What is high school redesign? Why does it matter for your child?

High School Redesign (HSRD) is all about giving students what they need to successfully complete their final years of schooling. It matters because as the number of students who graduate goes up, then more students have what they need to be successful throughout their lives.

Believing that high school completion is a building block for an individual’s success in the future, the Alberta government and many Alberta high schools have recently partnered to start HSRD. Its three main goals are:

- Engaged students
- High levels of achievement
- Quality teaching

Although these goals are the focus of schools participating in High School Redesign, they are also very applicable to students in elementary and junior high. Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools (WRPS) has been working on these goals in each of our schools for many years.

In order to achieve them in grades 10 through 12, the provincial government helped by making an important change. It changed the way it grants credits. Traditionally, credits have been based on the number of hours students spend in a class. But the government is now granting credits based on the completion of course work, and not on hours.

Because of this change, schools can be more flexible about how they meet the needs of students they serve. HSRD is being incorporated in many high schools in Alberta. Although there are some commonalities in approach from school to school, there are also some unique approaches based on local needs.

In WRPS, Wetaskiwin Composite High School as well as Pigeon Lake School and Buck Mountain School are all working on HSRD. We focused on Pigeon Lake and Buck Mountain in a previous edition, and this paper focuses on what is happening in WCHS.

Challenging start... successful end to high school
How the flexibility of High School Redesign makes a difference

Hazen Howe’s graduation depended on flexibility at school.

When you hear about the success Hazen Howe is achieving today, including graduation from high school in June 2017, you might think his educational journey was easy. But that wouldn’t be true. Perhaps a better word to describe his early years in high school might be tumultuous.

Heading to Wetaskiwin Composite High School (WCHS) three years ago, Hazen had just become a new father. That situation and other social challenges made focusing on school difficult. Hazen describes often being in the office, and having to face suspension from school.

“I had trouble adjusting to my surroundings and there were conflicts,” says Hazen.

“If there was a kid for the school to give up on it could have been Hazen,” says Hazen’s Dad, Dustin Howe. “But there is professionalism here. Mrs. Looker and her team behind her kept working with Hazen and it made a difference.”

“A traditional school environment just didn’t meet Hazen’s needs,” says Audrey Looker, WCHS Principal.

Continued on page 2...
Challenging start... successful end
... continued from cover

“Hazen needed to take a different path to complete high school. He has always had a strong drive. He just didn’t do well with the restrictions of a traditional program.”

So… staff called on the flexibility that exists within High School Redesign. First, Hazen was introduced to the work experience program which allowed him to receive credit for paid work. Eventually he moved to the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP).

Within the RAP program, and in Hazen’s grade 12 year, he attended school in the morning. During the afternoon he drove to Edmonton to work as an apprentice iron worker on the construction of the new Roger’s Place facility, where his Dad was also working. Now because of Hazen’s work on that project, he has a career direction.

“In May I was inducted into the Ironworker’s Union,” says Hazen with pride, “That’s the union my Dad belongs to. I liked being inducted. It feels good to be a part of a union and know that for the rest of my career that will be there to support me.”

Dustin Howe also attended the event. “It was definitely a special day,” says Dustin. “I had this feeling of… well a sense of accomplishment as a parent. I am proud that Hazen is heading in a good direction in his life.”

Dustin says he’s grateful for the flexibility provided to his son at school.

“I never had that as a student,” says Dustin. “I can relate to Hazen’s perspective. Its good the education system has recognized some kids aren’t as academically oriented and there’s options for them too, to give them a direction and help them finish high school. That’s important.”

Hazen is grateful for the encouragement from many staff at school. “The flexibility is key,” says Hazen. “I wanted to leave high school with my name as a success story. I know I was a lot of work at the beginning. But my goal was to finish off strong. I think I did that.”

What is high school redesign?
... continued from cover

But, all three schools have focused on the following pillars:

- Personalization
- Mastery Learning
- Flexible learning environments
- Rigorous and relevant curriculum

Why does High School Redesign matter?
Ensuring high levels of student achievement is at the heart of HSRD through schools, students and families working together. We are serious about working with you to help your child succeed. We’re passionate about our work, and thank you for entrusting your children to us.

In fact, we invite you to approach your child’s teacher this fall and ask them how they are: engaging your child, and how they are helping your child reach high expectations.

New hockey program results in 50% drop in absences
... continued from page 3

Dylan Soosay (right) and a friend who were in the hockey program

“New hockey program results in 50% drop in absences”

favorite, but we want them to feel excited about school. We want student to have something they get to choose. It helps them feel more invested in their education.”

Cross says the program has also been great for building skill in students who also play community sports. Because the hockey class started in September, for example, it gets kids conditioned in advance of the hockey season for community teams.

It also provides leadership opportunities. Since the school allows anyone who is interested to register, it means there are less experienced players mixed with more experienced players like Dylan Soosay.

“I like helping other kids,” says Dylan. “Showing them some moves makes me feel good.”
New hockey program results in 50% drop in absences

Dylan Soosay loves playing hockey. During his grade nine and ten school years, he lived in Saskatchewan so he could attend a school with a hockey program. During his grade 11 school year, Dylan moved home to Alberta and played in Fort Saskatchewan on the Midget Triple A team for the 2016-17 school year.

Dylan also became a student at Wetaskiwin Composite High School last year. When he registered, he was pretty happy to learn the school offered hockey.

“When I saw that class I picked it right away,” says Dylan Soosay, smiling from ear to ear.

The hockey class was new last year, as was a basketball class offered another semester. Both classes were placed first thing in the morning, with the intent of increasing school attendance especially for Indigenous students.

“When you wake up knowing you get to play hockey it does motivate you,” says Dylan.

The stats show other students feel the same way, and that the school had the right idea. During the three months the hockey program ran, the average number of absences for the entire class dropped to 5.5 days compared to 11 days for the same group of students in a different three month period. Of all the students in hockey program, 41 per cent were Indigenous students, and 30 per cent of the basketball class was Indigenous students.

The hockey and basketball programs are an example of High School Redesign at work. They are options that allow students to personalize their school experience. And that makes school more relevant.

“As much as possible we work to help students have schedules they like and want,” says Rob Cross, WCHS Phys. Ed. Department head. “Of course they still need to have their core subjects even if those aren’t a student’s

Continued on page 2...
High levels of achievement

Results matter

Learning is an expectation

Kids have a choice in showing what they've learned

Successful preparation for life

Graduation

Collective responsibility for student success

Schools working with students and families

Working Together

Focused & purposeful collaboration

Chances to pursue enriched opportunities

We don’t let kids fall behind

Learning is an expectation

High School Redesign

Response to Intervention

The graphic represents High School Redesign and RTI in WRPS. Although High School Redesign is a provincial initiative, with a core purpose and approaches, the interpretation of it may be different from location to location. For more information about High School Redesign, go to: www.abhsredesign.ca. And for more information about RTI in Alberta, go to: education.alberta.ca/response-to-intervention.
Successful preparation for life

Learning drives our teaching

We don't make excuses

High degree of student interest

Timely and responsive support

Students are learning what is important to them

Student choices are supported

Students feel teachers care about them

Students know teachers believe in them

Time in school schedule to get caught up and help with homework

School design

Students come to school and want to do well

Quality teaching

Results matter

We don’t let kids fall behind

Chances to pursue enriched opportunities

Learning is an expectation

Different from intervention

Schools working with students and families

Collective responsibility for student success

Kids have a choice in showing what they’ve learned

Working Together

Focused & purposeful collaboration

Response to Intervention

The graphic represents High School Redesign and RTI in WRPS. Although High School Redesign is a provincial initiative, with a core purpose and approaches, the interpretation of it may be different from location to location. For more information about High School Redesign, go to: www.abhsredesign.ca. And for more information about RTI in Alberta, go to: education.alberta.ca/response-to-intervention
Achieving career goals through High School Redesign

Jared Elliot is planning to work as a lifeguard to raise money to attend university in a year. If he is able to secure work as a lifeguard, it will be possible due, in part, to High School Redesign.

Because of the flexibility that is possible within the program, Jared has been able to receive his Bronze Medallion while attending high school. The Bronze Medallion qualifies him as a lifeguard. It also earned Jared high school credits, and it was all done during school hours.

“It’s been easier to get my bronze medallion this way,” says Jared. “And, I think it’s going to be easier to get a job because now they know me and have seen me,” he adds, referring to operators of the Manluk Centre.

The program has allowed Jared, and other interested students, to be at Wetaskiwin’s Manluk Centre for training during the school day, under the supervision of a high school teacher.

Students get three credits for work experience, three credits for an option, and one credit for workplace safety systems. Last fall there were 35 students at WCHS that took advantage of the opportunity.

The program has operated for four years now, and is making a difference for students because they are able to personalize their learning experiences.

“This program helped me with my academic classes too,” says Jared. “Going to the pool takes my mind off my core classes. I feel less stress about school.”

“Going to the pool takes my mind off my core classes. I feel less stress about school.”
- Jared Elliot

Turner Brooks is looking forward to a career as an Arborist and plans to live in a rural area. His passion for fabrication (welding) that he started in high school will be a useful skill in his future.

“I’m a hands on guy and I like machinery,” says Turner Brooks. “I’m a tradesman for sure.”

Turner is a student who benefitted from the flexibility and personalization created through High School Redesign.

As Turner pursued the curriculum goals for fabrication,
W
hen you attended high school, did you fill any of your option periods with a ‘hard’ academic class? You might expect the answer for most people to be ‘no’. But... there is one class at Wetaskiwin Composite High School that is all of the following: challenging, academic and optional. Yet, it is overflowing with students.

The class is called Social Sciences. It covers curriculum from a Social Studies and a Science perspective. Topics in the course include: political science, economics, world religions and anything related that the students want to study.

“The class examines issues in the world today, and how those impact us in Alberta,” says Audrey Looker, WCHS Principal.

“The class was super-non-traditional and really interesting to me,” says Jaslyn Rasmuson, who graduated from WCHS in June. “I really liked that the teacher gave us choices of what we wanted to learn in class, and those were the units we did.”

“My favorite part of the class was studying human nature,” says Jaslyn.

“We looked at what instincts humans have. We have an instinct to survive. We also have an instinct to be curious” (called epistemophilic instinct). “I didn’t even know that was a thing until social-science class.”

Jaslyn also enjoyed the assignment to create her own sustainable city (on paper). “I realized how much goes into planning a community. It really helped me appreciate my own,” she says.

The class is another example of High School Redesign at work. Allowing students to personalize what they learn increases interest and engagement. The course is also an example of increasing opportunities for mastery learning and rigorous and relevant curriculum.

Even though Social Sciences is an academic option, students are engaged. “It’s because of the choice and flexibility,” says Jaslyn. “I was willing to do the work because we were learning what we wanted to learn.”

Jaslyn says the Social Science course was also a great preparation for Social Studies 30. “We covered different material in each class, but what we learned in Social Science really supported what I learned in Social Studies,” says Jaslyn.

This fall Jaslyn is off to the University of Alberta studying physiology. She says she loved Social Studies and Social Science so much she’s enrolled in a similar course in Edmonton.

Right: Jaslyn Rasmuson, with a completed assignment for her Social Science class.

he was able to choose some of his projects rather than completing projects pre-selected for him.

He needed that ability because he had injured himself and was wearing a cast, which posed a safety issue around certain machinery. Turner needed an option that would work with his limitations, and would also match his interest and skill set.

The outcome was an assignment to complete stainless steel artwork on a large panel.

“I used grinding and welding applications in a different way,” says Turner. “It took me about a week to design, and it had some challenges like providing enough support so I could grind on the metal without it being too flimsy. But I think it looks really cool. I am happy with the way it looks.”

Turner’s teacher Al Blacker says that providing flexibility is leading to positive results. He says prior to high school redesign, enrollment in his CTS courses was declining. But now with the flexibility he can tailor the course to match what students are interested in.

“The students are driven and far more creative” says Blacker, “and that makes sense. If you are interested in your work, then you want to do it and you are more likely to do it well.”
Getting successfully to graduation is about doing the right things early

What makes high school successful?
It's not just about completing high school.

A student finishing grade twelve will receive more than:
- 11,000 hours of class time
- 2200 days of instruction

Over that same period, a teacher will commit 25,000 hours to the development of students.

Starting in kindergarten, each day is an opportunity to achieve a high standard of learning. Every successful day contributes to the successful completion of high school. The greatest successes occur when the time and effort of students and teachers is focused and supported.

While High School Redesign supports a high school focus, the same focus is being developed in all schools through Response to Intervention. RTI is teachers observing, formally and informally, how students are doing and then using that data to intentionally plan to meet those needs. RTI is about teachers, students and parents working together to provide timely and responsive support as learning needs arise.

HSRD and RTI share common elements that ensure high levels of student achievement in all schools, illustrated in a visual way on pages four and five.

School wide focus on literacy improves student skill at Falun School

“I liked being with other people at the same level as me,” says Caleb Stone who will be in grade four this year. “It gave me more confidence.”

Kordell Newman, who will be heading into grade three, says, “I like that there’s lots of reading because we get to take turns.”

“I liked helping other people,” says Christina Sjolin, who is also entering grade four.

“If you need help you can ask and the people in your group will help you,” says Sawyer Pohl, also starting grade four.

In addition to this, the teachers all used the same approach to reading so it was consistent throughout the school. The result of their effort was a measurable increase in student reading ability. For instance, 25 per cent of students were below grade level in the first term. By the second term that gap had decreased to 17 per cent.

“We saw that increase because of the focused intervention and practice on phonemic development,” says Holtby.

“It was exciting to see staff so engaged,” says Holtby. “Everyone was sharing the students’ growth. Everyone is seeing it. It is so exciting to see professionals learning from each other, and deciding to do something that was not directed by administration.”

This is also an example of Response to Intervention or RTI. RTI is in every WRPS school, which means teachers are working to find ways to meet the needs of individual students.

“I like RTI because it feels like I am not alone in trying to help students. I am a part of a team,” says Liddle.

In the fall Falun plans to continue its focus on literacy, as well as on numeracy. In order to make RTI effective, the school has ensured there is enough staff support.

In addition to regular classroom teachers, Falun will also continue to have a Learning Assistant teacher who can spend time focused on individual learning needs identified at the school. The teacher will continue to work hand-in-hand with homeroom teachers to make sure students get what is required for their success.
Finding everyday ways
to give each child
just what they need

Seth Akins Nelson is a well behaved student who does really well academically in school. His challenge is boredom.

“I usually get my work done really fast. I needed something extra to do,” says Seth, who is in grade six at Winfield School this fall.

Seth’s teacher recognized that too and had a conversation with the school principal. The result was a special assignment. The school asked Seth to plan the year end family barbecue, and figure out how much of each food item to order. Seth was tasked with phoning grocery stores to find out the cost of individual items.

“I thought it was going to be fun, but I learned it was difficult,” says Seth. The hardest part, he says, was getting the grocery store staff to take a child seriously. But once he “managed to get that to happen, it was a good assignment.

“It had a lot of math in it and I liked that,” says Seth.

Seth’s Mom is pretty proud of her son, and grateful the school saw what he needed. “Sometimes kids that are smart can get left to the side,” says Shannon Nelson.

Nelson has homeschooled some of her children. With Seth in public school she was concerned he wouldn’t get enough challenge.

“For teachers to go out of their way has been amazing. The fact that they’re doing what I would have done as a home school Mom is so great,” says Nelson.

Nelson says the assignment has been meaningful for her son, who one day plans to be a commercial airplane pilot. “He felt respected,” she says. “I have taught him that respect is earned. And Seth feels that he has earned his teacher’s respect. He has pride in himself.”

Seth’s experience is a good introduction to “Response to Intervention” (RTI) which is in place throughout Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools. RTI is a framework that supports teachers to remediate or extend opportunities for learning based on individual student needs.

“Winfield School is a consistently high achieving school, with solid teaching and learning,” says Brian Taje, WRPS Associate Superintendent.

“For teachers to go out of their way has been amazing. The fact that they’re doing what I would have done as a home school Mom is so great.”
- Shannon Nelson

Meadow Drebert is another student who has benefitted from that commitment. Heading into grade six this fall, she will have significantly more skill in reading because of educators support.

“I didn’t like reading before,” says Meadow. “Especially when I read out loud, I just couldn’t get the words right.”

Early in 2017 the school recognized that Meadow needed additional support. Principal Donald Teplyske decided he would meet with Meadow regularly to work on reading.

“We worked on word parts and what sounds they each make,” says Meadow. “It was helpful to break down a word. Now when I am reading I can chunk word parts instead of guessing at them. It feels good.”

“Meadow is a smart kid, but she was having some trouble with her reading fluency,” says Naomi Drebert, Meadow’s Mom. “It was so valuable for her to get some extra help and see her reading improve, as well as her confidence in the classroom.”

“I like baseball, running, hockey, wakeboarding and water skiing,” says Meadow. “And I am starting to like reading.”
Credit recovery creates hope and motivation to complete high school

Alisa Nepoose and teacher Dan Dick

Alisa Nepoose will soon graduate from high school and head towards a career as a social worker. Graduation will be an exciting achievement for her especially because, like many other kids her age, she’s had a couple bumps in her high school journey.

“I wasn’t as focused as I should have been in grade 10,” says Alisa. “But I finally realized I had to finish if I wanted to become a social worker. I am more motivated now.”

Because of High School Redesign, and specifically one aspect of it called “Credit Recovery”, Alisa will have the ability to finish strong, and in a time frame not too much different from other students her age.

“Credit recovery provides an opportunity for kids to gain skills in an area they missed earlier for whatever reason,” says Dan Dick, a WCHS teacher who also has the title of ‘success coach’.

What does credit recovery look like in action?

Let’s say a hypothetical student is enrolled in Math 10, and they pass many of the units of the course, but also fail a couple. In that scenario the student has failed Math 10.

In the old way of doing things, the student would need to take the entire course again. But now, with credit recovery, teachers can go back through the results to see what the student missed and have them re-do those portions only.

“It gives educators the flexibility to diagnose where there is a shortfall, so we can help more students finish courses and high school,” says Kris Denney, Principal of WCHS starting in fall 2017 (and Principal of Pigeon Lake School in 2016-17). “We assign our most seasoned and master teachers to this work because it is so important.”

Teacher Dan Dick agrees that the work is very important. “It gives students hope. It helps them realize they can still graduate in three years instead of four, for instance. Credit recovery helps them see that they have options, instead of many hoops to jump through.”

“I am grateful,” says Alisa talking about her experience with Mr. Dick and credit recovery. “And I’m excited about the future.”

Credit recovery creates hope and motivation to complete high school.

“Credit recovery gives students hope. It helps them see that they have options, instead of many hoops to jump through.”
- Dan Dick, teacher

Top left: Morgan Crawford, Top right: Grace Campbell. Both students competed in Skills Canada competitions in culinary arts, in the spring, and used flex block to practice their skills.

Below: WCHS students working on homework, in the student gathering area during flex block.
Grace Campbell and Morgan Crawford both love the culinary arts, and both focused on that during their high school years. In fact, both young ladies competed in a Skills Canada competition this spring; Morgan in baking and Grace in the culinary arts.

“The competition was an amazing learning experience,” says Grace. “It took a lot of hard work and dedication, but it was all worth it. Especially if you plan on entering a career in the trades like I do.”

“Everyone was so encouraging, and although the competition was high, there was a very welcoming and friendly atmosphere,” says Morgan. “I learned how to work efficiently under pressure and how to adapt to unexpected situations when things do not go as planned.”

Both young ladies used the Flex block provided at Wetaskiwin Composite High School to prepare for the event, and to ensure their core courses were completed as well.

“I really like flex block,” says Morgan. “I have track, volleyball, running, and piano after school, and getting ready for Skills Canada. It’s nice to get be able to get my homework done at school so I have time for everything after school.”

Grace says, “I use flex block time to catch up and to get one-on-one help from my teachers, and to practice for Skills Canada. Math is hard for me but because of flex I was able to pass that class.”

What is flex block?
Simply, flex block is time built into a school’s timetable for students to get supports they need. It’s a core component of High School Redesign, although individual schools have a variety of ways of providing that support. At WCHS, flex blocks occur twice each week. Each flex block is 36 minutes long.

Students have a choice to use that time to do any of the following:

- Go to the student gathering area to complete homework, where a teacher is present to provide help
- Go to a teacher’s tutorial on a specific subject
- Get one-on-one help from a teacher
- Participate in an enrichment opportunity such as: biology students designing a herb garden, dissection of a shark, visits from NAIT, Registered Apprenticeship Program, and career related presentations, learner’s license preparation, film study, and more
- Activities such as drama games, theatre make-up classes, mini cooking experiences, Phys Ed games, pumpkin carving and more

The school schedules the flex block in the afternoon, as opposed to the morning, so as to avoid issues with attendance. Students sign up for any of these options every week through an online system that WCHS piloted this year. Also...

“Teachers have the ability to book individual students in for a session in their room if it’s needed,” says Audrey Looker, WCHS Principal. “That way, if a teacher sees an area of concern, they can be supportive to that student.” For grade ten students, teacher advisory groups are established and also provide guidance and support to access flex blocks.

The school schedules skilled teachers to be available in the student gathering area so that when kids have questions they can get help.
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Changes to grade structures reflect Board’s desire to ensure quality education

During the 2017-18 school year, WRPS will complete a transition that will change the grade structure of its schools located east of the QE2. Starting this fall, schools in the east will be structured as either grade K-8 or grade 9-12 schools. Also, Queen Elizabeth School will become the location for the French Immersion and Year Round K-8 programs.

“We’ve asked parents what quality education means to them,” says Terry Pearson, Superintendent, WRPS. “Those priorities were reflected in a number of alternatives that we discussed. This plan is the result of those discussions.”

During the 2015-16 school year, WRPS used “Thought Exchange”, an online discussion tool that allows people to respond to the comments of others, as well as post their own. The tool helped WRPS evaluate its proposed plan, which now has Board approval and will move ahead.

The change in grade structures is one step we’ve taken to ensure high quality learning environments for our students.

There are some immediate benefits as a result of the changes. Students gain earlier access to a modernized facility. Grade seven and eight students have enriched opportunities to complete complementary and option courses. There are more learning supports for students as needs arise. Also, with reconfiguration, there are fewer transitions between schools, typically having a positive effect on successful high school completion.

If you have questions about the plan, please contact the division office at: (780)352-6018.

WCHS modernization now complete

When students head back to school at Wetaskiwin Composite High School this fall, their school building will be more ready to respond to their needs. Several years of modernization has come to a close. There was a lot of work done that will hide behind walls (such as new wiring, heating systems, plumbing and ventilation systems) contributing to a clean, comfortable and safe learning environment for students.

Some of the noticeable changes to the school facility include:

• Spacious upgraded two court gymnasium

• A new black box theatre space for drama next to the music room - the rooms can be joined into one fabulous production space thanks to an acoustically designed “sky fold” wall

• Two new large project classrooms that come equipped with a movable wall

Need to register for school?
Have questions about fall?
Check out our website for more information. www.wrps.ab.ca

Feedback welcome
Thank you for taking the time to read this publication. We hope it has been helpful and encouraging. We love working with you to help your children grow. We hope the coming school year is productive and happy for your child. If you have any questions, or feedback for us, we would love to hear from you.

1-780-352-6018
Ask for Sherry Knull
www.wrps.ab.ca