

SUPPORTING YOUR

health journey



Leading the Way to Inclusive and Healthy School Communities

The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is a health and welfare trust governed by 10 trustees. It offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for more than 56,000 covered members and their dependants in 58 school jurisdictions and 11 associations across the province. ASEBP is pleased to contribute a regular column in The CASS Connection, this issue features Graham Lowe, Ph.D., a consultant working with ASEBP in the area of workplace resiliency.

By Graham Lowe, Ph.D.

Alberta's educational leaders have at their fingertips the opportunity to support the province's school system's performance to reach new heights. The biggest potential for improvement is found in the concepts of inclusive education and healthy school communities.

According to Alberta Education, "Inclusion is not just about learners with special needs. It is an attitude and approach that embraces diversity and learner differences and promotes equal opportunities for all learners in Alberta." The Joint Consortium for Healthy School Communities' demonstrates how comprehensive school health links student success to school health.

These ambitious reform goals are achievable with the right combination of leadership and resources. What's required is for educational leaders to be resilient, supported in their jobs to achieve optimal personal well-being and to be transformational in their leadership style. What follows outlines what CASS members can do to put in place these three pre-conditions for success.

Beyond resilience: psychological capital

Educational leaders face heightened risks to their well-being given the demands

of their role in an educational system defined by rapid change, rising expectations and resource constraints.

Confronting these challenges and turning them into opportunities, requires leaders to be resilient. Resilient leaders thrive in the face of adversity. They bounce forward to find new strength and equilibrium as they work their way through challenges. They move to a new normal that enables them to progress toward a better future, finding opportunities and renewed energy.

Yet, today's leaders need more than just resilience. That's why researchers have developed the broader concept of psychological capital (PsyCap) to encompass not only a person's capacity to be resilient, but also to be hopeful, confident and optimistic.

Here's a check-list you can use to assess PsyCap. Do you or your team:

1. Always look on the bright side of things at work?
2. Feel optimistic about your/their future career?
3. Manage difficulties one way or another at work?
4. Take stressful things at work in stride?
5. See yourself/themselves as being successful at work?
6. Think of many ways to get out of a jam at work?

7. Feel confident contributing to discussions about organizational strategy?
8. Feel confident presenting information to a group of colleagues?
9. Avoid taking work stress home?

Why psychological capital matters

PsyCap is related to a range of organizational outcomes critical to a successful educational system. In this regard, PsyCap is similar to what educational experts Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan call professional capital, which combines individual talent, collaboration and sound educational decision-making.

There's abundant evidence showing that leaders with well-developed PsyCap have better overall physical and mental health than their colleagues who lack PsyCap. They are also better able to manage the stresses of their job and less likely to experience burnout.

Teachers, principals and system administrators who possess strong professional capital are also transformational in their leadership style. Transformational leaders are needed to improve school performance and students' educational outcomes.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership goes far beyond a transactional or goal-oriented leadership

style by enabling individuals to achieve their potential, find innovative solutions to challenges and embrace change. Transformational leaders motivate others to strive for higher levels of performance, are admired and trusted, stimulate creative thinking and are attuned to individuals' growth needs by acting as a coach or mentor.

Listed below are the hallmarks of a transformational educational leader. Assess your own leadership style by asking how frequently you do the following:

1. Articulate a compelling vision of the future for education and for your school jurisdiction;
2. Express confidence that school jurisdiction goals will be achieved;
3. Seek differing perspectives when solving problems;
4. Get others to look at problems from many different angles;
5. Go beyond self-interest for the good of students, teachers and communities;
6. Act in ways that build others' respect for you;
7. Consider the moral and ethical consequences of decisions;
8. Communicate the importance of having a strong sense of purpose;
9. Help others develop their strengths; and
10. Teach and coach your staff.

Healthy educational workplaces

A comprehensive view of a healthy school community includes educational workplaces. If schools and other educational system workplaces are healthy, this sets a positive tone for health promotion across the school community. Teachers themselves are healthier, leaders are more effective and students have positive role models for healthy lifestyles.

Organizational research shows that work environment, job and organizational factors impact individuals' well-being and organizational performance. These same factors—working relationships, role clarity, job resources, training and professional development, job autonomy, job demands and work hours—also contribute to transformational leadership behaviours.

With these important connections in mind, CASS members can promote healthier educational workplaces by taking these actions:

- Initiate an open discussion of how well-being enables the type of leadership required to continuously improve Alberta's education system during a time of resource constraints.
- Demonstrate as a model for others to emulate Leadership Dimension 5 in the *CASS Practice Standard*: "The CASS member provides exemplary leadership by building trust and effective relationships with the school system community." Trust, along with positive, respectful working relationships are the hallmarks of a healthy, inclusive workplace.
- Adopt an inclusive approach to promoting health and wellness, emphasizing that if teachers, principals and administrators experience their work environment as healthy, students are more likely to perceive a positive learning environment.
- Partner with ASEBP to promote the use of available mental and physical health promotion resources, especially related to stress reduction and work-life balance;
- Identify workplace risks to optimal mental and physical health so solutions can be implemented.
- Incorporate PsyCap and transformational leadership into CASS leadership and professional development programs.

CASS-ASEBP partnership

ASEBP is an active partner with CASS in its quest for the kind of healthy workplace needed to support successful leadership. It will also be strengthening its communication with CASS members about available resources, providing more mental health resources and benefits, and continuing to highlight health and wellness promotion and prevention.

CASS and ASEBP understand that individuals flourish in work environments that support their well-being. Together, as partners committed to promoting health and well-being in the education sector workplace, CASS and ASEBP are contributing to the bigger goals of inclusive education and healthy school communities. ■

*Graham Lowe is a workplace consultant, author and professor emeritus at the University of Alberta. He first provided ASEBP expert advice on organizational health in 1998. He has also provided consulting services on a wide range of workplace issues and leadership development to hundreds of organizations in many industries across Canada and internationally. He is the author of *Creating Healthy Organizations: How Vibrant Workplaces Inspire Employees to Achieve Sustainable Success* (creatinghealthyorganizations.ca).*


Homewood Health
Improving life



Offering Employee and Family Assistance 24/7/365

We will help you and your family whenever and however you need us.

1.800.663.1142

homewoodhealth.com



Homewood
Health | Santé