership practices that are dynamic and resilient.

Guiding Beliefs Embedded in the Model

• **We lead for all children.** Our decisions must benefit every learner, especially those who are most vulnerable.
• **We lead through learning.** Curiosity and inquiry are continuous, not episodic.
• **We lead with humility.** We grow ourselves as we grow others.
• **We lead in context.** Our leadership must reflect the histories, cultures, and communities we serve.
• **We lead for coherence.** Vision and systems must be aligned to sustain meaningful change.

Final Consideration: Leadership as a Sacred Responsibility

Leadership in public education is a sacred trust. The Spirit of Leadership provides not just a set of competencies but a way of being. When practiced together, these five dimensions create a coherent, courageous, and caring approach to leadership that serves all children and strengthens our collective future.

Discussion Paper: Stewardship for the Future of All Children

Introduction

Stewardship for the Future of All Children is the foundation of the Spirit of Leadership. This competency reflects the moral imperative of school district leaders to act with care, courage, and foresight to nurture a future where all children feel secure in their identity, connected to others, and responsible for the land and environment. Leaders are called not only to provide high-quality education but also to model and build a more just, inclusive, and sustainable society.

At its heart, stewardship means embracing leadership as a responsibility that extends beyond today's classrooms—it requires shaping environments where each child can thrive academically, socially, emotionally, and ethically. It demands leaders intentionally create spaces of belonging, respect diverse identities, and lift others up with compassion, humility, and integrity. Stewardship also draws on Indigenous teachings, recognizing the interconnectedness of self, land, sea, and sky, and honoring the wisdom of ancestors for future generations.

Considerations for Leaders

1. Lead Self
   - Develop a deep, critical awareness of one's own identity, strengths, and limitations.
   - Model humility, self-care, and self-respect as foundational leadership behaviors.
2. Lead Teams
   - Empower colleagues to express and celebrate their diverse identities.
   - Actively model ethical leadership and champion initiatives that promote equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization, and Indigenization.

3. Lead Organizations

- Build and sustain systems rooted in Universal Design for Learning that honor diverse learners.
- Create structures that position the district as a leader in social justice and sustainability, ensuring students graduate with the skills and values to pursue justice and environmental stewardship.
- Embed sustainability practices across all district operations, empowering both staff and students to reduce environmental impact and embrace sustainable futures.

Ultimately, Stewardship for the Future of All Children is about courageous leadership that safeguards and strengthens the social, cultural, and environmental fabric of our communities, ensuring a better future for generations to come.

Reflective Questions for Leaders and Teams

1. How are we actively supporting each child's development of a secure identity, sense of belonging, and connection to the land and others?
2. In what ways are we modeling and promoting justice, equity, and inclusion in both our classrooms and district practices?
3. Are our systems and decisions reducing our environmental impact and teaching students to be stewards of sustainability?
4. How do our daily actions reflect humility, care, and respect for the diverse stories and identities of those we serve?

Discussion Paper: Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry

Introduction

Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry is a core leadership competency that invites system leaders to embrace uncertainty, question assumptions, and model continuous learning. At its essence, inquiry is curiosity in action—a lived, daily practice that propels reflection, growth, and transformation. This competency is grounded in a belief that engaging learning environments emerge when questions are as valued as answers, and when evidence, innovation, and reflection become embedded in the very fabric of our systems.

A culture of curiosity is sustained not just by individuals asking good questions, but by organizations that structure themselves to support thoughtful risk-taking, reflective dialogue, and shared discovery. For system leaders, this means building trust, promoting diverse perspectives, and ensuring that data, stories, and lived experience are all part of evidence-informed decision-making. It means leading with humility and openness, recognizing that true inquiry requires not only intelligence—but courage.

This work is also deeply connected to Indigenous worldviews. It calls on leaders to value Indigenous knowledge systems, honour diverse ways of knowing, and embed inclusive decision-making practices. In fostering a culture of curiosity and inquiry, leaders support both personal growth and systemic transformation—advancing equity, student voice, and authentic engagement across communities.

Considerations for Leaders

1. Lead Self

- Model daily practices of inquiry with humility and curiosity.
- Pose challenging questions about personal beliefs, assumptions, and leadership practices.
- Embrace thoughtful risk-taking and remain open to being changed by what you learn.

- Critically reflect on diverse evidence—quantitative, qualitative, and experiential—to inform your practice.

2. Lead Teams

- Create psychologically safe spaces for curiosity, questioning, and innovation.
- Encourage teams to test new approaches, reflect on outcomes, and iterate practice.
- Build collaborative processes that engage multiple voices in shared inquiry.
- Facilitate the use of evidence to assess team impact and adjust course when needed.

3. Lead Organizations

- Embed inquiry into the structure and culture of the organization, linking evidence and action.
- Develop systems for transparent decision-making grounded in diverse forms of evidence.
- Prioritize equity by ensuring inquiry surfaces and addresses disparities in student experience.
- Nurture system-wide learning networks focused on iterative improvement, trust, and transparency.

Reflective Questions for Leaders and Teams

1. How do we cultivate a culture where questions are welcomed and inquiry is ongoing across all levels of the organization?
2. In what ways do our decisions and actions reflect evidence-informed thinking that includes both data and lived experience?
3. How are we intentionally creating space for diverse voices—especially those historically marginalized—in shaping our inquiries?
4. How do we ensure our inquiries lead to changes that improve life opportunities for all learners, with equity at the centre?
5. What systems have we put in place to share evidence, learn transparently, and adjust based on what we know?

Discussion Paper: Growing the Capacity of Self and Others

Introduction

Growing the Capacity of Self and Others is a foundational leadership competency grounded in the belief that people are the heartbeat of strong and thriving school systems. This competency speaks to the responsibility of system leaders to nurture, empower, and elevate individuals and teams—ensuring that leadership is not confined to titles, but is lived and shared across all levels of the organization.

Leaders must engage in lifelong learning, model humility, and recognize their own learning needs while simultaneously fostering environments where others can flourish. Leadership growth is both an individual and collective endeavor—supported through intentional professional learning, reciprocal relationships, and courageous conversations about change and improvement.

This competency also recognizes that to lead is to serve, and that meaningful change requires trusting relationships, shared language, and aligned action. Inspired by Indigenous teachings, it calls us to create space for reciprocity, uphold high expectations, and instill a shared responsibility for Indigenous education across the system.

When leaders commit to building capacity, they invest in the long-term strength of the system. They make space for new voices, distribute leadership, and sustain the learning organizations our schools and districts need to become.

Considerations for Leaders

1. Lead Self

- Reflect on your own learning needs and seek out professional development that both challenges and strengthens your leadership.
- Embrace humility and model lifelong learning in both formal and informal settings.
- Lead by example by demonstrating openness to feedback and personal growth.
- Develop and articulate a theory of change for your leadership journey.

2. Lead Teams

- Convene and support diverse teams with a range of perspectives, identities, and experiences.
- Empower others to lead, share agency, and contribute meaningfully to decision-making.
- Promote and facilitate high-quality professional learning within and beyond the team's daily context.
- Foster collaborative inquiry that builds shared understanding and forward momentum.

3. Lead Organizations

- Build systems that support sustainable, embedded professional learning for all staff.
- Identify and elevate internal and external expertise across the district to support learning.
- Ensure leadership opportunities are distributed across the organization with equity and intentionality.
- Deploy district resources to support the conditions necessary for growth, change, and continuous improvement.

Reflective Questions for Leaders and Teams

1. How are we modelling lifelong learning and cultivating humility in our leadership practice?
2. In what ways are we identifying, supporting, and empowering emerging leaders across the district?
3. Do we have systems in place to support continuous, job-embedded professional learning?
4. How do we support and respect the agency of all employee and stakeholder groups, particularly those who have historically lacked influence?
5. How are we building a shared language and theory of change to guide our collective improvement?

Discussion Paper: Contextual Literacy

Introduction

Contextual Literacy is a vital leadership competency that calls system leaders to develop deep understanding of both the internal and external systems that shape public education. In an increasingly interconnected and dynamic environment, leaders must not only navigate the complexity of governance, operations, and partnerships—they must fluently speak the "language" of these systems to ensure alignment with the district's priorities, values, and vision.

Internally, contextual literacy means cultivating a clear grasp of how departments, employee groups, and organizational structures intersect and influence one another. Leaders must recognize the functions, tensions, and rhythms of these systems, enabling them to anticipate impacts, support integration, and foster collaboration. Externally, leaders must build bridges with unions, local and provincial governments, and educational organizations, both within and beyond their communities. This requires relational intelligence, strategic foresight, and the ability to engage across political, social, and economic domains.

Contextual literacy is not just about comprehension; it is about communication and connection. Leaders must interpret and convey ideas in ways that resonate across systems while maintaining coherence with district values. This competency is deeply strengthened by Indigenous perspectives, which invite leaders to ground their work in local histories, community relationships, and language that honours place and people. When leaders embody contextual literacy, they create more responsive, inclusive, and forward-looking systems that can adapt and thrive in the face of change.

Considerations for Leaders

1. Lead Self

- Learn the structures, language, and standards of the various systems you work within and alongside.

5. What structures are in place to help us forecast changes and ensure we are planning for multiple possible futures?

Discussion Paper: Aligning Structures with Vision for Learning

Introduction

Aligning Structures with Vision for Learning is a strategic leadership competency that calls system leaders to ensure coherence between their vision for student success and the systems that govern, support, and sustain that vision. It is about bridging the gap between aspiration and action—intentionally shaping systems so they reflect and reinforce the district's deepest commitments to learning, equity, and engagement.

This competency asks leaders to look both inward and outward: to cultivate a clear, shared vision rooted in the needs of all learners, and to examine whether their systems—governance, human resources, financial planning, operations—are working in alignment with that vision. It requires ongoing reflection, evidence-informed decision-making, and the courage to challenge fragmentation in favour of focused, intentional design.

Deep alignment is not simply structural. It is cultural. It involves building shared understanding, distributed ownership, and a collective commitment to students. Drawing on Indigenous knowledge systems, leaders are reminded to activate collective voice, uphold cultural protocols, and create learning environments rooted in justice and relationality. When structures and values align, the entire system becomes a learning organization, capable of sustainable growth and transformation.

Considerations for Leaders

1. Lead Self

- Model strategic thinking by aligning your leadership practices with the values of the district's learning agenda.
- Seek input from others and reflect on how your personal leadership supports collective goals.
- Act with integrity and clarity in relation to strategic priorities, and participate in processes that challenge bias and privilege.

- Embrace reflective and reflexive approaches when considering future needs and system alignment.

2. Lead Teams

- Empower teams to contribute meaningfully to shared strategic visioning and planning processes.
- Facilitate shared understanding of key language and concepts related to district goals and learning agendas.
- Integrate multiple perspectives—especially those of marginalized voices—into team decisions and initiatives.
- Support teams in aligning their work with district priorities and encourage team-based reflection on effectiveness.

3. Lead Organizations

- Ensure all systems—governance, finance, operations, instruction—are aligned with the district's vision for learning.
- Build structures that embody the district's values and promote coherence, rather than fragmentation.
- Assess and refine alignment regularly using evidence, strategic self-assessment, and feedback from diverse groups.
- Plan for the future by imagining multiple possible scenarios and leading system-wide conversations about priorities, opportunities, and challenges.

Reflective Questions for Leaders and Teams

1. How well are our current systems and structures aligned with our stated vision for learning?
2. In what ways do we model and support shared leadership in strategic planning and decision-making?
3. How are we activating and empowering voices that have historically been marginalized in our planning processes?
4. What mechanisms do we have in place to assess alignment, and how are we using that information to inform change?
5. Are we planning not just for today's needs, but for the possible, probable, and preferred futures of our district and communities?

- Develop strong relationships across internal and external groups through active listening and cultural humility.
- Reflect on your role within multiple systems, and the influence your leadership has on their interconnectivity.
- Anticipate change by staying informed about political, economic, and social contexts.

2. Lead Teams

- Support teams in understanding how their work connects to other functions in the district.
- Help translate team initiatives into language and practices that align with broader systems.
- Encourage teams to develop networks beyond their immediate scope, fostering mutual support and collaboration.
- Build capacity in teams to engage with external partners, navigate diverse contexts, and communicate effectively.

3. Lead Organizations

- Advocate for the district across multiple forums using language that is system-aware and values-driven.
- Lead with clarity in complex environments by connecting internal priorities to external systems.
- Form and support functional groups that monitor external trends and advise on adaptive strategies.
- Use theories of change to guide district planning that reflects deep understanding of systemic interactions and their implications.

Reflective Questions for Leaders and Teams

1. How well do we understand the internal and external systems that influence our district's work?
2. In what ways do we support teams to translate their work across departments, disciplines, and systems?
3. How are we building relationships and partnerships that strengthen our district's capacity to lead in a complex world?
4. How do we incorporate Indigenous knowledge, local history, and community voice into how we communicate and lead?

BCSSA Strategic Plan and The Spirit of Leadership: Alignment

When The Spirit of Leadership (TSOL) was created, the organization wanted to ensure that it stayed as a living document. The BCSSA continues to create learning modules through The Voices of BC project in addition to offering numerous resources and supports for chapters to explore the competencies in ways that support their own leadership initiatives either locally or regionally.

With an update coming to the Strategic Plan, all chapters have had input and through this input several key themes emerged. This document shows how the thematic organizers of the Strategic Plan align with the competencies in The Spirit of Leadership. This alignment can act as a guide for the numerous supports and initiatives that the BCSSA develops for its members. In essence, the Strategic Plan is how The Spirit of Leadership is operationalized as an organization and the Plan reflects the shared values across systems. The intention of this document is to show how The Spirit of Leadership remains central to our work. The values and beliefs embodied in TSOL will continue to support and embody the work articulated in the Strategic Plan.

Here are several ways in which the alignment is demonstrated.

- Coherence Across Frameworks: Each Strategic Plan priority is deeply reflected in the competencies. The leadership competencies are not separate from strategy, they embody it.
- Systemic Equity and Reconciliation: Truth and Reconciliation is not a stand-alone item; it permeates every competency and aligns with BCSSA's strategic direction to disrupt colonial systems and centre Indigenous voice.
- Learning Organizations, Not Just Individuals: The Spirit of Leadership promotes system-wide learning, turning inquiry, capacity building, and alignment into core leadership practices — echoing the Strategic Plan's call for innovation and professional collaboration.
- Moral Purpose and Strategic Action: Stewardship and alignment ensure that values are not abstract. They become actionable through aligned governance, operations, and leadership decisions.

Strategic Priority	How TSOL Competencies Provide Support
Leadership	
• Champion a unified vision • Cultivate culturally responsive leadership • Strengthen collective capacity	• Stewardship ensures leaders act with purpose and advocate for just, inclusive education systems. • Curiosity and Inquiry support innovation and ethical reflection when shaping future direction. • Capacity Building develops shared leadership and professional networks.
Equity	
• Eliminate structural barriers • Advance equity-minded leadership • Center student voice	• Stewardship frames equity as a moral responsibility, guiding leaders to challenge biased systems. • Contextual Literacy enables leaders to act in contextually appropriate ways to address systemic barriers. • Indigenous perspectives embedded in TSOL reinforce equity through relational practices.
Support	
• Deliver high-quality professional learning • Foster a connected professional community • Prioritize member well-being	• Capacity Building focuses on sustainable, embedded learning and leadership development. • Curiosity and Inquiry encourage reflective, evidence-informed leadership practices. • These competencies support trust, wellness, and a culture of professional growth.
Truth and Reconciliation	
• Uplift Indigenous leadership and partnerships • Act on TRC Calls to Action • Co-create community-led solutions	• All competencies embed Indigenous perspectives and promote culturally responsive leadership. • Contextual Literacy and Stewardship help leaders act on TRC Calls and transform systems. • TSOL frames reconciliation as system-wide work grounded in ethical leadership.

Final Reflections

As articulated in the introduction, summary, The Spirit of Leadership is not separate from the Strategic Plan - it embodies it. The competencies provide the leadership engine that powers the vision and objectives of the Strategic Plan. They ensure that values like equity, reconciliation, and professional learning are not merely aspirations but lived realities. It is important to continue to show how The Spirit of Leadership aligns with other initiatives, and it is also important to consider how new initiatives can strengthen and inform any potential future revision of The Spirit of Leadership. By keeping the values and beliefs of the BCSSA at the heart of our work, we can continue to demonstrate alignment and the importance of the numerous ways we support our members and education in BC.

Strategic Plan Activity: Alignment and Offerings

Intention:

To assess how BCSSA's current programs support the goals of the Strategic Plan and the competencies in *The Spirit of Leadership*, and to surface gaps or ideas for future offerings.

In the Summer Gathering Learning Guide You Will Find:

- A copy of the Strategic Plan and TSOL Alignment document
- A short summary of current BCSSA offerings (e.g. Mentorship, Virtual Learning, Conferences, Leadership in the Public Eye, Foundations of Management, All Supers, Chapter Meetings, Conferences...)
- A Feedback Sheet – "Feedback and New Opportunities" for BCSSA

At Your Table

Please review the BCSSA Offerings and Discuss

- Which BCSSA Offerings feel most relevant to you in your current role?

- Where is alignment strong between offerings and The Spirit of Leadership?

- Where are there gaps between the Strategic Plan/Competencies and the offerings?

- What new or refined offerings would better support their work?

- What feedback do you have for BCSSA to consider as the design opportunities for members?

Share & Prioritize

- Share amongst yourselves 1–2 insights or gaps they identified

- Propose one new offering or refinement BCSSA should consider and record it on the "Feedback and New Offerings" sheet.

Close

We will ask a few tables to report out and collect these feedback sheets from tables.

Strategic Plan Feedback and New Offerings

Which BCSSA Offerings feel most relevant to you in your current role?

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Where is alignment strong between offerings and The Spirit of Leadership?

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Where are there gaps between the Strategic Plan/Competencies and the offerings?

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What new or refined offerings would better support their work?

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What feedback do you have for BCSSA to consider as the design opportunities for members?

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Prioritize and Suggest

Propose one new offering or refinement BCSSA should consider.

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