

*Networks & Connections:
Building Promising Practices to
Support Beginning Teachers*

National Congress of Rural Education in Canada
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Welcome and Introduction

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Working together.....

- Presenting at Hawaii International Conference on Education (2013)
- Common interest
- Why work in isolation?

- Provincial mentorship forums/individual work in Sun West

Supporting Beginning Teachers

- Mentorship in Sun West School Division
 - Why mentorship?
 - McDowell Foundation Grant
 - Research Project: *To Thrive and To Flourish: Supporting Beginning Teachers through an Induction-by-mentoring Approach in Rural Saskatchewan*
 - What's happening now?
- Provincial Mentorship Group
 - Timeline
 - Forums
 - Members
 - Purpose/Goals
 - Current/future work [Beginning Teacher Project (BTP)]

Why Mentorship in Sun West SD?

- Priority in supporting beginning teachers
- Successful workshops
- Search for best practices in long-term support-mentorship

Question: What would be sustainable in a rural school division?

Sterling McDowell Foundation Grant

To Thrive and To Flourish: Supporting Beginning Teachers through an Induction-by-mentoring Approach in Rural Saskatchewan

Research Question: In the context of rural Saskatchewan, what are the key components of an effective and sustainable induction-by-mentorship approach that helps beginning teachers thrive and flourish?

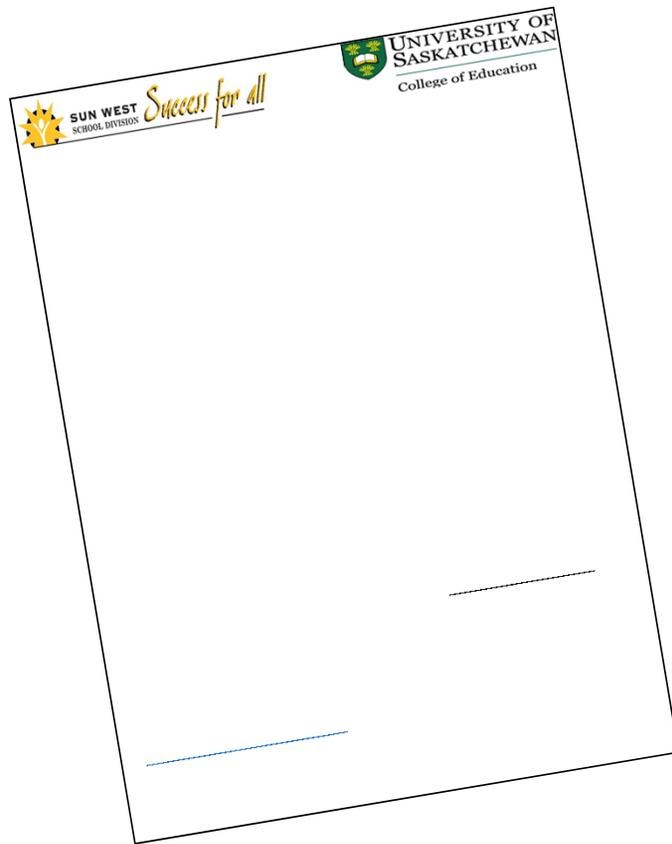
- Timeline: Spring 2015-present

Participants

- Mentors and mentees voluntarily applied to join the project
- 5 mentor teachers from different elementary schools
 - No high school applicants

Mentor	Mentee (Beginning Teacher)	Distance Apart
Larger PK-6 School Gr. 1	Very Small K-6 Gr. 1/2/3	1.5 hours 116 km
Larger K-12 School Gr. 4	Small K-12 Gr. 4/5	1 hour 98 km
Small K-12 Gr. 3/4	Small K-12 Gr. K/1/2/SST	Same school- release time provided
Medium K-12 Gr. 1	Large PK-6 Gr. 5	45 minutes 90 km
Large PK-6 K	Large PK-6 K	Same school-no release time provided

Methodology:



Fall 2015: Invitation went out to mentors and mentees

Timeline:

- October Retreat for mentors and mentees included team-building, co-planning, introduction of collaborative action research, completion of initial questionnaire.
- October-December Mentor Teacher (MT) spent 4 half-days or 2 full days in Beginning Teacher's (BT) classroom
- January-April MT spent 6 half-days or 3 full days in BT classroom
- January, May Retreat with research team provided time for reflection and self assessments on their degree of personal well-being/flourishing [Cantril's Ladder (1965) and the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2009)]
- July Research report presented to Sun West School Division

Findings

- ▶ Mentorship provides benefits
 - ▶ particular to mentees
 - ▶ particular to mentors
- ▶ Mentorship provides co-learning for both mentors and mentees meaning professional growth for both
- ▶ Mentorship supports the flourishing/thriving of beginning teachers in relation to their stages of development



Benefits to Mentees

Learning routines and logistics

...we're having an assembly tomorrow. That means we wait to get called down or you line up and you sit here; [its] all those little things that you don't really think about until you've hopped into the teaching profession and are on your own, you can really go to your mentor and just ask them, "How do you do this? And what kind of ideas do you have?" And it's nice to be able to bounce those ideas off each other

Helped in setting realistic expectations

...focus on what's important. If it's not going to make or break your day then don't worry about it - make sure you're home by five o'clock so that you have that time to yourself. I've started doing that I found after Christmas and I have been so much better at getting things accomplished and I have felt a lot better compared to the beginning of the school year, way less stress.

Provided with emotional support

...It was nice, I was able to talk to her about it when I was going through problems, we were able to talk more about professional things but it was nice having that I guess I felt comfortable going to her about those issues and she would follow up you know – 'I hope you're having a better day today, don't worry things will get better'"

Benefits to Mentors

Learned skills from mentees

...actually I found that my mentee, there's some things that she's got way stronger skillset... especially with these initiatives and technology I think sometimes they can have skills that we don't have.

Makes their teacher knowledge explicit, invigorating risk taking

There's just so many little things that you just do automatically that you don't actually think of you're actually doing. Like as a classroom management activity or organization thing or whatever. And then your mentee will go, "Wow that worked great, I'm going to try that

...because they're so energetic, enthusiastic coming in and it boosts your energy and enthusiasm because you're going, oh wow, is she good at that...So it really gave me the kick that I needed to try some new things.

Builds/reaffirms confidence

...it was really nice to have somebody who values what I'm doing and appreciated it and confirmed that what I'm doing she was interested in and excited about and wanted to try new things. And it was a bit of a confidence builder for me too

Mutual Benefits

Collaboration and co-learning

Mentor: *We were able to actually just create it [blended math] together because she wasn't sure of what it was too . So we kind of learned together.*

Mentee: *It's nice that they're also learning it with us so it's not like we're just new to the thing. ...To have those conversations really about what's working, what isn't*

Ameliorates feelings isolation

Mentor: *I can still bounce things off her and get the reassurance that yeah, my kids aren't the only ones struggling with a concept or even just having to chat. We are very similar, like we have similar interests too. Just even having those conversations and being able to work with somebody on a brand new initiative that she probably knows more about than I do. You know it's always easier to do things when you can bounce ideas and feelings and emotions off each other. Oh and I definitely feel like I've benefitted probably more than she has. She's given me a breath of fresh air, you know.*

Mentee: *[Mentor's name] helped in the fact that, you know, we could just talk about it. Sometimes it helps to just have another person to say, man I'm tired and overwhelmed and sometimes it's good to know that you're not the only one who feels like that. Even in her however many years of teaching, she's had twenty years or what not, that she still feels like that sometimes. So it's comforting to know that you're not alone when you're feeling overwhelmed.*

Findings: Recommendations

There are key ingredients in an effective mentorship program:

- ▶ *Provision of Time (release time, preparation time, conversation time)*
- ▶ *Mentors need to possess particular skills and characteristics that go beyond being a good teacher of children/youth*
- ▶ *Mentors & Mentees Need to Volunteer to Participate*
- ▶ *Mentors & Mentees need 'orientation' sessions*
- ▶ *Mentoring processes should not be evaluated*
- ▶ *Building a mentoring culture across the school division contributes to mentorship success*

Key Ingredients for Effective Mentorship

Provision of Time (release time, preparation time, conversation time)

...when I specifically had the time set aside for this, whether it was the day to visit [name of town] or it was the day that [mentee] came to see me, then I was able to foster that relationship and I was able to do things. I was just even thinking, you know in a perfect world a beginning teacher would not have a full course-load. They would have that [preparation] period at the same time as you [mentor] that's scheduled.

Mentors need to possess particular skills and characteristics that go beyond being a good teacher of children/youth

...mentors needs to know that role [be] a person who really thinks about other people, how they're feeling

Yeah, that empathy. Not looking for drama, not looking to stir the pot. ...be outgoing, and really open to new things. I think if I had a mentor who wasn't open to new things, it would be a total different experience.

Mentors & Mentees Need to Volunteer to Participate

...if somebody was willing to be a mentor and work with you and you were willing to have a mentor, then as long as you have the time to really get to make those relationships I feel like you would build that...I guess if it was forced then you might not have the same commitment

Key Ingredients for Effective Mentorship – cont.

Mentors & Mentees need 'orientation' sessions

I think it would be beneficial if you were looking at a mentorship program to have a meeting like we did ...if you had met with your mentors before school started. Do that in that first initial week where you're all gathering and have time to co-plan and talk about fears, talk about things that you're excited about. 'Cause that collaboration piece I think is what gets a lot of us excited. And to start that program at the very beginning of the year, maybe even before that first week where you meet with all of the staff and start going to those PD days I think would be quite beneficial.

Mentoring should not be evaluated

The only thing that I would have a fear of is if the school division did really buy into this, that then they would turn it into something where you had to produce something. And that would be my fear, is that it would turn into something that you have to prove that we gave you that time for a reason.

And I think just the nature of this too, that she [mentee] felt no judgement or pressure by me being there...

Building a mentoring culture across the school division contributes to mentorship success

...when the division is setting up a mentorship that the principals need to be on board with this. If that very beginning [orientation session] included a team - mentor, mentee, principal and the learning coaches... And they would have been at this meeting so everybody would have been on the same understanding...

Findings: Challenges & Suggestions

There are challenges in implementing a sustainable mentorship program:

Grade/Subject Alike Pairing versus Pairing Based on Proximity

- ▶ not resolvable based on data – both arrangements are suggested – pragmatic solution is advisable
- ▶ to overcome problematic mentor/mentee pairings consider a Team Approach or use of Multiple Mentors to fulfill various roles.

Professional Development offered by school divisions can be problematic

- ▶ consider using dollars various PD opportunities to build a mentorship culture -to provide time for teachers to collaborate across the division.
- ▶ consider having the mentors join mentees during the beginning teachers' workshops

Consider carefully ways of using technologies to help mentors and mentees connect

Where is Sun West now?

In response to the results of the research, Sun West has implemented a division-wide mentorship program as follows:

- At the beginning of the school year, school-based administrators were asked to identify mentors at the school level for all beginning and new teachers. Mentors were to come forward strictly on a voluntary basis. Due to budget constraints, mentors were assigned by school or by school family PLT group. Beginning teachers were included in this program; new-to-the-division (experienced) teachers are part of a modified-type mentorship program.
- School-based administrators were provided inservice on the importance of facilitating a mentorship program in the school, benefits of the program, ways to support the relationship in the school, etc. Resources were supplied.

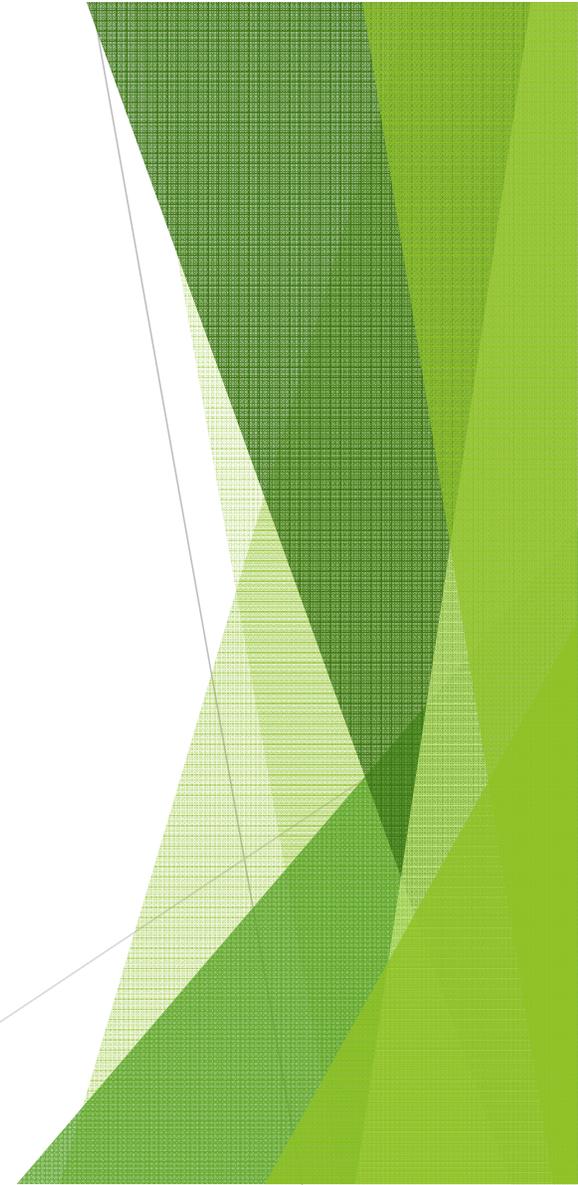
- On Day 2 of the Beginning Teachers Orientation, BT were introduced to the mentorship program in Sun West. The session was livestreamed and mentors were given release time to join the presentation from their schools. While a face-to-face session with mentors and mentees would have been the preferred method of delivery for this session, with limited resources this was the next best option.

In the 1 hour session feedback from the work completed last year, the research conducted was presented. How the mentor-mentee relationship could look this year was discussed. Resources were given to both the mentor and mentee. Some initial tasks were assigned to the partners, but after that, it has been up to the mentor, mentee and school based admin as to how the relationship continues at the school level. Superintendents check in with school-based admins to see how the process is being facilitated at the school level and if supports are needed.

- In May data will be collected with respect to the benefit of the work we did this year and to respond to recommendations. Based on that data and the state of the resources available, we will plan for the upcoming year.

Provincial Mentorship Group

- Timeline
- Forums
- Members
- Current/future work
 - Beginning Teacher Project (BTP)



Timeline

- Work began in the spring of 2015

Forums

- 5 forums held at U of S to discuss Beginning Teacher Induction through Mentorship

Members:

U of S

LEADS (School Divisions including Horizon, Light of Christ, Sask Rivers, Good Spirit, Regina Public, Northern Lights, Prairie Valley, Sun West, Saskatoon Public, Prairie Spirit, Greater Saskatoon Catholic)

STF

SPDU

Saskatoon Tribal Council; Treaty Six Education Council; Prince Albert Grand Council

Purpose/Goals

- To gain a common understanding of the definition of mentorship
- To determine what 'Induction by Mentorship' might look like in Saskatchewan
- Create a framework that is effective and sustainable
- Access voice of beginning teachers

Teacher Induction Workshop/Learning Experience and Mentorship Principles

It is our belief that the Teacher Induction by Mentorship model should consist of support through both workshops/learning experiences and a mentorship process. And further, that these processes are interdependent and reciprocal.

Workshop/Learning Experience Guiding Principles

Workshops/learning experiences are events that occur throughout the beginning teachers' first year(s) of teaching. Workshops/learning experiences should focus on:

1. Student Learning

- What does student learning look like?
- Content will focus on planning, classroom environment, instruction and assessment, and leadership responsibilities.

2. Professionalism

- All new teachers need the opportunity to explore the ethics and expectations within their organizations.

3. Relationship Building/Collegial networking

- Opportunities will be provided to develop relationships among colleagues and beginning teachers.
- Relationship-building and collaboration will be modelled through activities and conversation throughout the workshop.

4. Teacher Learning and Growth

- All new teachers need the opportunity to understand professional supervision and evaluation processes.
- Learning and growth are supported through collaboration and risk-taking opportunities.

5. Provincial/School Division Goals and Priorities

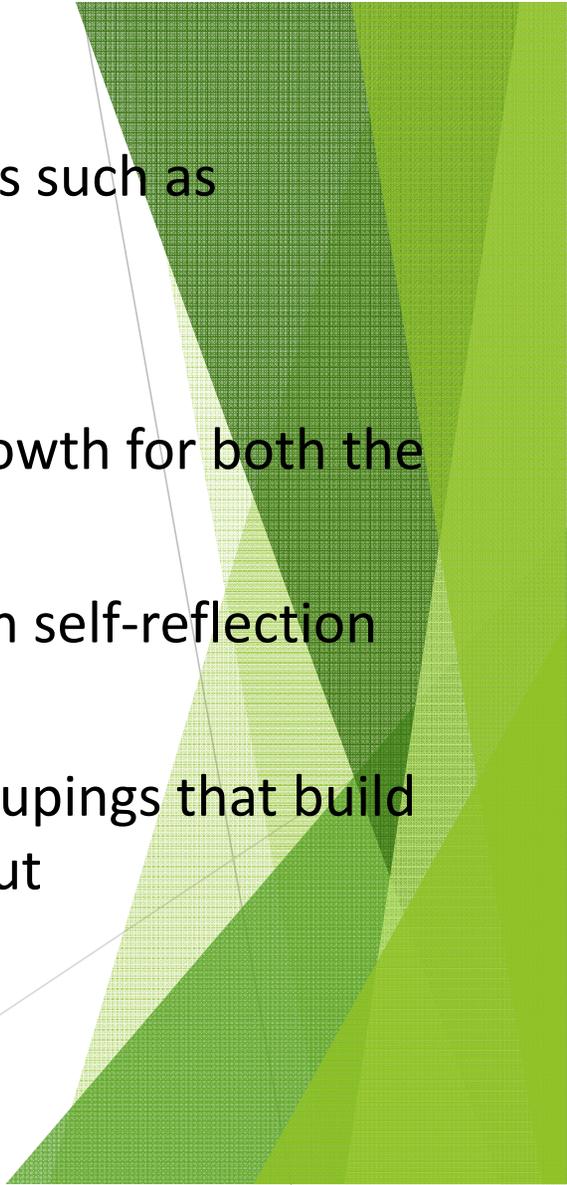
- Provincial and division policies, goals and initiatives will be presented and discussed.

6. Engaging Parents, Family and Community

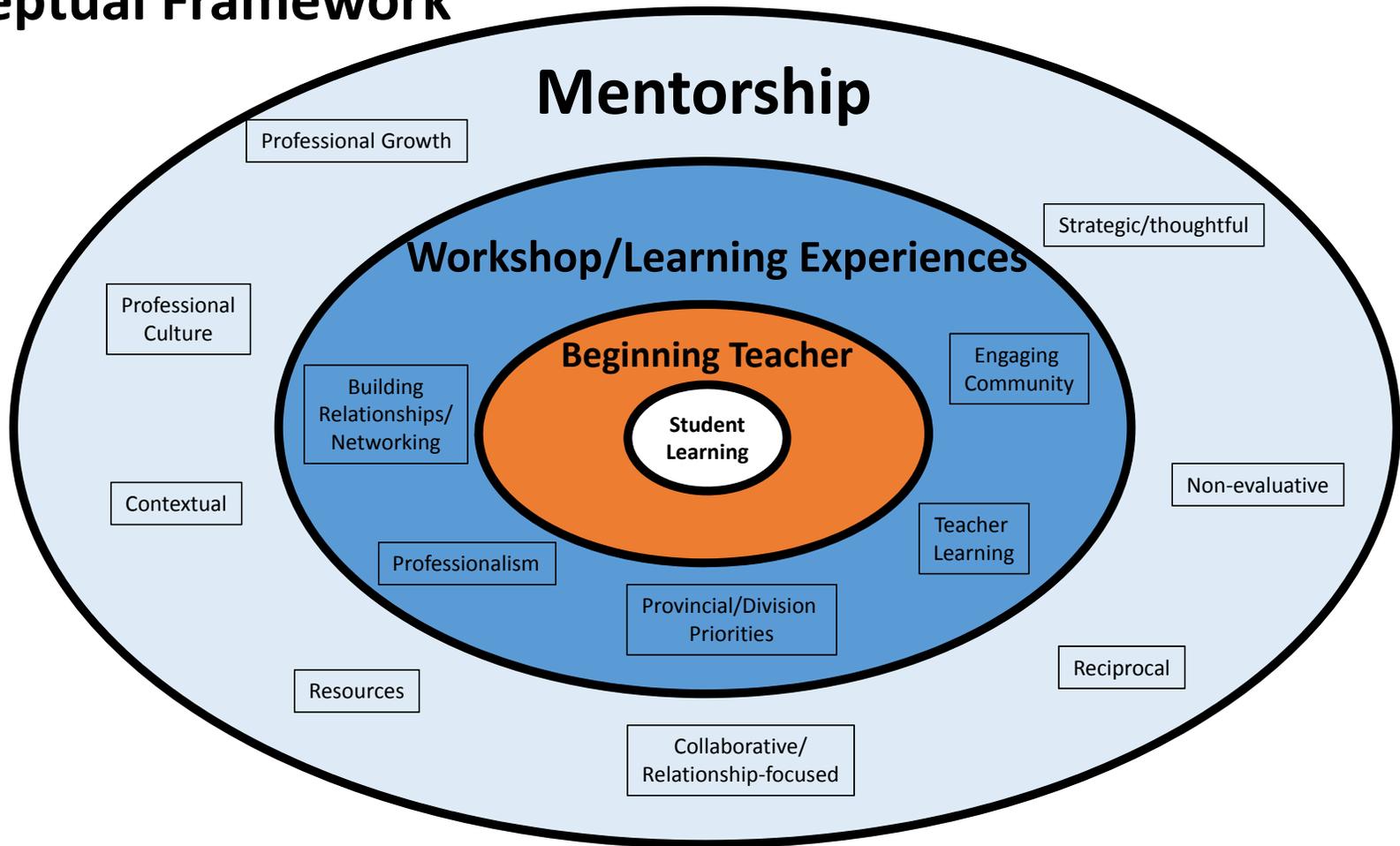
- The importance of engaging with families and community will be explored.

Guiding Principles of Mentorship in Saskatchewan

1. Mentorship is valuable and necessary to support the professional growth of beginning teachers.
2. Mentorship is a part of teacher professional culture.
3. Mentorship is a responsive and supportive process driven by the individual needs of the mentee (new to a school division, new to teaching, new to school, new to community, new to professional practice, new to a professional role).
4. Mentorship requires resources: human, time, and financial. The time commitment and time investment needs to be acknowledged and compensated.
5. Mentorship is contextual (location, role, community, etc.)

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6. Mentorship is required in addition to existing programs such as coaching; not to replace these programs.
 7. Mentorship is collaborative and relationship focused.
 8. Mentorship is reciprocal, and provides professional growth for both the mentor and mentee.
 9. Mentorship is a non-evaluative process that focuses on self-reflection to allow for professional and personal growth.
 10. Mentorship should involve strategic or thoughtful groupings that build relationship, trust, sense of belonging, and capacity, but mentor/mentee reassignment is possible.
 11. Mentors require support and training.

Conceptual Framework



Current/Future Provincial Work

Beginning Teacher Project (BTP)

“Networks & Connections: Building Promising Practices to Support Beginning Teachers in Saskatchewan.”

Beginning Teacher Project (BTP)

“Networks & Connections: Building Promising Practices to Support Beginning Teachers in Saskatchewan.”

Grants: College of Education Research LEADER Grant; University of Saskatchewan President’s SSHRC Insight Grant; President’s SSHRC Connections Grant

Focus Groups: invitation to school divisions/treaty councils to participate in the design of survey questions

Survey: designed summer, 2017

Info out to BTs: sent out to all beginning teachers fall, 2017

White paper: to school divisions and First Nations organizations

Thank you.
Any questions?

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