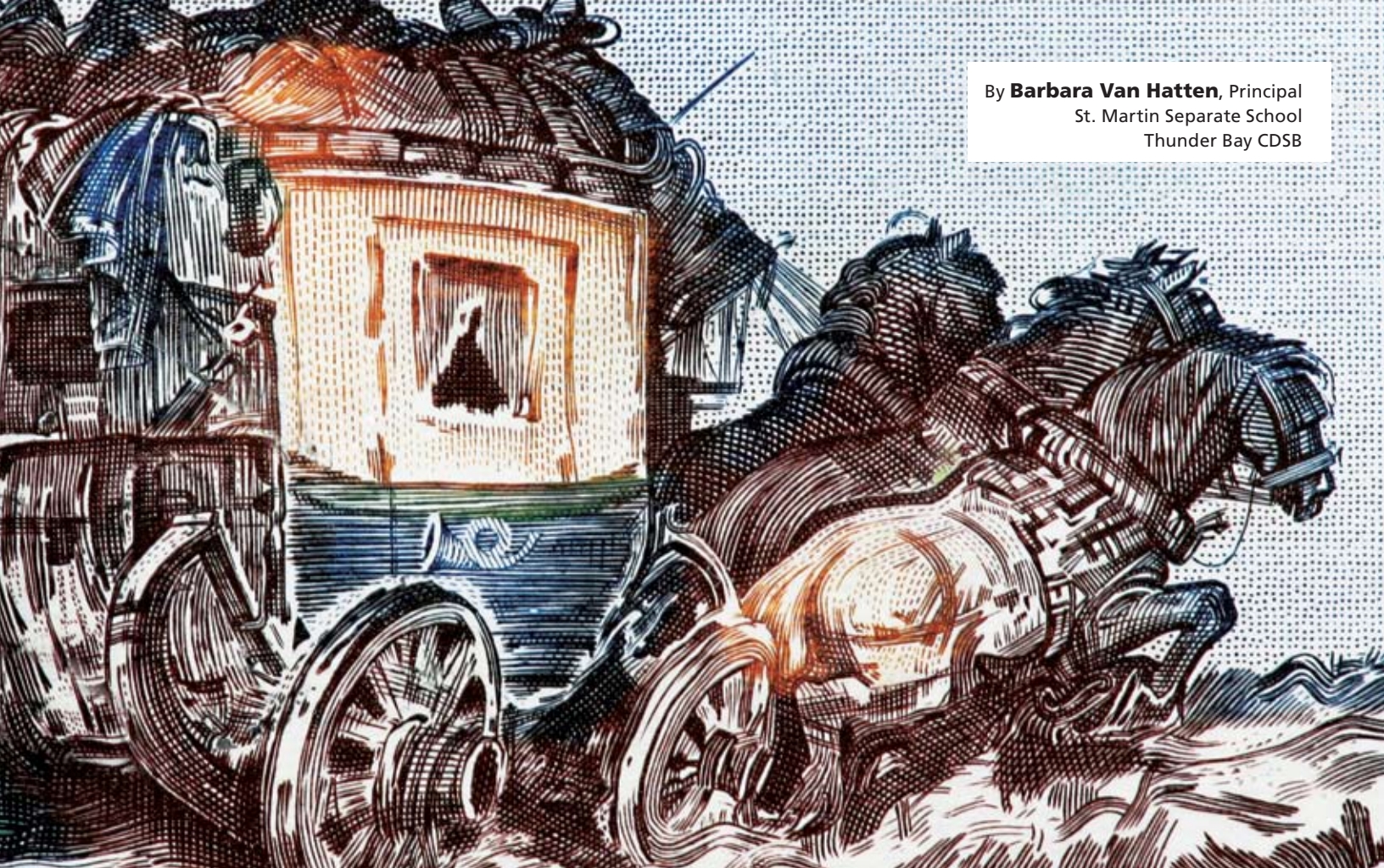


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LSA: Bringing It Home and Making It Work

Running a school today sometimes reminds me of one of those runaway stagecoach scenes in old movie westerns. You know, the one where the driver of the stagecoach has somehow been dislodged from his perch and the horses are careening wildly over a rock-strewn dirt road heading straight for a precipitous cliff. The passengers hang on for dear life and scream wildly while the hero fends off the bad guys and climbs into the driver's seat to bring the frenzied horses under control, stopping just centimetres from the cliff's edge and certain death.

In this analogy, I see the principal as the hero trying to steer students and staff towards success. In an effort to avoid the ongoing stress of trying to bring those horses (provincial and board initiatives) under control, the lead principals from our *Leading Student Achievement (LSA)* initiative have worked with the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board (TBCDSB) and our principals' group to develop a plan to provide support for our elementary principals. This was especially necessary for those either new to the role or to the elementary panel. We needed to find a way to bring what we learned in provincial and regional forums home to our board so that principals had everything they needed to incorporate LSA successfully into their school improvement plans.

The LSA Lead Principals' Group

We are fortunate to have four lead principals who attend all LSA sessions. The board decided at the outset to support LSA by sending more than one lead principal and this has proven to be a wise decision. This is our third year in the project. In the last year and a half, we have lost two of the original four principals to new assignments. Despite this loss, we have maintained momentum as those more familiar with the initiative work alongside the new members.

What We Learned From Our Two Years

It was apparent that despite what we had accomplished in the last two years, some of our administrators still demonstrated only an emerging understanding of LSA. We believed that in order for the work of LSA to be implemented successfully and meaningfully, it was necessary for our principals and other administrators to have a comprehensive understanding of the *Conditions for Learning*, the structure of *Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways* (T-LCP) meetings, their own roles in the meetings and school improvement planning. Our ultimate goal was to align the many other provincial and board initiatives with LSA to make the principal's job more manageable (no runaway stagecoach) and hopefully allow him/her the opportunity to be an instructional leader. In order for this to happen, we had to make some changes to what we were doing as lead principals.

What We Decided To Do

Following discussions between the lead principals and the board, the monthly system leadership team (SLT) meeting, which includes the director, supervisory officers, principals and management personnel, was reorganized in order to give the LSA initiative the attention it needs. Board business is now conducted in the morning, leaving the afternoon free for LSA presentations and family of schools' networking sessions. Each lead principal now serves as a facilitator for a family of schools' grouping. We are much more systematic in our approach this year. An outline of our process and progress to date follows.

The Planning Meetings

The four lead principals, a superintendent and the board's elementary coordinator meet prior to each monthly SLT meeting to discuss new information we have received, new research, or successes or challenges that have arisen either in our own schools or in the family of schools.

We then plan an agenda for our afternoon SLT session. Each session allows us the opportunity to meet as a family of schools either to discuss the information that was received, to share successful initiatives or to provide support or suggestions for issues that have arisen. The lead principals take responsibility for the afternoon SLT sessions, working with the elementary coordinator and the literacy resource teachers when their expertise is helpful.



OUR SYSTEM LEADERSHIP TEAM SESSIONS

Session 1 – October 2009

Review of the LSA Initiative and Establishing a Focus

The lead principals reviewed the LSA initiative so that all principals had a common understanding. The agenda included the following:

- putting the LSA project in context;
- reading and discussing Ken Leithwood's latest research article based on his survey results distributed at the LSA provincial forum;
- discussing the *Six Conditions for Learning*: Which condition do you most need to address in your school? How can it be addressed effectively? What help do you need to address it?;
- discussing Dr. Katz's key points from the LSA provincial session and how they reflect our own schools' experiences;
- discussing how the board's literacy resource teachers can best help support the T-LCP process in our schools;
- effectively linking SMART goals and T-LCP to monitor student achievement; and
- completing Dr. Leithwood's fall LSA survey.

Session 2 – November 2009

Productive, Successful T-LCPs

The lead principals ran a session designed to help each school implement even more successful T-LCPs. The agenda was as follows:

- developing working norms for T-LCP meetings: how to embed Leithwood's *Conditions for Learning* into the norms;
- developing *big ideas*: View the webcast, *Wiring the World for Global Good* by Gordon Brown. Family of schools discussion: How does the big idea allow students to connect to the world?;
- sharing lessons learned based on past experiences in the T-LCP with the whole group;
- setting the context for upcoming network meeting and sharing expectations for upcoming regional networking session with Denis Maika and Elaine Hine; and
- meeting with family of schools to share and discuss each school's improvement plan.

↓
MOST SOPHISTICATED
• SHARING
• JOINT WORK

JOINT WORK ≠ The right answer
" " = Challenging one another's assumptions
• Being receptive to feedback
• Talking openly about differing views, opinions, values
• Dealing openly with professional conflicts

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

1. IMPOSTER SYNDROME
2. PRESERVE AND CONSERVE EXISTING UNDERSTANDINGS

used in schools effectively. The elementary coordinator helped us set the stage to implement effective HUB meetings. The agenda included:

- reviewing some of the research videos and exploring the instructional strategies from *Engaging Boys: Powerful Possibilities for All Learners* and *Me Read?*; and
- preparing for the HUB meeting scheduled for the next SLT.

In February, we held a HUB meeting with a principal and a junior teacher from each school. The senior elementary principals, high school principals and a teacher from each of their schools attended as well. To date, we feel that this approach has been beneficial.

Session 3 – December 2009

Teacher Efficacy – Rubric vs. Success Criteria Effective Conferencing during Moderated Marking

The lead principals shared the information and ideas presented at the LSA regional network meeting conducted by Denis Maika and Elaine Hine. The topic, *Moderated Marking*, included discussion around the use of success criteria to moderate a diagnostic task and issues that have arisen around the use of rubrics. The elementary coordinator assisted us with the development of success criteria. The agenda was as follows:

- discussing moderated marking and how it addresses teacher efficacy;
- using success criteria rather than a rubric to score the diagnostic task: deep viewing of the video, *Success Criteria - Holy Family PVNCCDSB* to help establish the rationale: What resonates with you? Does the issue described reflect your experience in your own school?;
- developing success criteria for a sample text as a family of schools;
- using the success criteria for moderated marking of the same piece of writing. Score the answer using both examples of holistic scoring (*Getting to Wow and Wow* and *Beginning, Developing, Strong*). Which holistic scoring method do you feel best meets your needs?; and
- recording effectively the strengths and next steps during conferencing.

Session 4 – January 2010

Using the LNS Resource Packages: *Me Read?* and *Supports for Boys' Literacy* DVD Effectively; HUB Meetings

Lead principals took the group through a process to review the LNS supports for engaging boys and to determine how they could be

Signs of Success

- TBCDSB has shown growth in EQAO results.
- TBCDSB scored above the provincial average in reading, writing and mathematics in both grades 3 and 6.
- Ten out of 15 schools are now on a balanced day schedule to address Leithwood's *Time for Learning* condition; the remaining five schools have jointly redesigned their bell times to address this as best they can.
- All schools are running T-LCPs.
- All principals now participate actively in all T-LCP sessions.
- Principals use the literacy resource teachers to help plan the T-LCPs.
- A new T-LCP model is being piloted in six schools; Grade 3 teachers are included in the junior T-LCP; JK and SK teachers are included in the primary one.
- Principals are working together and consulting with one another regarding school improvement plans.
- Senior elementary principals expressed interest in attending the JK to six LSA sessions.
- Comfortable working relationships among principals have been enhanced as demonstrated by the following comments from principals within the group.
 - › *These sessions are great. I hope we keep doing this.*
 - › *This was helpful.*
 - › *We should have been doing this before.*
 - › *We need to do more things like this.*

At the end of this year, we will evaluate the effectiveness of our plan based on ongoing feedback from our principals' group, the outcomes from the T-LCP sessions, the district review process and EQAO results. At this point in time, our stagecoaches are traveling up the road and we are all on board and heading for home.

For further information or to comment, contact Barbara Van Hatten at bvanhatt@tbcdsb.on.ca.