



Directorate for Education

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), OECD

Innovative Learning Environments (ILE)

INVENTORY CASE STUDY

Olds High School in the Community Learning Campus

Canada, Alberta

The Community Learning Campus (CLC) is an innovative approach to high school, post-secondary and community education, sharing resources and working jointly with a variety of community groups and agencies. It focuses on providing an active, constructive, and holistic educational environment that brings together high school and post-secondary education in one place (which may be virtual), seeking to create a seamless transition for students wishing to enter the workforce, apprenticeship, college, or university. The CLC is both a virtual and a physical learning space in four multi-use facilities: 1) core high school; 2) fine arts and multi-media centre; 3) health and wellness centre; and 4) the Bell eLearning Centre. Delivery is either seminar-based or class-based, both of which are constructivist and organized around project work. Programmes are organized around four pillars – personal, knowledge, community, and global – and navigation relies on the CLC Learner Map, which is both a framework for individual learner pathway decisions and a graphic enabling community access. This case study is mainly focused on the high school organisation.

This Innovative Learning Environment case study has been prepared specifically for the OECD/ILE project. Research has been undertaken by Sharon Friesen from the University of Calgary under the supervision of Kim Bater from the Canadian Rockies Public Schools, following the research guidelines of the ILE project.

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Inventory Case Study: Olds High School, Olds, Alberta, Canada

Olds High School in the Community Learning Campus

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The Alberta Context

This report is Alberta's contribution to the international study on Innovative Learning Environments (ILE), carried out by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Olds High School is located in the province of Alberta in Canada. Alberta is one of ten provinces and three internal territories, which comprise the Canadian educational context. In Canada, K-12 education, as well as postsecondary education, is the responsibility of provincial and territorial governments, and in each province and territory there are laws, policies, and procedures that govern the operation of both K-12 and postsecondary institutions. Alberta Education is responsible for 2,134 schools within Alberta. Schools within Alberta are governed by a Public, Separate, Francophone, Charter, Early Childhood Services Private Operator or Private School authority. Alberta participates in national and international studies of achievement. These include: Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

Summary

Olds High School is a public (Alberta government) junior-senior secondary school, within Chinook's Edge School Division, offering a comprehensive curriculum for approximately 650 students in Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12. Students range in age from 14 – 19 years. The high school is co-located on the Olds College campus, and involves a unique partnership among high school, post-secondary and community learning environments. This partnership is known as the Community Learning Campus. The innovative building was designed to be open, interactive, collaborative and rich in information and communication technologies, with learning programs being interdisciplinary, personalized, project and problem-based and enhanced through opportunities provided by Olds College. Student-teacher relationships are a key emphasis within this school. Structures have been created to enable the development of these strong learning relationships ensuring learning success for each student.

Aims, Nature and History of the Innovation

Nestled in the foothills on the eastern slopes of Rocky Mountains lies the community of Olds, Alberta, Canada. It is basically a farming and ranching town of approximately 7300 residents. To the east side of Olds are farms, to the west, rolling ranch lands and approximately 95 kilometres to the south, a city of just over a million people, Calgary. Unlike many other Alberta rural communities, Olds has had the advantage of having a college in the town.

It is within Olds, Alberta that an innovative approach to reconceiving high school, post-secondary and community learning environments began. Known as the Community Learning Campus (CLC) <http://www.communitylearningcampus.ca/> this unique community venture has a rather unusual beginning. Built in the 1920s, the former Olds High School building was a long thin building that was not very structurally sound. A former school district leader described it as "a crate type of facility, very much like a

warehouse, with separate classrooms, no double classrooms, no breakout rooms, no good student gathering area, poor gymnasium—you know, a poor learning spaces for students.” It was located on a busy highway running east and west through the town; a highway with significant truck traffic. The playing grounds for the students and the track and football fields were on the other side of this busy highway. The mayor of the town, along with many community members, became quite concerned about the condition of the former high school. Everyone agreed, it should be renovated; however, when the Minister from the provincial government came to present the cheque for 6.7 million dollars in 2003 to go towards the high school renovation, the parent council president turned it down, stating, “We’d love to have the 6.7 million, but we really would like to look at building a new school.”

Realizing that more like 20 million dollars would be required for a new building, the superintendent of Chinook’s Edge School Division, Jim Gibbons, started to look for alternative solutions. He engaged the mayor, the community and the president of Olds College. As the story goes, the president of Olds College and the superintendent of Chinook’s Edge School Division met at a local coffee shop where they sketched out a preliminary vision for what was to become the Community Learning Campus (CLC). It would have a fitness facility of some sort for the entire community, there would be a core high school, there would also be some type of building having to do with high-end technologies and there would have to be a theatre. They agreed that this structure had to be much more than a school on a college campus, as it needed to be more than a real estate deal. They decided they wanted to push the boundaries in terms of rural development. This new vision had to be a model for what could happen if communities really worked together.

Convinced they were onto a good idea, these two individuals started to hold meetings, bringing the community together around the idea of a CLC and thereby further developing the concept. They commissioned a study that when completed they gave to the provincial government. The provincial government released a half million dollars of the 6.7 million to conduct a further study. When the second study was complete and agreed to, the CLC was granted approximately 34 million dollars to begin the process. Upon seeing the potential benefit to the community other partners contributed additional funds. Shovels went into the ground to begin building in 2006.

Such a unique idea required an equally unique governance structure (Figure 1). A joint venture between Olds College and Chinook’s Edge School Division in collaboration with the Town of Olds, Mountain View County, and the University of Alberta was created.

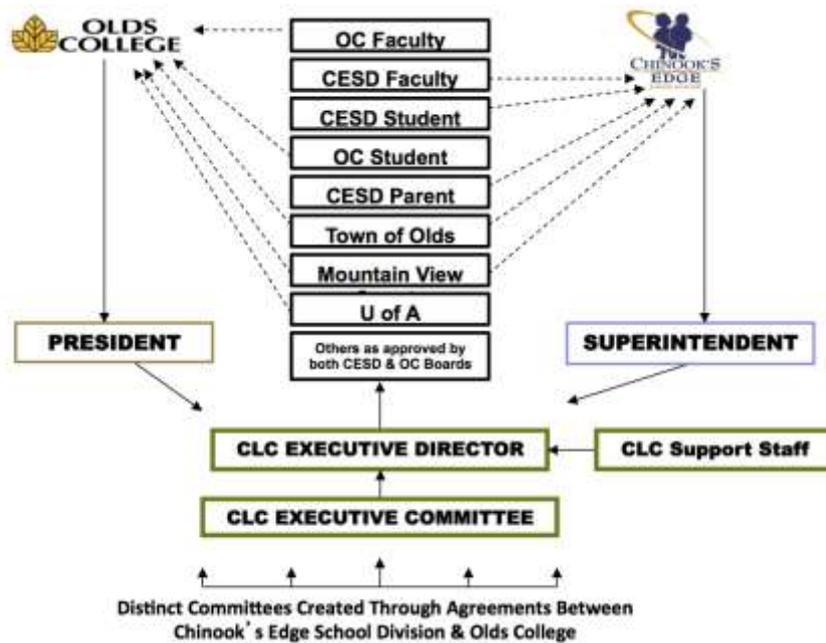


Figure 1. Community Learning Campus Governance Structure.

From that initial conversation in the coffee shop onward, the CLC was designed to address the specific rural needs of the Olds community, and a vision for schooling and learning for their adolescent community members. Guided by a vision to be recognized as a leading educational environment in personalizing success for all learners in their community, the CLC established the following four outcomes:

- Provide reciprocal and seamless transfer between high school, post-secondary and community
- Personalize learning to meet diverse needs
- Create a campus that encompasses and promotes environmental sustainability
- Advance rural community development

Olds High School, an integral part of the CLC, is situated on the Olds College campus, located within the Ralph Klein Centre. The high school serves approximately 650 students from Grades 9 – 12. In addition to the high school, the Ralph Klein Centre also includes a number of community organizations and resources such as a Child Care Centre, the Health and Wellness Centre, the Integrated Career Centre and Central Alberta Child and Family Services. Students take their physical education classes in the Health and Wellness Centre. It is not uncommon for community members to share the Health and Wellness Centre while the students are in their physical education classes. Many students, in the school, stated they enjoyed seeing members of the community in the when they were in physical education class.

Students have access to the counsellors at the Integrated Career Centre and Alberta Employment and Immigration, again both located within the Ralph Klein Centre. A few steps next door is the Fine Arts and Multimedia Centre (Figure 2). This Centre contains a 390 seat theatre; instructional, presentation and conference space; and multipurpose areas for performing and visual arts in Olds and area. The instructional spaces include areas for music, drama, visual arts, cosmetology and a stained glass studio. High school and college students, the community, business and industry, utilize high-end technology and multimedia labs in the Bell e-Learning Centre.



Figure 2. Community Learning Campus. Top left Bell e-Learning Centre, top right Ralph Klein Centre and bottom centre Fine Arts and Multimedia Centre.

Located on a college campus, bound together in a strong collaborative partnership, has its distinct advantages. High school students have digital access the library at Olds College, at the school or from home. The library collections between the two educational institutions, Olds High School and Olds College are amalgamated giving the high school students access to the NEOS system, which allows access to university and college databases and books. Students take many of their Career and Technology Studies (CTS) courses such as fabrication in metals, welding, carpentry, etc. at Olds College. While students from the high school have been able to access CTS courses at Olds College since the 1990s, with the development of the CLC, this type of programming grew into a dual credit program¹. The goal of the dual credit program is for all students to have at least one experience in post-secondary during their high school years. Open to any student at Olds High School, it is possible for the students to earn credits in both institutions, while still in high school. Students stated they saw the dual credit program as a unique opportunity for advancing their studies. In addition, they were clear that courses taken in the dual credit program helped to establish relevance and meaning to various courses. It was a real strength within their high school program.

Olds High School created a vision supported by unique solutions and an instructional model to guide the creation of this innovative learning environment. The staff of Old's High School, along with the community created a strong vision for the school: "Where students come first."

¹ Dual credit allows high school students to earn credits in high school and college at the same time.

Vision

- To provide expanded programming for learners.
- To be a nucleus of innovative and collaborative learning.
- Trades and Technology Labs, research laboratories, and other facilities are located across the Olds College Campus.
- Program development and implementation that comply with K-12 guidelines and provide:
 - an integrated, multi-year sequence of career guidance,
 - course work,
 - work-based learning experiences,
 - academics,
 - applied academics,
 - relevant Career and Technology Studies,
 - job shadowing,
 - mentorship,
 - internships,
 - apprenticeships,
 - portfolio development, and
 - research assistant transition opportunities

Unique Solutions

- Incorporate core programming necessary for high school completion
- Utilizes CLC and College facilities to provide enhanced learning opportunities.
- Encourages a team approach to instruction.
- Support personalized learning for students.
- Provide educational opportunities through seminar opportunities and grade grouping.
- Offer a full complement of optional courses including trades, fine arts, food, fashion, computers, media arts, mechanics and fabrication.
- Present opportunities for service learning and volunteerism.

Instructional Model

- Engage all learners by addressing their individual needs.
- Embark on active learning through project opportunities and problem-solving activities.
- Offer an interdisciplinary approach which allows learners to design projects based up their multiple intelligences.
- Establish personalized learning communities.
- Develop interactive, dialogue-based teaching.
- Support teachers to become as coaches, mentors, moderators and facilitators of learning.
- Infuse technology in learning opportunities.
- Promote life-long learning.

While the majority of students live in the community and have gone to school together for a number of years, several of the students chose the school driving a considerable distance every day, up to 100 kilometres, to attend the school. One of the students, a Grade 12 student, spoke at length about the ways in which the students at the school just thought of the school and their learning in the school as normal.

I came to this school in Grade 12. I drive here because of the incredible academic benefits. The teachers care so much. They challenge me. They make the learning so interesting. They want me to succeed. They want every one of us to succeed. They believe in you.

I like it that the students are altogether. My Social Studies 30-1 [highest level] class also has students in it that are in Social 30-2. We are altogether. Everyone is learning at an equal rate, but not necessarily the same material, but sometimes we are all working on the same project. I see every kind of person here everyday and they generally look so happy. (student)

Structured Patterns and Characteristics of the Learning Environment

Opened in 2010, the Olds High School building reflects the vision for learning that guided the design of the building—“*where students come first.*”

A visitor to the school is initially struck by the open design, the amount of natural light and the variety of spaces. Located at the southern end of the Ralph Klein Centre, the physical layout of the school is designed to provide space for classroom, team and individual configurations, which allows for self-directed study, project-based or problem-based work and collaborative learning opportunities. One of school district leaders stated that early in the process they were clear that the type of innovative, collaborative learning design they had in mind had to drive the building plans. They engaged the expertise of an individual who ensured

the learning plan drove the facility plans and the pedagogies we wished to sponsor. This plan was woven throughout all the buildings. We wanted a variety of learning spaces. We wanted students to be able to easily move from individual work, to small group work, to seminars. We wanted an environment that made it easy and natural for people to come together. We didn't want to create the egg carton educational facilities from the 1950s. (district leader)

Depending on the nature of the activity, students' classes are in various buildings on the campus:

- Core academics, CTS foods and fabric, physical education and Career Education are contained within the Ralph Klein Centre (core high school, Integrated Career Centre and Health and Wellness Facility).
- Fine Arts in the Multimedia Centre
- Library in the Learning Resources Centre
- CTS Classes and Videoconferencing suites in the Bell eLearning Centre
- CTS Practical Arts in the Agricultural Mechanical Building within the College
- Olds College Courses within the College

Flexible Learning Spaces

Dot Negropontes, a school district leader, and the first Director of the Community Learning Campus explained:

We wanted something that was very open, very flexible, with movable walls, technology very accessible, by making sure we had enough places for people to charge batteries and plug in and such. And then, also, the space could be reconfigured to suit a variety of needs. So, the students, for example, within the fine arts facility, might use the stage area to have drama classes or maybe configure it for them to actually do presentations there. The cosmetology area, which is connected to the stage area, might be used for doing the hair and makeup for a production.

So, in the quad areas (see page 9 for a detailed description of quad areas), the design was very deliberate. There are some core classrooms that might be considered more traditional; however, the furnishings are table-groupings so that they don't necessarily look like traditional desk upon rows of desk type of classrooms. So, when I say traditional, I mean they are more rectangular, box-like in design. In each quad, there's a big open area where students can meet, work together, and then there's a small little office area, called a Multipurpose Room if they need quiet space for breakout.

They also can flow out into the concourse area and work there. And so, there's just a real variety. And as well, the teachers then have office areas where the students could come to make appointments. And it's just more of a mature atmosphere than you might find in a more typical high school.

A number of different learning spaces exist throughout the school (Figures 3, 4 and 5).



Two rooftop gardens provide a rich learning environment for budding botanists, high school teachers and college faculty.

Figure 3. One of the school's rooftop gardens.



Students have an opportunity to take a full range of fine arts and multimedia courses.

Figure 4. Inside one of the art studio's in the Fine Arts and Multimedia Centre

Students have access to the technology when and where they need it. Computer-based technologies can be found throughout the school, in the Multimedia Centre and in the Bell eLearning Centre (Figure 5).



Students have opportunities to learn chroma keying techniques used in video production and post-production as part of their studies.

Figure 5. Green Screen in the Bell eLearning Centre

Students can bring their own laptop computers from home that they can connect into the school network. The school also provides both laptop computer and desktop computers throughout all the learning spaces.

Learning Communities

Subscribing strongly to the principle that learning is a social endeavour, the school is both physically and programmatically organized into four learning communities, called quads (Figure 6). There is one quad located in each quadrant of the two-storey building. The students’ lockers, the teachers’ office, the learning areas, study spaces, computers, and a small kitchen area, containing a microwave, fridge and sink, are located in each quad. The quads provide a range of learning settings for a wide variety of groupings and configurations.

The quads are each named according to a colour: Red, Green, Blue and Gold. In the Red Quad are the Grade 9 students. This is the only quad that contains a single grade. The remaining three quads are a mix of Grades 10, 11 and 12 students. Students remain in the same quad, with the same group of teachers, throughout their three years in high school. As Grade 12 students graduate from the Blue, Gold and Green quads each spring, new groups of Grade 10s enter in the fall. Teachers work together in collaborative, cross-graded, interdisciplinary teams.



Figure 6. One of the learning quads.

At the end of their first Grade 9 year, in the Red Quad, students are assigned to or apply to one of the three remaining quads—Blue, Gold or Green. When asked how it was determined which quad a student went into, the students explained that they are able to apply to enter the Green Quad; however, if they choose not to apply to the Green Quad they will be assigned to either the Blue or Gold Quads. The students and teachers interviewed for this study indicated there were no differences between the Blue and Gold Quads in terms of types of learning environments; rather, decisions were made based on the students learning preferences and personalities.

The principal stated that there is an application process for the Green Quad as it is the Academic Team (AT) quad and not all students wish to or are well suited to undertake a self-directed, seminar based learning environment. One of the students, a member of the Green Quad described it as the independent learning quad. *“We go to some of our classes, and then we get the rest of the time to just work independently. It works really well for this kind of structure. And it really works well for me.”* The teachers in the Green Quad noted that class-type of seminar learning are less frequent (2 or 3 times a week) than in the other quads; however, the seminars are punctuated with intensive teacher-directed individual and small group learning, and significant amounts of teacher-student conferencing.

Students from all the quads were quite adamant that student groupings were based on how they learned best, not what they learned. As one student explained, *“Our school definitely provides more variety for students to be able to learn at their own pace and in the ways that they learn the most and the best.”* (student)

Organization of Learning

The school’s organization and timetable enable a flexible approach to learning so students have the opportunity to access the expertise and facilities of the CLC throughout the school day, within their daily studies and also outside of the school day. Personalized learning, learning supports and ubiquitous access to high-end technologies are provided to support students’ learning.

The school timetable consists of five 70-minute blocks with 10 minutes between classes. One of five blocks of time is known as Flex Period (flexible period). Lunch occurs in the Flex Period and as well as independent work time. Students explained they have time to eat and also enough time to work on homework or anything else they might wish to work on. They also have access to a teacher during this time. While describing the Flex Period, the students were quite clear that *“you have to do something”* during Flex Period, *“you can’t just sit around and bug people and hang out.”*

One of the students noted, *“they [the staff] have been working a lot on the timetable. I know this because it has changed a number of times.”* In discussing the current timetable the principal shared the way in which he envisioned the timetable scheduling to evolve.

The challenge that we’re working on is how to get to the point where the students and the teachers can work out their timetable together. ‘Can we meet at this time?’ Right now I’m building a timetable and I basically saying to the students and teachers, ‘this is your meeting time’. That’s what I want to get rid of eventually. (principal)

Building Strong Relationships: Groupings

A strong community of relationships is core to the success of this innovative learning environment. The administrators, teachers and students spoke about the ways in which the various groupings in the school were designed to forge strong relationships: administration to teachers, administration to students, teachers to teachers, teacher to students, student to student and students with topics and activities they undertook.

The students who were interviewed made extensive reference to the ways in which *“the teachers are willing to put in extra personal effort to get to know each of the students. They take so many different approaches to helping us learn and they try to get every single person in the classroom so we can actually learn.”* (student) Teachers who participated in this study repeatedly stated they knew *“who each of these students are.”* The principal stated, *“If you can’t get to know who each of the students are, you’re not going to be able to engage them.”* Students, teachers and administration attributed the strong relationships to the length of time, three years that teachers remained with the same group of students. *“I find that you have a teacher for more than just one year, you can actually start learning better, because you understand how they teach and they understand how you learn.”* (student) All participants in this study stated that such an organizational and pedagogical structure enabled the formation of a strongly connected learning community.

I personally like it. I like it because then they [the teachers] know your strengths and weaknesses. And then they can help you grow through those over the three years, instead of having to reconnect with teachers every year. ‘Cause then you walk in and they know right away who you are, what you’ve done in the past. They can see improvements, or if you’re starting to struggle or if it’s too easy ‘cause they have, they know you over three years. (student)

“Even if you don’t get along with a certain teacher, there’s still an understanding between you for a long period of time that that’s the way it is, and you try to accommodate one another, as opposed to shaking it off for a year.” (student)

We’re not all apart; we’re with the grade elevens and the tens because we’re all in one quad together, so they haven’t separated it. And we are together for a long time. It’s good. (student)

Students spoke of the way the tone for respect and relationships are fostered early in their transition into the school. They spoke of the ways that they came to know the Grade 8 students that would be coming to the school and the various events they host for these students. Once in the school for Grade 9, these students were welcomed into the school on the first day.

One thing I’d like to add is, I was here for the first day of school and Mr. Christensen pulled us all down to the gymnasium and I was overwhelmed by how many people were here. I was like, ‘Oh, where are all the grade nines?’ Mr. C. said, ‘If you all could rise’ and I thought it would be, like; we would have to sing Oh Canada or something. We all stood up and he had us welcome the Grade 9s to the school. We clapped until the last grade nine came in. Everyone stood up and welcomed the Grade 9s. I think that says something about what is expected of you when you come to this school. (student)

Assessments

All students in Grade 9 and Grade 12 write summative standardized Alberta Education province-wide examinations in all core subject areas. Grade 9 students write Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT). The provincial government encourages teachers and administrators to use PAT information in planning and delivering relevant and effective instruction in relation to learning outcomes in the *Programs of Study*. All Grade 12 students in Alberta write provincial standardized Diploma examinations. Students' final grade is calculated using 50% of a school-awarded mark and 50% of the Diploma examination mark.

Provincial testing is evaluative as it is used to provide institutional accountability. At the Grade 12 level, the provincial testing is also used for academic promotion and high school accreditation. Provincial testing at the Grade 9 level is used to provide institutional accountability; however, the marks are not used as a basis for academic promotion. As stated earlier in the report, students at Olds High School achieve at high levels on summative standardized provincial testing in both the Grade 9 and 12.

To provide ongoing access to student achievement to parents and students, the school district uses a web-based student information system, PowerSchool™. This information system is used to provide both summative and formative information to students and parents on a daily, weekly and interim basis.

Students stated that it was helpful to have ongoing access to their marks. Many students talked about how much their parents used the online, web-based student information system. One student stated that his parents went into PowerSchool™ everyday. It provided an opportunity to speak with him about how he was doing, what he was learning and what he could do to improve. *"We see our marks at anytime using PowerSchool which is very helpful because I talk to my mom and dad, and I can also go to the teacher and be like 'Can you show me what I did here in order to get this mark and what I can do to improve.'"*

One of the students attributed both the school's success and his success to the ways in which strong relationships between teachers and students were intertwined in the rich interplay between teaching and learning.

You form some kind of strong relationship with the teachers. And you get to know like each other and it makes like learning a lot easier, because if they know you and you know them, they kind of can like change their learning, or their teaching styles to accommodate you and like the class they're with. And like they're doing a really good job in my opinion, 'cause I know my math teacher did tell me like last week that, like we in our school last year I think was the first year in it, and she said that the class average has been like the highest she's ever seen it, which is like a 73%. So it has to be working somewhere if that's happening. (student)

Teachers at Olds High School are working towards developing a rich repertoire of formative and summative assessment practices that are consistent with the goals of the school. Incorporating the research on assessment-in-learning, assessment-as-learning, assessment-for-learning and assessment-of-learning into their instructional practices, teachers work together to continually improve and strengthen

their practices and student learning. There is a strong emphasis on formative feedback to support students' ability to improve and strengthen their learning.

Teachers spoke about making criteria explicit to students by creating rubrics for students. Some teachers stated there were times that they created rubrics with students. A number of the teachers stated they were actively working with each other to clarify, share and understand the learning intentions and outcomes. To this end, they were working towards developing effective discussions, tasks and activities that elicited evidence of learning. They were also working with students to teach them how to work with each other to provide constructive, peer feedback. They stated that their goal was to create practices in which they activated students as owners of their own learning. The teachers were clear that while they had initiated a number of new formative assessment practices, this was an area of ongoing focus.

Students talked about the ways in which they experienced the variety of assessment strategies that teachers were developing. The students spoke about the various ways in which the assessment practices helped them know what was expected of them, how improve and strengthen their learning and how to meet or exceed the expectations. *"We know what is expected, we know how to get there and we know where we are."* (student)

We use rubrics a lot. Sometimes we make them up with the teacher before we start on a big project. I really like those ones because I know, we all know, where we are heading. (student)

Sometimes, she'll [the teacher], even like, before we start the project, she'll give you the rubric and we look at it and talk about it and see what we need to think about doing. Then we start our project the next day, which really helps because we get to know what we have to do and what we need to get done and how much it is worth. It is just best when it is all open like that." (student)

Teachers spoke about the ways they are continually working to build formative assessment into their instruction—pedagogical encounters that are part of the fabric of instruction. They are working towards viewing formative assessment as a process rather than a tool. As much teaching at the school occurs one-on-one or in small groups, teachers have a commitment to creating discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning. However, teachers stated that even within larger group class discussions, tasks and activities, they are working to develop practices that are more dialogic in nature. In these ways, students are provided with, and supported by, specific, constructive feedback while they are learning.

E-portfolios are used to document student learning throughout a student's four years at the school. Students begin their e-portfolios in Grade 9. They continue to add to their learning portfolio throughout the remaining three years at the school.

In addition to developing formative assessment practices, teachers are also examining different ways to develop summative assessments. As one teacher explained, the lines between formative and summative assessment are starting to blur in some instances; i.e., formative assessment becoming merged with summative assessment. She explained how this occurs with students' writing.

Students keep a portfolio of their writing. By the end of the year they go back over their portfolio and they look over their writing and they decide which one is their best. They make edits to this piece of writing and then that's the one that gets graded for their final mark.

Two teachers provided the following example of one of their assessment practices:

We brought all the English students together and gave them a four or five-page detailed editing sheet to go through. These were the criteria they worked with. The students had to take someone else's essay before we, the teachers, had our look at it. The students went through a peer assessment process, going through a classmate's essay and providing specific, detailed, helpful feedback to their classmate to help them improve their essay. They were also learning the mistakes that someone else made, but they were also finding out another way to improve their own writing and thinking. After this, the students worked on their essays again. They got formative assessment back from their peers and they got to, redo it, bring it back to us and then of course we graded it but then we also provided the students with more feedback.

Students appeared to have a clear sense of the ways in which deep understanding and marks were related to each other and also, more particularly, the differences between them. As the following student notes, senior secondary school is typically about marks and grades:

And I think during high school, like throughout grade 11 and throughout a lot of grade 12, it is about the marks. And it is about reaching that 80, 85 whatever your goal is. But then I think at the end of it, for myself personally like looking back, it's about the content and what I actually did learn. It's not the number on the top of the test, but it's like, 'Okay I do actually have a knowledge of ...' whatever that topic is. Going out into the real world, I think that's a lot more important. (student)

However, this student as well as the following student, indicate that interest in learning and the pursuit of deeper understanding is the goal, not the grade.

Well honestly in my opinion, I think I would rather do badly on a test and then like even if it was right after that I would understand it. Like if I did really bad because I didn't understand the stuff, but then later on took the time to actually understand it, I would rather have that happen than me do really good on the test, and then just let it fall and then have to relearn it later type of a thing. Like I don't know, I think being a successful learner is being able to understand and be able to understand it at a point where its like, it's in your mind and it's like not that you have to keep trying to memorize something that is not making any sense, but you just memorize it for the test. It's not really about the test. It's about you and your learning. (student)

Teaching At Olds High School

There are a total of 45 staff at Olds High School, 33 who are directly involved in teaching activities. This includes 26 teachers and 3 administrators, who also teach, and 4 educational assistants, who are also involved in teaching. All teachers and administrators at Olds High School certificated teachers in accordance with the Alberta Education system. They are employees of Chinook's Edge School Division.

When asked how he chose the teachers who taught at the school, Tom Christensen, principal of the school, was clear, "you hire passionate people." He explained that the school is staffed with many of the same teachers who taught in the high school before it moved to this new location. Both Tom and Dot, the District leader, stated that there are several teachers who chose not to move into the new school.

These teachers decided that they would not be able to work within this new learning environment with the pedagogical or organizational direction the school was taking. Both leaders talked about these teachers' choice to seek a teaching position elsewhere in the district. They both acknowledged that these teachers had a lot to offer. Tom was clear they were good teachers, but they didn't want to work with the college or they couldn't see themselves sharing an office or working with the same group of students for three years. *"I respect them for that."*

The district leader, the community, the teachers and the students attributed a large part of the success of the school to the school leadership. *"Our principal is always there for us. He is constantly walking around the school."* (student) High visibility seemed to be a hallmark of every school administrator. *"Our administration is very visible in this school. They are not sitting in their offices. The kids are very connected to Tom [principal], Gayleen [vice-principal] and Wanda [vice-principal]. They are very student centred and they're always mingling amongst the students. They lead by example."* (teacher)

Teachers were clear that there was an expectation for collaboration, continuous improvement of practice focused on those things that would make a difference to student learning and outcomes. They spoke of the ways in which time and support was provided to create a culture of sustained teaching innovations.

Teacher repeatedly spoke of the amount of trust that the administrators had in them. They frequently stated how supported they were in taking risks with their teaching. They spoke about feeling free to try new things, to be creative, without having to look over their shoulder. They also spoke of the respect they had for each other as colleagues. *"We all know what we are trying to accomplish. We have a vision for learning here and we work with it on a daily basis. We're not there yet, but we work towards it everyday."* (teacher)

Students also spoke of the openness of administrators to new ideas, particularly ideas originating with the students, *"like, if you can't find a team or a club that interests you, well we all know that we can see Mrs. Roelfsema, our Vice Principal and she will help us create a new club or put a new team together."* (student)

Ongoing professional learning is a priority in the school. Much of the professional learning is embedded in daily activities such as team teaching, curriculum builds (multidisciplinary teams of teachers working collaboratively on designing an integrated, multidisciplinary study), collaborative lesson planning, and team meetings. Teachers also attend district and school scheduled professional learning days. The school principal, summed ongoing professional learning as follows,

"with all my teachers, if they don't collaborate with each other, if they don't learn together, if they don't de-privatize their classrooms, then we won't be able to reach the level of deep learning and engagement that we are striving to achieve. It takes everyone working together all the time, learning together everyday."

Nature and Quality of the Learning

Beyond the flexible, interactive and collaborative learning environment the learning context is supported by holistic structures of learning, an interdisciplinary curriculum, and a project-based, problem-based approach. Guided by a vision for learning *“To ensure that Olds High School provides educational opportunities that enable students to become responsible and productive members of society”* the learning program is built upon the following values:

- Reinforcing the values of honesty, integrity, and respect for self, others, and property.
- Providing a progressive environment with a choice of educational programs which motivate students and staff to meet their individual potential as life-long learners.
- Recognizing the importance of personal responsibility and mutual accountability of students, staff, and parents in the educational process.
- Offering dynamic curricular and extra-curricular opportunities in a disciplined setting.
- Nurturing a co-operative relationship between the school and the community.
- Using technology effectively to support learning and communication.

As a public school within the province of Alberta, teachers are required by Ministerial Order (#004/98) School Act, Section 39(1) to follow the authorized Programs of Study outcomes and standards for student learning and education delivery. In Alberta, a basic education must provide students with a solid core program, including language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.

While the outcomes and standards are prescribed, administrators and teachers within schools have a fair amount of autonomy as to how they design the learning environment and their approach to learning to enable student success. As a proud member of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Associated Schools Network, a global network of schools that actively promote a culture of peace by focusing on the ideals and themes of UNESCO, Olds High School has selected a number of themes for learning, which are focused on environmental stewardship and social justice.

Student learning activities are organized around a central framing question, consisting of the following:

- Grade 9 – Central Framing Question: Who am I? Learning activities for Grade 9 include: core academic subjects (which include inquiry-oriented, project-based learning), complementary course on campus, e-portfolio introduction, 21st century skills course and a personal interest project (PIP).
- Grade 10 – Central Framing Question: Where am I going? Grade 11- What do I need? Grade 12 – Do I have what I need? Learning activities for Grades 10 – 12 include: core academic subjects (which include inquiry-oriented, project-based learning), a focus on service learning, a major interdisciplinary project, complementary courses on campus and post-secondary transition planning.

The pedagogical approach at Olds High School is based on the following key elements:

- Engage all learners by addressing their individual needs.
- Embark on active learning through project opportunities and problem-solving activities.
- Offer an interdisciplinary approach, which allows learners to design projects.
- Establish personalized learning communities.
- Create interactive, dialogue-based teaching.
- Ensure teachers act as coaches, mentors, moderators and facilitators.
- Infuse technology in learning opportunities.
- Promote life-long learning.

When asked to describe the pedagogical approach at the school, teachers were quick to point out they felt they were at the beginning stages and were working together to design practices that they themselves had never experienced. They spoke of how they decide on which topics to open for deeper exploration and inquiry, using interdisciplinary approaches and which topics, while rich in possibilities, will be examined and investigated through only one discipline area. Whether approaching a topic through an interdisciplinary or disciplinary lens, the teachers attend carefully to ensuring the students encounter the territory as richly textured, open to inquiry, and welcoming of deeper exploration and investigation. The school faculty understands their planning and practice as continually growing, strengthening and evolving. One teacher stated, *“I’d like to begin by saying we are at the infancy. We are in a transition phase. We are still moving away from yesterday and moving into tomorrow.”*

As stated previously, the teachers at Old’s High School are strongly encouraged and supported to work together in interdisciplinary teams, on curriculum builds to create and ensure horizontal connectedness across the various disciplinary domains (Figure 7). The opportunity to extend teacher professional learning is made possible through additional funds provided to every school jurisdiction in Alberta through the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi.aspx>. AISI funding to the school jurisdictions supports time and resources for teacher professional development. Teachers at Olds High School use some of this money to support the creation of the interdisciplinary learning designs, curriculum builds. A number key areas are intentionally woven together in each curriculum build: current research on how adolescent students learn; the provincially mandated curriculum; a rich task/activity focused on a rich idea to enable students to engage deeply with a contemporary issue, problem, question or project; formative and summative assessment; contemporary technologies; and rich, authentic resources.



Not all learning happens on campus. Enacting one of the interdisciplinary curriculum builds in 2010, involved the teachers taking the students into the mountains, a short distance to the west of the school.

Figure 7. Students involved in an interdisciplinary study in the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

The teachers were clear that providing students with well-designed, inquiry-focused, projects enabled them to go far beyond the Alberta provincial curriculum expectations. They attributed this depth of learning and deep engagement to learning designs that were deeply embedded in a rich, authentic and rigorous territory that the students were genuinely interested in. A teacher provided the following example of the ways that two students undertook a project within biology:

I will just tell you about two of my current students who studied the microbiology of their cell phones in our microbiology project. They learned how to make microbiological plates in order to

culture the bacteria they swabbed from several of their friends' phones. The skills required to design such a study were definitely part of the provincial curriculum, but the understanding of bacteria required to undertake such a study is not. (teacher)

While a number of teachers spoke of their learning with a future orientation, as not yet, as in the process of 'moving away from yesterday and moving into tomorrow,' the students did not. They spoke of learning and schooling as engaging, as real, as interesting, as challenging. I found that quite unusual for high school students. In a recent study of Canadian secondary school students, *What Did You Do In School Today? Transforming Classrooms Through Social, Academic and Intellectual Engagement*, researchers found engagement, particularly intellectual engagement fairly low, in secondary schools in Canada (Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009). The students at Olds High School talked about how they experienced the curriculum.

Learning here is so real. Like you are in the real environment, like a real shop, and a real theatre, and a real lab. Like when you write a script in Language Arts, then you just go into the real theatre and you work on it and make it better and then you perform it. It's real. It's not like doing things, for you know, just a class. (student)

Students also commented on the emphasis on project-based, problem-based learning within the school. A few noted that they appreciated having an opportunity to experience both the larger projects and also more contained, individual inquiry-focused lessons and projects. Students were explicit about what they learned and how they learned while engaged in their projects.

We get to do some self-directed projects. We work with other students on these. I like those. They are more fun than some of the other things. I learn a lot about how I work and how to get everyone involved and how to organize my learning. Like, I learn more in those projects than in some of the other projects. (student)

I think it was fun; it was really fun getting together and working on the project. Of course, we all argued and we all agreed. We challenged each other. That is actually how we got things done and how we improved. We definitely got to know each other a whole lot. (student)

Students do not work in partner groups all the time. Rather, they spoke about the ways in which the nature of the work has a part to play in the ways students are grouped or group themselves.

There are different types of groupings for different assignments. Sometimes we have assigned partners. Sometimes I can pick my own partners. Sometimes I'm in a table grouping of four students and sometimes I am in a grouping of just two students and sometimes I choose to work by myself. It's the best, because I can talk with the other students and we work our way through the project. It really makes me think that two minds are much better than just one because sometimes, I just don't know this and your partners know a better way to do it and you end up learning from them. It even helps me during a test because I think back to the way our team was working and I say to myself: 'Oh, remember when they did it that way and it was better and so I try it during the test and it works.' (student)

Regardless of the pedagogical design, students were clear about the ways in which the various learning relationships permeated the environment of the school.

It's a whole environment, yeah, it's more like a family where everybody talks to everybody. If you have questions you go ask another student or you can go talk to the teacher. The other student might be in the same grade or in a different grade. It really doesn't matter. I like it. (student)

I think the teachers here work hard to make the way they teach fit the way I learn. (student)

In many schools, student discipline is a thorny matter but one that speaks volumes about the ways in which relationships, respect, and trust is fostered within a community. While the school leaders and teachers did not speak about student discipline, the students made mention of it enough times that it is worth noting in this report. Many of the students commented on the ways that the administration and teachers involved them in matters of the ways in which they conducted themselves, in their quads, in the school and in their community. Students stated that matters of discipline are opportunities to learn, learning to make strong choices when it came to learning the ways in which they conduct themselves. They talked about the need to learn to regulate their conduct and to represent themselves well within the school and within the community.

With the discipline we have, we don't actually have a large amount detentions or discipline problems here. If we see another student doing something that they shouldn't do, we just tell them. It is important to us at this school, because we don't just represent ourselves, how we act says something about our school and our community. We are all responsible. (student)

The discipline here is kind of strict, sort of, but it is also sort of different. The principal and the teachers trust you. But you have to keep their trust. They have expectations of how we behave. They want this school to be a community. And it is. It works. It is also because we are part of the community and part of the college. So we have to be like, really mature. We all know that you're not just only giving yourself a name, your giving the school and your community a name too. (student)

Career Planning

A focus on post-secondary exploration encourages OHS students to start their career planning early and carry it through their high school years.

- Career visioning begins in grade 9 with a dedicated career practitioner using a number of projects and resources for post-secondary planning.
- All grade 9 students will enrol in two required options, Digital World and Excite. Digital World focuses on digital citizenship, essential technological skills and building a personal "eFolio" (digital portfolio) which will be revisited throughout their high school years. All grade 9 students participate in Take Our Kids to Work Day annually.
- OHS hosts an annual Post-Secondary Review Evening (with representatives from 30+ institutions in western Canada) for all CESD parents, students and community members.
- In addition, OHS hosts application drives with various post-secondary institutions in Alberta.

- An annual Career and Job Fair is held at OHS in conjunction with Alberta Works and Service Canada with over 80 employment and career fields represented.
- Every grade 12 student completes an in depth interview with the school counsellor to assist them with their post-secondary planning. A grade 12 application for graduation is completed by all students in consultation with the school counsellor.
- Structured Career Development Activities at Olds High School:
 - Grade 9 – Excite 9 and Digital World classes
 - Grade 10 – Interviews with the OHS Career Practitioner and several group career counselling sessions
 - Grade 11 – CALM 20 and updating individual eFolios
 - Grade 12 – Graduation application and graduate/parent interviews with guidance counsellor, including a presentation of the graduate’s eFolio
- Job shadowing and occupational research interviews are arranged by guidance counsellor on a request basis in grades ten through twelve.
- Students can participate in numerous career planning activities throughout the school year such as CMHF Health Discovery Day and Encounters with Canada. These activities and many others can be explored on the school website. Students are encouraged to participate in Off-Campus Education (OCE) to pursue career interests. OCE includes Work Experience, RAP and Careers Next Generation Health Careers Internship.
- More than 100 local businesses are involved with RAP, the Knowledge and Employability Program, and the mainstream work experience opportunities at Olds High School.
- Career preparation education which includes the Registered Apprenticeship Program, Green Certificates, and other work related preparation opportunities.
- A coordinator promoting the transition of students from high school to the opportunities of the Olds College. A college consortium allows students to complete the first year of their college program and their high school education simultaneously

Dual Credit Programs

Dual credit programs allow high school students to earn both high school and college credits for the same course. Generally, this means a college credit course taught by a college instructor with the involvement of a secondary school teacher and successfully completed by a high school student enrolled in a high school. The credits earned count as credit toward completion of a student’s high school diploma and post-secondary credits that are recorded on their post-secondary transcript. Students receive a transcript from each institution upon the completion of the course or term.

Dual credit provides high school students with a relevant, real-world transition strategy. There are many different approaches to dual credit, from seats in existing courses to online courses to full cohorts of high school students. Each of these approaches meets different needs for our learners.

By working together with our post secondary institutions using a learner-centered approach, administrators and teachers believe students will be provided with a seamless transition to the world beyond high school. Dual credit courses provide:

- Personalized Learning with Flexible Timing and Pacing Through a Range of Learning Environments
- Student-Centered Education
- Responsibility for High Standards and Performance
- Curriculum
- Parental and Community Engagement
- Collaboration and Shared Governance

Further, staff at Olds High School sees dual credit as an integral part of the Alberta Education's High School Completion Strategic Framework. Specifically, they have seen evidence that students are more engaged, are making positive connections with adults outside of the regular high school setting, and that they see dual credit as assisting with their transitions to post-secondary and/or the world of work.

Impact and Effectiveness

While still a fairly young school, utilizing the current location and learning environment, there are a number of indicators to demonstrate that the school is achieving the outcomes not only set for it, but also set for the Community Learning Campus:

- increased high school completion rates,
- increased provincial standardized test scores,
- school satisfaction surveys
- strong community support

The Olds High School website is located at <http://www.oldshigh.ca/>. The provincial achievement and diploma test results for the school are located on the Alberta Ministry of Education website. In addition, the Ministry of Education provides the school jurisdiction and the school with an annual accountability report, called the Accountability Pillar.

While the test results provide the school with a measure of how well the students have performed on a standardized examination, the Accountability Pillar that provides school districts and school authorities with a wide range of data focuses on more than student achievement.

In addition, the student is participating in a national student engagement study called *Tell Them From Me?* (<http://www.thelearningbar.com/>). Teachers and administrators are particularly interested in increasing student intellectual engagement.

In a province with an average high school completion rate of 73%, Olds High School had a 99% completion rate in 2009-2010. In speaking with the students, they were clear, that the strong relationships they established with their teachers and the ways in which the learning was designed to meet their particular needs and interests at the right level of challenge made school an exciting place to be. In redesigning the structures and pedagogies of high school, Olds High School is an innovative example of schooling in the twenty-first century.

All students in Alberta write provincial standardized achievement examinations in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12. On average, the students in the school score above the provincial average in both Grades 9 and 12 with higher than average participation rates.

School Satisfaction Survey Results: Life After High School

Statement	Student Satisfaction
	2010-2011
Students know how to access information regarding post-secondary education.	89%
There are sufficient resources available at school to help students make career decisions.	87%
Students are learning the skills they will need when they leave school.	82%

School Satisfaction Survey Results: Safe and Caring School

Statement	Student Satisfaction	Parent Satisfaction
	2010-2011	2010-2011
Students/Parents feel welcome at the school	93%	85%
Students feel safe at school.	85%	80%
Students are encouraged to do their best at school.	87%	91%
The school promotes physical activity, health, and wellness.	92%	92%
Students are recognized when they do well.	68%	89%
The school offers many activities outside of the classroom.	89%	98%
Students care about each other in the school.	87%	84%

School Satisfaction Survey Results: Communication

Statement	Parent Satisfaction
	2010-2011 Results
The school communicates effectively with parents.	90%
The school involves parents in school activities.	86%
The school has a process for improving the quality of education.	86%
The School Council plays a meaningful role in the school.	86%

The school continues to be fully supported by the community. One of the community members, a parent of a student in the school stated:

“It is not just a high school disconnected from the community. With the CLC now and the high school a number of things have come into our town, such as a Fine Arts and Multimedia Centre, Fitness Centre and a community gym. Our kids are integrated in the community while they are in school, everyday. You know, it is a high school very different from the one I went to. But I trust the principal and the staff. My son really likes going to school.” (parent)

Conclusion and Transferability

This innovative approach to reconceiving high school, post-secondary and community learning designed to address the specific rural needs of the Olds community and a vision for schooling and learning for their adolescent community members serves as an innovative learning environment in Alberta and Canada.

Within Alberta, the structural patterns, characteristics of the learning environment, and the nature and quality of learning occurring Olds High School has the opportunity to inform the redesign of secondary schools. As a public 21st century secondary high school within Alberta’s High School Flexibility Enhancement Project, the school’s strong results and community support provide evidence that Olds High School has many features that are transferrable to other high schools, not only in Alberta.

References

Willms, D., Friesen, S. & Milton, P. (2009). *What did you do in school today? Transforming classrooms through social, academic, and intellectual engagement* (First National Report). Toronto: Canadian Education Association.