

Summer Gathering: A Resource for Districts



Being in the Canoe Together: Conference Summary and
Connecting The Spirit Of Leadership (BCSSA) to Being in the
Canoe (BCPVPA)

August, 2025

Conference Summary and Alignment of Competencies

During the Summer Gathering Conference, a major portion of the activities were centred around a deep exploration of the competencies in The Spirit of Leadership. Participants had an opportunity first to explore competencies individually and then across all competencies as they collaborated with and listened to leaders from across BC.

After the activity on exploration of competencies, districts and individuals were asked to make one commitment that they could take away from the conference. In those commitments, there were strong themes, one of which was the opportunity to align the new work from the BCPVPA on their leadership competencies titled “Being in the Canoe” with the BCSSA competencies in The Spirit of Leadership. This document is a summary of the key themes that emerged and is also a resource to districts where the alignment between the BCPVPA and the BCSSA leadership competencies are made in the hopes that this would support the work in districts.

If districts choose to use these adapted discussion papers, it is strongly recommended that you read the section on how these discussion papers were adapted as there is very strong alignment, but the BCPVPA competencies have some important distinctions and stand on their own as well as stand in alignment.

Summer Gathering: One Commitment Themes

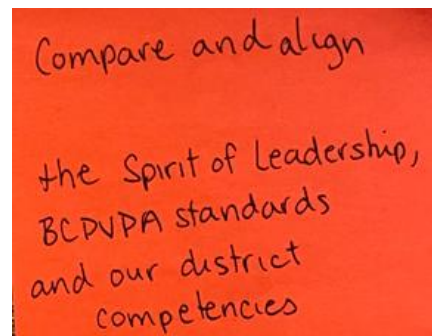
On the first full day of the BCSSA Summer Gathering conference, participants spent a full day doing a deep dive into the competencies in The Spirit of Leadership. At the end of that day, participants were asked (either individually or in district teams) to make One Commitment that they would take away from the conference. These commitments were placed as Post-It notes on the wall of the conference room.

This document is a summary of those commitments for the information of Districts and individuals as you look ahead to your collective work in 2025/26.

1. Alignment of Competencies and Strategic Plans

Many leaders emphasized aligning the BCSSA and BCPVPA leadership competencies with district strategic plans, professional growth plans (PGPs), and organizational structures.

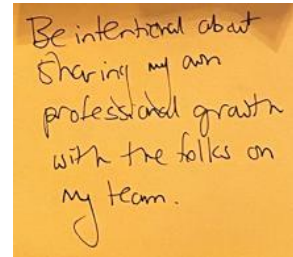
- Examples: “Align BCSSA competences with BCPVPA ones,” “Continuing aligning the district leadership development plan with the Spirit of Leadership competencies,” “Develop mechanisms to assess alignment,” “Compare and align the Spirit of Leadership BCPVPA standards and our district competencies.”



2. Professional Growth and Capacity Building

There was a strong commitment to personal and team development. Leaders highlighted using competencies as frameworks for professional growth, reflection, and coaching.

- Examples: "Use the Spirit of Leadership competencies to guide professional growth plan conversations," "Re-read the leadership competencies with the intention of setting a personal goal," "Work with PVP team to fully understand how the competencies show up in their actions," "Leadership opportunities and learning series for all employees."

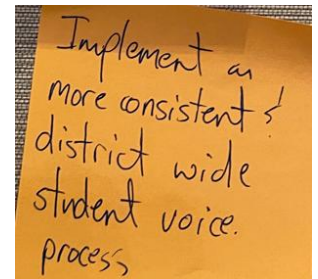


Be intentional about sharing my own professional growth with the folks on my team.

3. Student Voice and Agency

A recurring theme was expanding opportunities for student input in decision-making and learning design.

- Examples: "Expand student voice opportunities," "Implement a more consistent and district-wide student voice process," "Create intentional space for student voice as part of the inquiry process," "Amplify student voice."

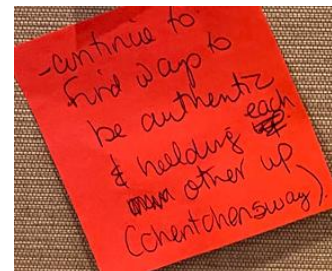


Implement a more consistent & district wide student voice process

4. Relationships, Trust, and Community Engagement

Commitments focused on strengthening relationships with colleagues, Indigenous communities, and the broader public through listening, presence, and authentic engagement.

- Examples: "Strengthening relationships through ongoing communication," "Be visible at sites and invest greater time in community," "Build trust within the IEC," "Living in right relations," "Show up in community," "Continue to find ways to be authentic and holding each other up (chentchensway)."

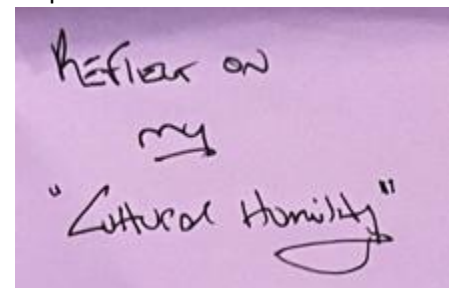


-continue to find ways to be authentic & holding each other up (chentchensway)

5. Equity, Indigenous Voice, and Cultural Humility

Leaders committed to advancing equity, reconciliation, and cultural responsiveness.

- Examples: "Reflect on my cultural humility," "Foster holistic well-being for Indigenous learners," "Indigenous voice in new strategic plan," "Be more intentional... demonstrating humility and vulnerability."

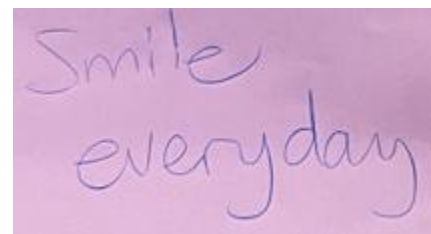


Reflect on my Cultural Humility

6. Well-Being and Self-Care

A smaller but notable theme emphasized leader well-being and modeling balance.

- Examples: "Self-care," "Smile every day," "I commit to being present in my interactions at work, actively listening," "Continue to foster holistic well-being."

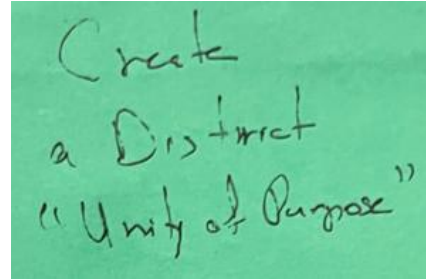


Smile everyday

7. Collaboration, Structures, and Systems

Several leaders spoke about creating intentional structures for alignment, growth, and collaboration across departments.

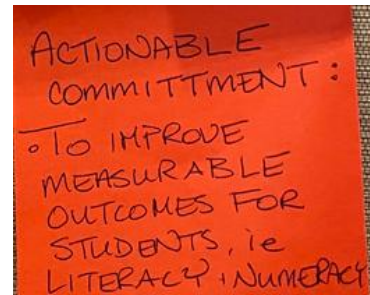
- Examples: “Create a district unity of purpose,” “Aligning structures with vision for learning,” “Meet with senior leadership team to refine growth planning process,” “Commit to a community of practice around one competency as a director’s team.”



8. Focus on Outcomes and Learning

A number of commitments tied leadership directly to student achievement and measurable outcomes.

- Examples: “Actionable commitment: to improve measurable outcomes for students i.e. literacy and numeracy,” “Aligning formative assessment with the strategic plan,” “Clear cohesive learning goals for district educators.”



Adapting The Spirit of Leadership Discussion Papers for BCPVPA Competencies

Acknowledgements

The concept for this work originated as an opportunity for collaboration emerged through summer professional learning activities. SD67 (Okanagan-Skaha) School District is looking at how to revision their Professional Growth Plan practice for principals and vice-principals using the new BCPVPA Leadership Competencies titled “Being in the Canoe” as part of their preparation for the 2025/26 school year. As SD67 was beginning this work, the BCSSA was also preparing Discussion Papers on The Spirit of Leadership for their annual conference. The opportunity emerged to bring these two processes together by adapting the BCSSA Discussion Papers for the BCPVPA Competencies. The BCSSA would like to extend our appreciation to Todd Manuel, Superintendent of Okanagan-Skaha and their district team including principals and vice-principals for allowing BCSSA to share and extend this work.



Purpose of the Work

This intent of this paper is to show how the BCSSA series of leadership discussion papers—originally written to explore The Spirit of Leadership can be adapted to support the new leadership competencies introduced by the BCPVPA in their Being in the Canoe framework.

While the BCSSA competencies focus on district-level system leadership, the BCPVPA competencies are tailored to the school-based leadership context of principals and vice-principals. Our goal was to maintain a strong alignment between the two frameworks while respecting the distinct language, scope, and emphasis of the BCPVPA model.

Guiding Principles

This adaptation was guided by three commitments:

1. Alignment with Intent – Honour the original meaning, tone, and moral grounding of the BCSSA Spirit of Leadership papers while ensuring they reflect the lived realities of school leaders.
2. Contextual Relevance – Using our existing Discussion Papers which were created for our Summery Gathering conference, we replaced district-wide, system-level language with school-based examples, responsibilities, and relationships.
3. Respect for the BCPVPA Framework – Integrate the BCPVPA competency architecture, specifically:
 - Self and Community as core dimensions of each competency.
 - Recognition of Agency as a component of the principal and vice-principal role.
 - Inclusion of the separate BCPVPA competency Bridging Policy and Practice, which has no direct equivalent in the BCSSA framework.
 - Acknowledgement that the BCPVPA framework does not have a competency parallel to BCSSA’s “Aligning Systems and Structures,” requiring a more interpretive alignment to related BCPVPA standards.

The Adaptation Process

The work followed a consistent methodology:

1. Review of Original Papers
 - a. Each Spirit of Leadership discussion paper was analyzed to identify its key themes, reflective questions, and underlying values.
2. Mapping to BCPVPA Competencies
 - a. The Spirit of Leadership BCSSA competencies were cross-referenced with the closest BCPVPA equivalent. Where no direct parallel existed—such as with Aligning Systems and Structures—content was reinterpreted to align as closely as possible with related BCPVPA descriptors, while maintaining fidelity to the original intent.
3. Language and Scope Shift
 - a. All district-level terminology (e.g., “strategic plan,” “district operations,” “system improvement”) was reframed for the school context (e.g., “school growth plan,” “school operations,” “school improvement”).
4. Integration of Self and Community
 - a. Each adapted paper was restructured into two sections:
 - Self – Reflecting the personal mindset, learning, and leadership stance of the principal or vice-principal.
 - Community – Capturing the collaborative, relational, and culturally responsive leadership work within the school community.
5. Inclusion of Agency
 - a. In competencies where agency was a significant element (e.g., Contextual Literacy and Agency), language was added to reflect the empowerment of principals and vice-principals to make informed, values-driven decisions.
6. Creation of a New Paper
 - a. For Bridging Policy and Practice, a new discussion paper was written entirely from scratch to match the tone and intent of the original BCSSA set, ensuring coherence across the series.
7. Reflective Questions

Each paper concludes with a common reflective question:

“How do you translate these aspirational statements to a practical professional

growth plan goal?”

This closing prompt reinforces the papers’ original intentions which are both as a conversation starter and as a tool for personal reflection and professional growth creation.

Outcome

The final product is a six-paper series that:

- Retains the moral and relational grounding of The Spirit of Leadership.
- Speaks directly to the roles, responsibilities, and contexts of principals and vice-principals.
- Aligns structurally with the BCPVPA Being in the Canoe framework.
- Supports coherence across system and school leadership frameworks while respecting their unique perspectives.
- Provides thoughtful adaptations where direct competency parallels did not exist, ensuring each paper remains relevant and supportive to the intended audience.

These adapted papers now serve as a bridge—honouring the original BCSSA Spirit of Leadership while providing principals and vice-principals with resources that reflect their competencies, context, and leadership agency.

Discussion Papers for BCPVPA Leadership Competencies

Stewardship for the Future of All Children: School Leadership

Introduction

Stewardship for the Future of All Children is a core value of school leadership. For principals and vice-principals, it is the moral commitment to act with care, courage, and foresight so that every student feels safe in their identity, connected to others, and prepared to contribute positively to their community and the world.

In the school context, stewardship means shaping learning environments where all students can thrive academically, socially, emotionally, and ethically. It calls leaders to create a culture of belonging, model ethical conduct, and foster respect for diverse identities. It also draws on Indigenous teachings, recognizing the interconnectedness of self, land, and community, and honoring the knowledge passed down by elders and ancestors for the benefit of future generations.

Self

As a steward for the future, school leaders:

- **Know Themselves:** Develop a deep, reflective awareness of their own values, strengths, and biases, recognizing how these influence decisions and relationships.
- **Model Well-being and Integrity:** Demonstrate humility, care, and self-respect, making personal well-being a priority so they can sustain their leadership over time.
- **Live Ethical Leadership:** Uphold the principles of fairness, transparency, and justice in all actions, ensuring that their decisions consistently reflect the best interests of students.

Community

As stewards of school communities, school leaders:

- **Foster Belonging and Connection:** Build a school culture where every student and staff member feels seen, valued, and connected to the learning community.
- **Champion Equity and Justice:** Advocate for policies, practices, and programs that promote diversity, inclusion, decolonization, and Indigenization in the school environment.
- **Model Environmental Responsibility:** Embed sustainability practices into daily school life, from classroom learning to operational routines, encouraging students and staff to act as caretakers of the land.
- **Collaborate for the Common Good:** Partner with families, Indigenous communities, and local organizations to support the holistic development of all students and strengthen the social fabric of the school's wider community.

Reflective Questions for School Leaders and Teams

1. How are we fostering each student's secure identity, sense of belonging, and connection to the land and community?
2. In what ways do our school practices model and promote justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion?
3. How are we reducing our school's environmental impact and teaching students to take responsibility for sustainability?
4. How do our daily actions—both in leadership and in classrooms—reflect humility, care, and respect for the diverse stories of our students, staff, and families?
5. How do you translate these aspirational statements to a practical professional growth plan goal?

Fostering a Culture of Curiosity and Inquiry: School Leadership

Introduction

Fostering a culture of curiosity and inquiry is a hallmark of strong school leadership. For principals and vice-principals, it means creating a learning environment where questions are as valued as answers, and where exploration, reflection, and evidence-based thinking drive growth for students and staff alike.

In the school context, inquiry is curiosity in action—a daily practice of listening deeply, asking meaningful questions, and remaining open to learning from diverse perspectives. It requires leaders to model humility, embrace uncertainty, and be willing to change their own thinking when new insights emerge.

This competency is strengthened when leaders honour Indigenous knowledge systems, embrace multiple ways of knowing, and create inclusive spaces for students, staff, and families to engage in shared problem-solving. By fostering curiosity and inquiry, leaders cultivate a school community where innovation thrives, equity is advanced, and learning is a collective journey.

Self

As leaders of curiosity and inquiry, school principals and vice-principals:

- **Model Curiosity:** Demonstrate an openness to learning by questioning assumptions, reflecting on personal biases, and seeking feedback to refine their practice.
- **Embrace Risk and Change:** Take thoughtful risks in pursuit of better learning outcomes, showing that mistakes are opportunities for growth.
- **Reflect Critically:** Use diverse forms of evidence—data, stories, and lived experiences—to inform decisions and guide improvement.
- **Lead with Humility:** Accept that they do not have all the answers and remain open to learning from students, staff, and the community.

Community

As community leaders, principals and vice-principals:

- **Create Safe Spaces for Inquiry:** Build a school culture where students and staff feel safe to question, explore, and test new ideas without fear of judgment.
- **Encourage Collaborative Learning:** Facilitate opportunities for staff, students, and families to engage in shared inquiry, ensuring that diverse voices inform school decisions.
- **Promote Equity Through Inquiry:** Use inquiry processes to identify and address inequities in student experience, ensuring all learners have opportunities to thrive.
- **Share Learning Transparently:** Establish routines for communicating findings, celebrating successes, and making course corrections openly with the school community.

Reflective Questions for School Leaders and Teams

1. How do we make curiosity and inquiry visible in our school's daily practices?
2. In what ways do we integrate both evidence and lived experience into our decision-making?
3. How are we ensuring historically marginalized voices are included in our school's inquiries?
4. How do we ensure our inquiries result in meaningful change for all learners?
5. What routines and structures help us share learning openly and act on what we discover?
6. How do you translate these aspirational statements to a practical professional growth plan goal?

Growing the Capacity of Self and Others: School Leaders

Introduction

Growing the capacity of self and others is central to effective school leadership. Principals and vice-principals are responsible for nurturing the professional growth of both themselves and their colleagues, ensuring that leadership is not defined by position alone, but shared across the school community.

This work begins with self-awareness—understanding personal strengths, growth areas, and the need for continuous learning. It also requires intentionally creating spaces where staff, students, and families can learn together, take risks, and contribute meaningfully to the school's shared vision.

Drawing from Indigenous teachings, capacity building is rooted in reciprocity, trust, and the recognition that everyone has knowledge to contribute. In a school setting, this means valuing the voices of all community members, holding high expectations for one another, and working collectively to improve student outcomes and well-being.

When school leaders grow capacity, they invest in the long-term strength of the school community, create opportunities for emerging leaders, and ensure that professional learning is collaborative, embedded, and sustained.

Self

As leaders committed to growing capacity, principals and vice-principals:

- Engage in Lifelong Learning: Seek professional learning that challenges and strengthens leadership practice.
- Model Humility: Show openness to feedback and demonstrate a willingness to learn from colleagues, students, and the community.
- Clarify a Leadership Vision: Develop and communicate a personal theory of change that guides decision-making and growth.
- Demonstrate Self-Awareness: Reflect regularly on leadership effectiveness and adapt practice accordingly.

Community

As community leaders, principals and vice-principals:

- Empower Others to Lead: Provide opportunities for staff and students to take on leadership roles and contribute to decision-making.
- Foster Collaborative Professional Learning: Facilitate ongoing, job-embedded learning that connects directly to the school's goals and student needs.
- Value Diversity of Voice: Actively seek and integrate perspectives from all members of the school community, particularly those historically underrepresented.
- Build Trust and Reciprocity: Establish relationships grounded in mutual respect, shared responsibility, and a commitment to collective success.

Reflective Questions for School Leaders and Teams

1. How do we model lifelong learning and humility in our daily school leadership practice?
2. In what ways are we empowering staff, students, and families to take on leadership roles?
3. How do we ensure professional learning is sustained, collaborative, and connected to student outcomes?
4. How are we honouring and amplifying voices that have historically been underrepresented in school decision-making?
5. What shared language and vision guide our growth and improvement as a learning community?
6. How do you translate these aspirational statements to a practical professional growth plan goal?

Discussion Paper: Contextual Literacy and Agency: School Leaders

Agency is defined in the BCPVPA framework as “The ability and empowerment to act with purpose in response to contextual understanding, making informed decisions that reflect professional judgment, moral courage, and a commitment to student success.” In this competency, agency is paired with contextual literacy, emphasizing that school leaders are not only analyzers of context but also actors within it, with the professional will and skill to influence outcomes.

Contextual Literacy and Agency is a critical leadership competency for school principals. It emphasizes the ability to navigate and influence the diverse professional and cultural contexts in which school leadership operates, while exercising agency to actively shape and improve those contexts. Principals must understand how internal and external systems operate, how they intersect, and how change happens across multiple layers of school, district, community, and policy environments.

For school leaders, contextual literacy and agency is both a mindset and a skillset. It requires fluency in the languages and practices of pedagogy, governance, labour relations, finance, Indigenous protocols, and community partnerships. Principals must connect seemingly disconnected systems, communicate effectively across professional, cultural, and political boundaries, and act decisively in service of the school’s mission. They must forecast and respond to change—locally, provincially, nationally, and globally—while remaining grounded in the unique needs and identities of their school communities.

This competency is rooted in respect for place and history, honours Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, and demands communication practices that build authentic, reciprocal relationships. In practice, contextual literacy and agency is about understanding the broader educational, political, and social ecosystem while maintaining deep attentiveness to local realities, relationships, and opportunities for action.

Self

This includes demonstrating agency by taking decisive, values-driven action based on contextual insights, showing moral courage, and being prepared to act when opportunities or challenges emerge.

- Cultivate deep understanding of internal school systems and how they connect to district structures (e.g., staffing, budgeting, scheduling, student support services).
- Build authentic relationships with students, staff, and parent advisory councils.
- Learn and use contextually appropriate language and frameworks relevant to diverse stakeholders.
- Apply theories of change suited to school-level improvement and community building.
- Exercise agency by identifying areas for proactive leadership and initiating positive change.
- Act effectively in professional and cultural contexts, and operate between those contexts to achieve school objectives.

- Recognize commitments to decolonization and Indigenization in decision-making and school culture.

Community

Leaders nurture agency within their school communities by creating conditions where staff, students, and families are empowered to act in alignment with shared values and contextual understanding.

- Build strong relationships with local Indigenous nations, community organizations, and external partners.
- Engage with district departments, professional bodies, and community groups to foster just, reciprocal relationships.
- Centre the school as a hub of community action and resilience.
- Advocate for the school in district and public forums, aligning school goals with broader community and district contexts.
- Anticipate and plan for changes in policy, demographics, and societal expectations that affect the community.
- Enact programs of change through consensus building and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.
- Honour Indigenous language, protocol, and worldview in all community engagement.

Reflective Questions for Principals

In what ways do you currently exercise agency in your leadership, and how can you strengthen your capacity to act with moral courage and contextual understanding?

1. How well do we understand the internal systems that drive our school? Where are we strong, and where do we need greater clarity?
2. What external systems (district, government, union, community, economic) most influence our work—and how are we engaging with them?
3. How do we foster reciprocal, trust-based relationships with students, staff, parents, and community members?
4. How do we honour Indigenous language, protocol, and worldview in our school culture and community engagement?
5. How are we building a school environment where we not only respond to change, but actively influence it in service of equity and student success?
6. How do you translate these aspirational statements to a practical professional growth plan goal?

Bridging Policy and Practice: School Leaders

Introduction

Bridging policy and practice is the work of translating vision and guiding principles into meaningful, lived experiences for students, staff, and the broader school community. For principals and vice-principals, it means ensuring that the intent of educational policy—whether developed at the district, provincial, or national level—finds authentic expression in daily teaching, learning, and school culture.

In the spirit of The Spirit of Leadership, this competency is grounded in moral responsibility, relationships, and a deep understanding that leadership is about coherence between what we say we value and what actually happens in classrooms and hallways. Policies provide the “what” and “why”; practice determines the “how” and “with whom.” Effective school leaders weave the two together in ways that reflect local context, equity, and the lived realities of their learners.

Drawing from Indigenous teachings, bridging policy and practice requires listening to the community, honouring diverse ways of knowing, and building shared ownership of change. It is not about compliance alone—it is about creating the conditions where policy becomes meaningful action, rooted in trust and collective commitment.

Self

As reflective leaders, principals and vice-principals:

- Understand the intent and spirit of relevant policies, not just their technical requirements.
- Act with integrity to ensure personal leadership decisions align with both policy expectations and the moral imperative to serve all children.
- Engage in ongoing learning to deepen their ability to interpret and apply policy in ways that are culturally responsive and contextually appropriate.
- Model the bridging process by making transparent how policies inform decisions and actions.

Community

As community leaders, principals and vice-principals:

- Build shared understanding of policies by communicating them in accessible, meaningful language.
- Facilitate collaborative dialogue about how policies connect to the school’s goals, culture, and day-to-day realities.
- Seek and integrate feedback from staff, students, and families to ensure implementation reflects local needs and perspectives.
- Address gaps between policy and practice by co-designing solutions with the community.
- Ensure that policy-driven changes uphold equity, inclusion, and student well-being.

Reflective Questions for School Leaders and Teams

1. How do we make the purpose and intent of policies visible and understandable to our school community?
2. In what ways do our daily practices reflect the spirit as well as the letter of educational policy?
3. How do we ensure policy implementation is culturally responsive and contextually grounded?
4. When gaps exist between policy and practice, how do we address them collaboratively?
5. How are we using policy as a catalyst for equity, innovation, and improved outcomes for all learners?
6. How do you translate these aspirational statements to a practical professional growth plan goal?

Aligning Structures with Vision for Learning: School Leaders

Introduction

Note: This competency is not included in the BCPVPA competencies but is included as an extension of the BCSSA competency as explained in the section on Adapting the BCPVPA Discussion Papers with the original set of Discussion Papers written by the BCSSA and for The Spirit of Leadership.

Aligning structures with a vision for learning is a strategic leadership responsibility that calls school leaders to ensure coherence between their vision for student success and the systems, routines, and practices that govern, support, and sustain that vision. It is about bridging the gap between aspiration and action—intentionally shaping school structures so they reflect and reinforce the school’s deepest commitments to learning, equity, and engagement.

This competency asks principals and vice-principals to look both inward and outward: to cultivate a clear, shared vision rooted in the needs of all learners, and to examine whether school-level systems—scheduling, staffing, budget decisions, operational processes—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 school community becomes a learning organization, capable of sustainable growth and transformation.

Self

As reflective leaders, principals and vice-principals:

- Model strategic thinking by aligning personal leadership practices with the values of the school’s learning agenda.
- Seek input from others and reflect on how their leadership decisions support collective school goals.
- Act with integrity and clarity in relation to school priorities, and participate in processes that challenge bias and privilege.
- Embrace reflective and adaptive approaches when considering future needs and school-wide alignment.

Community

As community leaders, principals and vice-principals:

- Empower staff, students, and families to contribute meaningfully to shared visioning and planning processes.

- Facilitate shared understanding of key language and concepts related to the school's goals and learning priorities.
- Integrate multiple perspectives—especially those of marginalized voices—into school decisions and initiatives.
- Support staff teams in aligning their work with school priorities and encourage collaborative reflection on effectiveness.
- Build and maintain school structures that embody shared values and promote coherence rather than fragmentation.
- Regularly assess and refine alignment using evidence, collaborative review, and feedback from diverse groups.
- Plan for the future by imagining possible scenarios and leading community conversations about priorities, opportunities, and challenges.

Reflective Questions for School Leaders and Teams

1. How well are our current school structures and processes aligned with our stated vision for learning?
2. In what ways do we model and support shared leadership in school 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. How are we planning not just for today's needs, but for the possible, probable, and preferred futures of our school community?
6. How do you translate these aspirational statements to a practical professional growth plan goal?

The Spirit of Leadership: BCSSA Discussion Papers

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

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