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## Leading to improve reading comprehension for students in Koinonia School Division

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WESTERN UNIVERSITY

Leading to improve reading comprehension for students in Koinonia School Division

by

Leanne M. Peters

AN ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF  
GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

LONDON, ONTARIO

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### Abstract

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) will examine the system and school leadership, required to support all students in improving their reading comprehension skills. This examination is necessary because students from historically marginalized populations continue to lag behind their peers in reading comprehension which directly impacts their success in school and life. Using Divisional reading comprehension data, Provincial Literacy data, Divisional goals and Provincial aspirational targets will provide baseline evidence as well as targets to reach in implementing this plan. Divisional leadership and school leadership skills are considered and connected to teacher efficacy and deliberate pedagogical choices which lead to students' improved achievement. From the perspective of transformational leadership and using a social justice lens, systems, school and teacher leadership can align to support organizational improvement related to students' reading comprehension skills. As a system, Kotter's 8-Step Change Model is used to manage change in Koinonia School Division (KSD) – as pseudonym. Using Breakspear's (2018) Learning Sprints approach in the classroom will focus school teams on the gap specific to students' reading comprehension levels and on the next best teaching strategies for the teacher to take so students' growth and achievement can increase. This OIP will be of interest to those examining leadership for change, improvement of student achievement in a rural context.

*Keywords:* transformational leadership, learning sprints, reading comprehension, organizational improvement, rural school division

### **Executive Summary**

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) focuses on two important lines of inquiry – to improve reading comprehension skills for students in Koinonia School Division (KSD) and to support school-based principals and vice principals as they enact a change process within their school contexts. The problem of practice (PoP) is of significant concern especially when looking through a lens of social justice. Many students in KSD are not reading at grade level. This is having a detrimental affect on their education and impacts their overall capacity to graduate from high school and extends then to students’ lives beyond high school. If all students are able to read and comprehend complex texts at high levels then one can hypothesize, they will have greater success both at school and in pursuing their passions beyond school.

Koinonia School Division (KSD) lying north of a major centre, spans 7000 km<sup>2</sup> and encompasses ten schools and two Hutterite Colony schools. There are large numbers of Indigenous students who attend school in the School Division and the area is considered to be a low socio-economic region in the Province. Divisional student data shows high rates of transiency, mobility and in some areas, large numbers of students in the care of child welfare agencies.

The leadership approach being used to examine this problem of practice is transformational leadership. Bass (1995) identifies four key factors of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. These four factors are integral to School Division leadership and propelling the organization forward. Intertwined with transformational leadership is Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) five exemplary practices: “Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge

the Process, Enable Others to Act, Encourage the Heart” (p. 15). Together these ideas create a vision of leadership that leads the people in the organization to a place of self-efficacy where they can effect the kind of change needed to ensure each student is successful. It is imperative that people within the organization have the skill and the desire to implement changes that are contextually relevant and research-informed. To do so, principals and vice principals require the skills to recognize quality literacy instruction and support teachers in making changes to their classroom practice to ensure students’ success.

The change management approach for this OIP utilizes Kotter’s 8-step approach to change (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2016; Kotter, 1995). Despite the linearity of this approach, the steps are appropriate to move the organization forward toward its goal of having all students able to read grade level text. The first step is to create a sense of urgency and the need for change. Teachers recognize the challenges faced by students who are poor readers and want to be able to support students in their acquisition of skills. Using the principals and vice principals as a guiding coalition and co-constructing a vision that has students reading at grade level by the end of grade three are the next steps in the change process. Engaging in Breakspear’s (2019) Learning Sprints process at the classroom level is a process for teachers to engage in action research in their classrooms and plan, sprint, review as they work on small, manageable learning outcomes for a targeted group of students. The focus is on developing teacher expertise in curricular outcomes that are hard to teach but necessary to learn. The next steps of the change process include taking the time to celebrate successes and continuing to engage in strategies which both ensure ongoing success and embed the change strategies into the culture of the organization.

Using Nadler and Tushman's (1989) Congruence Model provides a way to analyse the organization from the inputs of: environment, resources, history and strategy, through the transformation process, and leading to the output of successful students and highly skilled teachers, principals and vice principals. This analysis helps to shape how the organization can function as coherent system moving forward.

Three strategies were considered as part of this OIP. Maintaining the status quo was briefly considered but as having high level literacy skills is a critical social justice issue, continuing in the same vein is not an option. Reading Recovery, a tier 3 intervention program, was another considered strategy. There is some value in engaging in Reading Recovery but it has a targeted audience of grade one students and therefore does not allow for a broader participation in the change process. Engaging in the process of Learning Sprints, using classroom-based data, and focusing on research-informed pedagogies is the preferred strategy to promote change within the School Division.

Engaging and supporting teachers to refine their classroom pedagogy will more likely ensure that each child receives the support they need to become successful learners in Koinonia School Division.

### Acknowledgements

I am a part of all that I have met;  
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades  
For ever and forever when I move.”- Alfred Lord Tennyson (*Ulysses*)

Throughout these last three years of studying, I have gained much knowledge and wisdom from a variety of people who have supported me along the journey. A heartfelt thank you to all the professors at Western University who have guided me along this road and pushed my thinking in new directions. I have also been honoured to have many mentors along the path of my career who have helped to shape me into the educator and leader I am today.

The Superintendent of Koinonia School Division is a brilliant and visionary educational leader, who provided mentorship at the start of my teaching career, when I was just beginning to think about school improvement, then took a chance and hired me as her Assistant Superintendent. She has been a guide throughout this journey and I am privileged to have her as a colleague and friend.

Many friends in my church family stopped over coffee and asked about my progress and offered words of advice and encouragement. My family also took time to occasionally check in and ask how the writing was coming and if I was spending yet another Saturday reading. I look forward to having more time to spend with them.

To my “cohort besties” I am delighted we found each other in course one, and that the bond has grown as we have journeyed together along this road. I am in awe of your abilities and gifts as educators and I know that I have been made better because of your influence.

Finally, to Dr. Beate Planche, thank you for your unending encouragement and support through this last year. Your ongoing, descriptive feedback has made me a better writer.

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### **Acronyms**

EDI – Early Development Index

F - Female

FTE – Full Time Equivalent

KSD – Koinonia School Division (a pseudonym)

M - Male

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

OIP – Organizational Improvement Plan

PCAP – Pan Canadian Assessment Program

PAC – Parent Advisory Council

PDSA – Plan Do Study Act

PESTE – Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental

PoP – Problem of Practice

SOAR – Scholastic Online Assessment of Reading

SSHRC–CURA – Social Sciences Humanities Research Council – Community-University

Research Alliances

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem**

This Organizational Improvement Plan explores the journey of a small, rural school division as teachers and leaders focus their energy to ensure that all children have the literacy skills necessary for success later in life. One purpose of schools is to serve society at large – to create a suitably educated population that can enter the workforce and pay taxes to support the country’s infrastructure. A secondary purpose of education is to foster a love of learning ensuring that children have the requisite skills enabling them to have the life that they want for themselves and to flourish. Ultimately, we want children learn and grow up to be skilled, democratic citizens with the character to be good neighbours and this requires that children can read and comprehend text at high levels. As organizations, schools benefit when the teachers have the skills and capacity to teach students to read and comprehend a variety of texts. While teachers require skills to be able to teach reading, school principals also require skills to be literacy leaders within their schools to ensure that students are achieving grade level reading outcomes. Divisional leadership, superintendents and assistant superintendents, lead their organizations to achieving this goals.

### **Organizational Context**

Koinonia School Division (KSD) (a pseudonym) is a small, rural school division located in the Canadian Prairies. Spanning roughly 7000 km<sup>2</sup>, there are approximately 1000 students in ten schools. Enrollment has declined over the last five years from 1195 students in 2013-2014 to 1072 students in 2017-2018 (Koinonia School Division, 2017a). The school configurations are as diverse as the communities they serve with the most common being grades K-4, K-8 and 5-12. Given the small student population, most K-8 classrooms are multi-age and teachers typically do not have same grade level teaching colleagues within their own schools. All schools have a

principal, and some have vice principals. The vice principals are in place to develop the Division's leadership capacity from within and not because there is an inherent need to have them due to the small size of the schools. The largest school would be a grade 5-12 school with approximately 200 students and the smallest, apart from the Hutterite Colony Schools, would be a K-12 school with 46 students. At the time of this Organizational Improvement Plan's (OIP) publication, I will have left this organization to join another school board. This OIP, written in the present tense, reflects my original status and responsibilities with the organization.

Currently, 60% of the teaching population has ten or less years of experience and their average age is 45 years old. Within the 86 full time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff, there has historically been a 10% turnover each year with one or two retirements and one or two teachers who move on to other, larger centres. Of the principals and vice principals, the average years of experience is four years with formal leadership experience ranging from zero to 11 years of principal experience. The Division's leadership team is comprised of principals and vice principals, a Literacy Lead Teacher, a Numeracy Lead Teacher, a Student Services Administrator and senior management (Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Operations and Infrastructure and Secretary-Treasurer). This team has also remained very stable with approximately one change every year occurring among the principals, primarily due to retirement. A team of teachers and school principals in the early stages of their respective career journeys provides both opportunities and challenges as personnel develop skills and evolve into their roles.

Koinonia School Division (KSD) serves a low socio-economic region with farming being a major source of income for families. Small family farms are on the decline as larger corporate

farming operations buy up land and consume what was once the family farm. Regional flooding in 2011 had a significant impact on the communities. One First Nations community was completely flooded and has only recently returned to their homes in the last year. Valuable farmland was flooded and families had a difficult time recovering from this economic impact. The region has no other significant industry that would attract workers and the few immigrant families who have arrived to the area work primarily in the field of health care.

While the School Division understands the provincial drive towards trades and apprenticeship, turning that into opportunities for students in the region remains limited because there are few businesses who can accommodate a high school apprentice. Following graduation, a small percentage of students move to a larger centre for post-secondary opportunities, university or college, but many enter the workforce and remain close to their home communities. Two of the communities in the School Division have an interesting dynamic because many of the students' fathers work away from home for a large power line company. These jobs do not necessarily require a high school diploma and it is sometimes a struggle for educators to support students to complete their requirements for high school graduation. Other students who remain in their communities may work in some of the local businesses or on the family farm. A few of these students will eventually go on to some form of post-secondary education or training.

**Indigenous students.** Students from several First Nations communities attend school in Koinonia School Division at various entry points. The federally funded, Indigenous education system has K-8 schools which First Nations students attend on their home reserve communities. Most of these students enter Koinonia School Division in grade 9 but some families choose to maintain residences off reserve to access the provincial system as catchment area students in



earlier grades. The Indigenous students who enter the provincial system in grade 9 are typically two to three grade levels behind in literacy. In the school with the highest number of self-declared Indigenous students in the 2016-2017 school year, 42 self-declared Indigenous students started grade 9. Of those, 29 (69%) were more than two years behind in reading comprehension (Koinonia School Division, 2017b). In the same school, a year later, there were 33 self-declared Indigenous students and 13 (39%) of them were reading two or more grade levels below grade 9 using the Scholastic Online Assessment of Reading (SOAR) (Scholastic Canada, 2009) as a measure (Koinonia School Division, 2018). This provides significant challenges for teachers to have supports readily available for students who are reading and comprehending text well below grade level and to then also create a harmonious, integrated school experience for all the students who are entering high school.

A new challenge arose for the 2018-2019 school year. One of the First Nations communities determined that it was in their students' best interests to educate their high school students on their First Nation reserve for the upcoming school year. This decision affected one school in particular, effectively cutting their school population by more than a third. In May 2018, the First Nation community leadership provided the School Division with documentation of their intent to withdraw all of their high school aged children which necessitated transferring almost half of the teaching staff out of the school. Through resignations and attrition, the School Division was able to offer every teacher a position within the Division. In total, 63 First Nation students will remain in their community for the remainder of their high school education. This has had a significant impact on the affected school community. The staff was reduced by half and teachers had to accept positions elsewhere in the School Division which is geographically large. The shortest commute is now twenty minutes and the longest upwards of an hour each way

to go to work. The staff have worked hard in the last decade since the First Nation students started attending the school to develop programs and strengthen their curricula by including more Indigenous perspectives to better engage the students and meet their learning needs. There was also a period of mourning where staff and students had to say good bye to each other. There were strong relationships between people so this was and continues to be a time of adjustment.

All the schools have experienced shifts over the last decade with the most significant being declining enrollment. Family farms have been sold, small businesses shuttered as people move to larger, urban centres. The school communities, including staff and the Board of Trustees have had to adjust to this decline in student population which requires creative thinking and leadership to now best serve this changing population. With fewer students, it becomes increasingly challenging to provide a broad level of programming to meet diverse students' needs. Teachers are required to teach multi-level classrooms not just at early and middle years but also in high schools.

**Vision and mission.** The School Division's Vision and Mission were revised three years ago with input from Senior Administration, staff, and the Board of Trustees who represent the larger community. Stakeholder involvement was important in the development of the statements to ensure that we heard voices from a broad cross section of people. The timeline for the development of this work was focused and deliberate believing that the important work was to make the statements come alive in each classroom for every learner. This work has aligned with the Division's leadership philosophy of focusing on the quality of teaching and learning in each classroom.

The updated mission includes the belief that every child can learn and that high expectations are held for each child. The mission statement inspires a culture where risk-taking is not only encouraged but expected, as well as the importance of ensuring places and spaces where children and staff are safe and welcomed. Strong relationships are seen as foundational (Koinonia School Division website, 2019). The Superintendent's Message points to a shift in the organization's culture from one of management and operations to one where the focus at the school level is firmly on learning for every child (Koinonia School Division website, 2019).

When I began as Assistant Superintendent in 2011, principals were focused on management tasks like school budgets and fire drills with little time spent on instructional leadership. The current Superintendent had begun the process of shifting the culture from management to instructional leadership ten years ago when she arrived in the School Division. In December 2012, the School Division, supported by a Ministry consultant and two professors from a local university, embarked on a transformation process to radically reimagine the School Division by September 2014. The process engaged principals, vice principals and teachers to focus on three lines of inquiry:

1. innovative pedagogy to support student learning,
2. technology integration as a pedagogical tool and
3. the learning environment.

Throughout the process, supported by the Board of Trustees, educators from across the vast geography met regularly to inquire into innovative teaching practices to support student achievement, consider ways to improve the overall school environment and examine how technology could be leveraged to engage students in learning. September 2014 marked the predetermined end of the transformation process but there have been residual effects that have

remained part of the School Division's culture including a perceived willingness that teachers will take pedagogical risks if they might result in improved learning outcomes for students.

**Provincial political climate.** A consistent Superintendent with a strong vision has ensured a high level of stability for the School Division over the past ten years. As the Assistant Superintendent on the leadership team, the Superintendent and I have complementary skillsets. We have been supported by a Board who, in an era of cutbacks, has maintained \$50,000 in the annual budget to support innovative teaching practices. The Board has also retained teaching positions even though staffing makes up more than 80% of the overall budget. There has been stability within the Board of Trustees with a change of only one seat in the 2014 election. In fall 2018, two of the seven seats on the Board changed in the Trustee election.

Politically, this is a time of transition with continued reductions in provincial funding. This year was no different with the School Division seeing a 2% reduction in funding from the Ministry. In the fall, as part of their budgeting process, the provincial government published an online survey which asked residents to support or oppose ideas such as the reduction of school divisions across the province, the reduction of senior administration in school divisions and the reduction of the number of bargaining units in the province, to control overall spending on education and ensure value for dollars spent on education (Province of Manitoba, 2018).

The Provincial government has recently undertaken a K-12 Education Review, commissioners have been selected, written submissions will be accepted until the end of May 2019 and a series of public hearings will be held beginning in April 2019. The final report is expected to be made public in March 2020 (Manitoba Government, 2019). Alongside the political announcement of the Education Review, the Ministry of Education released its

document on Literacy and Numeracy in the province; a follow up to the Provincial Literacy and Numeracy summit held in January 2018. This document includes aspirational targets whereby 80% of students will be meeting expectations on the grade three and grade eight Provincial assessments and the grade 12 Provincial Standards test by 2027-2028 (Manitoba Government, 2019, p. 16). Education in the province appears to be a government priority and educators are awaiting the findings of the Education Review and the subsequent implementation of any recommendations.

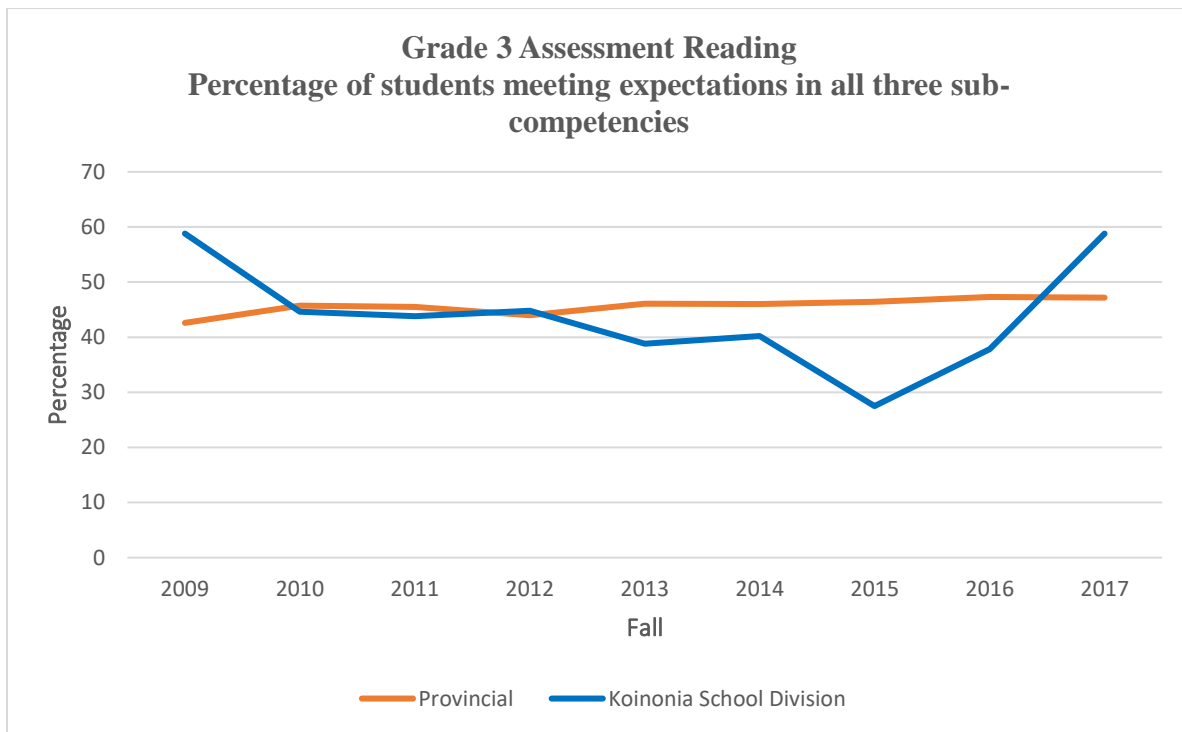
**Building capacity.** Divisional energy has continued to focus on building the capacity of principals to ensure that student learning and achievement remains central to the work at the school level. This has prompted a year of activity where principals have reflected on their learning and leadership journeys over the last five years. The reflections and the ensuing discussions formed the foundation for the Superintendent's message on the Division's website. There is a recognition of the cultural shift from one of isolation to one of strong teacher collaboration. Divisional schools have shifted from a culture of isolation to one of increased collaboration. Individual teachers may hold some of the answers but by working collaboratively, teachers and staff can more easily unlock the mysteries that impede students from making significant gains in their learning.

Koinonia School Division, though geographically large with few students, has been deliberate in focusing principals and vice principals on instructional leadership to support the academic achievement of each child. Teachers are supported to collaborate with each other as a way to improve student learning.

### **Leadership Problem of Practice**

The issue at the heart of this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) is the fact that not all students are able to read and comprehend text at high or even functional levels. This OIP asks how strengthening the skills of principals and vice principals can support improved reading comprehension outcomes for students. A sub-question within this problem of practice identifies a lack of grade level reading comprehension skills for students, specifically self-declared Indigenous students and a student population that is 40% self-identified Indigenous students (Koinonia School Division, 2018). This is a Divisional average and includes the two Hutterite Colony schools. The two high schools with First Nations that feed into them have a greater self-declared Indigenous population of 65% (Koinonia School Division, 2018). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) identifies in Article 17 a need to protect Indigenous children from interference with their education. The Article further identifies the importance of "...taking into account their special vulnerability and the importance of education for their empowerment" (p. 8). In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (2015), education is specifically identified as an action area. Recommendation 10 (ii) states a need to focus on "Improving education attainment levels and success rates" (p. 2). Having a transformative worldview is crucial to ensuring that a historically marginalized group of people can access education, specifically the ability to read and fluently comprehend text at high levels. Shields (2010) posits that the end goal of transformative leadership is one of liberty, justice and emancipation. This is required for our Indigenous students to make the significant educational gains that many of them require to ensure they are successful in achieving high school graduation and in their endeavours thereafter.

Early Development Index (EDI) data, collected every two years, show that students are increasingly entering grade one not ready in one or more domains (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2016-2017). The provincial grade three assessment in literacy consistently shows that students are not meeting expectations in literacy in this province. The assessment, given in the fall of grade three, measures end of grade two learning outcomes. As shown in Figure 1, the provincial data of students who are meeting expectations in all areas of reading comprehension continues to fall below 50% and the school division data is trending towards a slight improvement as compared to the provincial data.



*Figure 1.* Grade 3 Assessment reading: Students meeting all three sub-competencies

Grade 9 credit acquisition in literacy remains low and divisional graduation rates, as calculated by the province are also well below the provincial average. When that data is disaggregated, it

shows that self-identified Indigenous students are not performing on par with non-self-identified Indigenous students (Koinonia School Division, 2017, 2018).

Students who graduate from high school as literate members of society have a better quality of life, experience fewer mental health concerns and have greater opportunities and earning potential. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2016) states that:

...literacy is associated with many positive life outcomes: individuals with better literacy proficiency are less likely to be unemployed, earn higher incomes when they are employed, are more likely to report being in good health, to volunteer, trust others and feel that people like them can have a say in what the government does. (p. 1)

The Manitoba government document (2019a) identifies that, “literacy and numeracy skills are strongly correlated with positive health, social and labour market outcomes” (p. 2). The provincial Ministry of Education has placed an increasing emphasis on improving students’ literacy rates. The current government has conducted a large-scale consultation where roughly 1000 stakeholders came together to provide input into the requirements of a provincial literacy and numeracy strategy. The most recent Pan-Canadian Assessment (PCAP) data shows that the province is in the bottom third of the country in reading (O’Grady, Fung, Servage, & Khan, 2016).

The School Division engages in a strategic planning process and the Board of Trustees, as elected members of their communities, represent the public through this process. Parent and community input are sought through meetings with Parent Advisory Councils (PACs). Having children reading at or above grade level continues to be important to stakeholders so students



who graduate from high school have more than a functional literacy level to have access to any opportunities in life which they wish to pursue. The Board of Trustees has not specifically made the statement that all children must be reading by the end of grade one but place an emphasis on having all children reading at grade level by the end of grade three. This takes into consideration some of the socio-economic factors such as mobility and transiency that disrupt children's learning.

As the Assistant Superintendent, I work with the principals and vice principals to support their skill development as instructional leaders specifically in the area of literacy. I also track and analyse Divisional data about student growth and achievement at the school and Divisional levels.

### **Leadership Position and Lens Statement**

In my leadership role, I embrace a transformational leadership style in supporting and encouraging innovative practices and dealing with individual situations. Northouse (2016) suggests that leaders create the vision which is then embraced by the followers. However, it is up to the leaders to support the followers in making the changes needed to reach the vision. Bass (1995) provides the following definition:

Transformational leaders were defined as those who: (1) motivated you to do more than you originally expected to do, (2) raised your level of awareness about important matters, (3) increased your level of needs from need for security or recognition to need for achievement or self-actualization, and/ or (4) led you to transcend your own self-interests for the good of the team or the organization. (p. 469)

The reciprocal nature of transformational leadership aligns with the culture of Koinonia School Division (KSD) where ample time is spent developing a broad level of understanding among the principals and vice principals and engaging in small and large group conversations to ensure that all voices can be heard and honoured within that group. Yukl (1999) identifies transformational leadership as being an approach that has identified characteristics that can be taught to and learned by a leader as well. Yukl (1999) also offers that transformational leadership is entirely appropriate when an organization is going through a change process making this leadership style relevant to this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP). Within Koinonia School Division (KSD), as part of the leadership team, I spend time with each principal and vice principal, in their school, to support them in enacting the vision for change set out by the Division. Each school leader is given just in time support that is custom fit to the school context so that change may be carried out at the school level. Some schools have sole charge principals and I have become their sounding board as they work through their decision-making processes.

As the Assistant Superintendent, I have developed positive working relationships with the principals and vice principals and my work is to help them to grow and develop as leaders. This is done by exhibiting some of the things identified by Aguilar (2016) and exhibiting genuine interest and care in their schools and in their lives. As well, this is cultivated through an authentic curiosity in the teaching and learning process that occurs in each school. As Leslie (2014) articulates, "...a society that believes in progress, innovation and creativity will cultivate it, recognizing that the enquiring minds of its people constitute its most valuable asset" (p. 8).

There is an element of distributed leadership here because I do not hold the capacity, the position or the interest to lead each of the schools individually. The principals must be

empowered to make day to day decisions about their schools and their learning agendas based on students' and teachers' needs. Prior to entering school and system administration, I was a high school English teacher and I do not hold all the pedagogical answers for early years' literacy practices. I rely on the considerable skills of some of the early years' principals when we consider how to best approach reading comprehension with younger students. As pointed out by Bush and Glover (2014), one of the limitations of transformational leadership is that "...the language of transformation may be used to secure the implementation of centrally determined policies, not the identification of school-level vision and goals" (p. 566). Thus, it will take the collective work of the leadership team to implement a change process that will improve all students' reading comprehension.

Koinonia School Division (KSD), as outlined on its organizational chart, functions as a hierarchy. The Superintendent/CEO is the sole employee of the Board. There are a number of competing ideologies that impact this problem of practice. As a leadership team, the Superintendent/CEO and I would in one sense embrace a liberal approach to leadership and the principals in KSD would have opportunity to lead fearlessly in their schools with significant autonomy. One example of the principals' autonomy is having control over how they spend some of their budgets. Schools receive some of the money that is allocated categorically by the province and they can spend it as they deem appropriate for the work that they wish to do in their schools. One school consistently uses that money to "buy" additional educational assistant time while another school uses that money for additional teaching materials and school resources.

The Board of Trustees would view the world through a conservative lens. As elected officials of the community, they model fiscal restraint and desire robust evidence to ensure that

students are making progress. However, despite their need for quantitative data and a desire to have common, externally driven student assessments, trustees have been continually supportive of setting money aside in the budget to support innovative teaching and learning practices.

Due to the vast geography of the School Division, no two communities are the same and top down, imposed models for the schools would be detrimental to their flourishing as healthy institutions. For example, one K-4 school, with 90 students, groups all the students and all the teachers for a 100-minute literacy block according to students' and teachers' abilities. The teachers work with the students they are best able to teach rather than the students in their homerooms. The children move freely between classrooms as they gain skills in reading comprehension based on teachers' assessments and conversations with the other teachers. This model works in this school because of principal leadership, staff cohesion and communication with the community which has led to a common understanding of the dynamic nature of learning. While there is no specific Board policy regarding the implementation of a balanced literacy program, there was a shared decision-making process at the principals' leadership table and they had voice in the creation of the *School Division's Balanced Literacy Framework K-8*. School visits made by the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent focused on the literacy block and the specific progress that the priority learners were making in reading comprehension.

The Senior Leadership team will be encouraged to embrace a critical lens to see this problem of practice. It is imperative that examining the system for inequities and ensuring the same high-quality teaching happens in each school regardless of demographics. Rather than using a formula funding model to resource schools, resources are allocated based on need, which

is determined by school-based data. This data includes student stability, mobility, attendance, behaviour, number of students with special needs, literacy and numeracy levels, credit acquisition and the number of students in foster care. These criteria were co-constructed by the principals and vice principals eight years ago and marked a shift in thinking from “my school” to “all of our schools.”

There is a neo-liberal aspect to leadership in this problem of practice because students are being prepared to enter the workforce after graduation and it is crucial that students have the skills to be successful. Some students are engaged with high school apprenticeship and work experience opportunities so that they may see what careers are available to them following high school. Koinonia School Division (KSD) supports career fairs and career days so that students can make informed choices about their futures. Since the province introduced legislation to keep students in school until age 18 or until they earn a high school diploma, alternative programming has increased. One example is a grassroots program that focuses on educational growth opportunities for students who are disengaged from school. Funded in part by a federal employability skills grant, this program offers students who have dropped out of school an opportunity to learn life skills such as cooking, getting regular sleep and packing a lunch while living together for several weeks in a camp. Students learn basic literacy skills in a small group and they participate in several weeks of work experience at a job in which they are interested. At the end of 11 weeks of programming, students earn three credits and are supported to re-engage with school to complete their high school education. This has created some success for a few of the Indigenous learners who had either already dropped out of school or were on the verge of leaving school. These learners built some connections between school and creating a life with

choices and opportunities after school. Some employers expressed interest in hiring the students who had participated in the program once they completed high school.

Embracing change, articulating a vision and walking the messy path of change as a leader is part of my philosophy of change. The challenge is to take this philosophy and adapt it for a functionalist system that, while it wants to change, does not move as radically or as quickly as possible. Further, I have no desire to completely eradicate the functionalist from the system as it allows for the maintenance of positional authority. I embrace a transformational leadership style, described by Northouse (2016) that binds together the follower and the leader to achieve great things. Blackmore (2013) identifies the lack of “theoretical or political position” of the various leadership approaches (p. 140). She goes on to write, “Certainly, some contemporary leadership discourses about transformational and distributed leadership, for example, offer socially just possibilities” (Blackmore, 2013, p. 140). I believe that as a system leader, I have both the capacity and the moral imperative to make the system better for students. As a system leader, I profess to build social and professional capital in principals, teachers and support staff to improve an entire school system. When Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe how to enact change, they envision a system where teachers are drawn in to work collaboratively to solve “complex problems” (p. 151) and rather than run from barriers, teachers and principals see them as opportunities. To do so, I would invite input from all stakeholders and with the goal of building social capital, create an organizational culture where risk-taking is the norm. Although the system is hierarchical, through distributed leadership, schools have some autonomy to enact change within their contexts. Imposing one model for all schools will not bring about lasting, systemic change. As Andrews, Cameron and Harris (2008) point out, the “hero leader” (p. 301)

no longer features prominently in organizations; a variety of positions play a role in the change process.

### **Framing the Problem of Practice**

Change and system improvement are critical in this problem of practice. Students, particularly Indigenous students, cannot continue to experience low graduation rates. When students have grade level literacy rates, the overall quality of education improves for all students. The evidence of improvement is also visible in high expectations for all students. No longer are students appeased with less complex material to comprehend which limits access to new ideas and overall capacity to engage in critical thinking and building connections with the world outside of school.

**Leadership - principals and vice principals.** First, this problem of practice is a challenge for leadership. Principals and vice principals, as the instructional leaders in their school, require the necessary skills to enable them to lead teachers in this change practice. This will frame my work with school leadership teams and with the support of the Literacy Support Teacher will ensure that there is a common understanding of quality literacy instruction. Simply observing a small group of students and a teacher around a horseshoe table does not alone stand as a quality instructional practice.

At the school level, principals will engage their teachers in a collaborative inquiry or action research cycle to address the specific learning needs of teachers and students in a given school context. In an Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) monograph, the authors outline a collaborative inquiry strategy that focuses on deepening the principals' theory of action which subsequently supports teacher learning. The stages of inquiry are straightforward, observe, plan

and act with reflection built into each level. Breakspear's (2018) Learning Sprints follow a similar path of plan, sprint and review. Breakspear's (2018) Learning Sprints are predicated on teachers focusing on their next learning outcomes, with a targeted group of students and making small changes to teaching practice to support teacher learning which will subsequently improve student learning.

Breakspear's (2018) learning sprints have evolved from the technology sector where missed deadlines and project cost overruns were costing companies millions of dollars. Relying on elaborate planning processes meant that technology was dated before it could get to development. Recognizing the need for agility, they adapted their processes to move more quickly from the planning stages to the action and reflection components. Sutherland (2014) describes the change process in *Scrum* which details short, iterative change cycles. A key component of the process is the weekly scrum meeting with team leaders to check for progress, identify roadblocks and determine the path forward.

These change cycles also conform to Lewin's Action research cycles. According to Burnes (2004), "The theoretical foundations of Action Research lie in Gestalt psychology, which stresses that change can only successfully be achieved by helping individuals to reflect on and gain new insights into the totality of their situation." (p. 984) So as a conceptual way to manage change, action research then requires that the researchers, as individuals, need to be able to observe and understand the changes that are taking place because of their actions. Burnes (2004) goes on to say that for action research to be effective it must be collaborative and feel participatory. This feeds into Agile Learning Sprints where teachers work in small teams and



target a group of learners in a learning outcome. Teams collaborate to increase their understanding of the learners and the impact of the teachers' actions on those learners.

Another strength of this problem of practice is the examination of the leadership required to make the systemic improvements to address the students' low levels of reading comprehension. This problem requires transformational leadership at the system level to engage in creative solutions to address a longstanding problem. It also requires school-based leadership that may be transformational but may also be distributed among the principal and the teachers to ensure that teachers acknowledge and understand the need to work at improving reading comprehension outcomes for students. Although transformational leadership is the main leadership theory to thread through this problem of practice, it is worth considering other leadership theories such as creative leadership. As Stoll and Temperley (2009) identified in their study of creative leadership teams, there is a need in school leadership to think beyond the status quo and to seek solutions that have not been tried yet. Often, educational practitioners run to tried and true solutions rather than using relevant data to think differently about a problem. Creative leadership is another way of approaching change by using "out of the box" thinking to improve learning outcomes for students. Mainemelis, Kark, and Epitropaki (2015) conjecture that creativity in leadership is no longer just an add-on. Without creativity leaders have little success in moving their organizations to the next level. While reading comprehension has been isolated in this problem of practice, improving reading will also help to improve students' writing as they are intricately linked together. Improving students' reading comprehension will serve students as they engage in math as well since much of the focus of problem-solving rests on the ability to be able to read and comprehend what is being asked and then having the understanding to determine which mathematical algorithms will be required to complete the task.

Teaching students to read is one of the foundational tasks of schooling. It is a building block of the education system and having students graduate from schools with well-developed literacy skills is the desired outcome. However, the provincial graduation rates for a four-year, on time graduation from June 2013 to June 2018 continue to range from 76.2% to 79.9%. The disaggregated data paints a different picture with Indigenous students' graduation rates ranging from 45.7% to 49.4% in the same five-year period (see Table 1). The overall, four-year graduation rates for Koinonia School Division in the same time period ranges from 49.6% - 67.4%. While this marks an improvement, much work remains to be done.

Table 1 On-Time 4-Year Graduation Rates

Provincial		Provincial (Indigenous Students)	Koinonia School Division
2009-2013	76.20%	46.90%	57.50%
2010-2014	77.20%	47.20%	49.60%
2011-2015	77.30%	45.70%	49.80%
2012-2016	78.10%	47.40%	58.30%
2013-2017	79.00%	49.40%	56.80%
2014-2018	79.90%	48.50%	67.40%

*Note.* Adapted from “High school graduation rates and achievement statistics,” 2018, Manitoba Education and Training.

If the desired result is to have all students achieve high school graduation, then the evidence is clear that the goal is currently unmet. Further, if low literacy rates are contributing to poor graduation rates then increasing students' reading comprehension levels would assist in improving graduation rates even if all other factors contributing to students' graduation rates remain the same.

**Coaching practices.** Other literature that is relevant to this problem of practice is the literature around coaching practices and the role of coaching in the schools. The importance of the role of instructional coach as part of the change process is increasingly evident in the literature (Aguilar, 2016; Fullan & Knight, 2011; Knight 2011, 2016). Coaches require specific training to gain a clear understanding of their role, purpose and how they might engage with classroom teachers. Little impact on teaching and learning can be made by deploying coaches to schools without a clear understanding as to their specific role and purpose in the school and in the teacher's classroom. With clarity, purpose and a vast pedagogical toolkit, coaches could have a profound impact on teacher learning and subsequently on students' learning outcomes.

**Teacher efficacy.** Research on teacher efficacy also factors into this problem of practice. Teachers have to believe that the work that they are doing in classrooms can make a difference for the children that they teach. Versland (2016) notes that mastery experiences, vicarious experiences and feedback all factor into students' and teachers' self-efficacy. It would be interesting to determine how great an impact a lack of mastery experiences has on students' achievement levels and furthermore how research on grit and resilience might play into students' future successes.

**PESTE analysis. Political** - The provincial political agenda creates a sense of urgency for this problem of practice. Given that the province engaged stakeholders in a large literacy and numeracy summit in January 2018, it is reasonable to assume that improving students' reading comprehension skills aligns with the provincial agenda. At meetings of School Superintendents, the Assistant Deputy Minister continues to mention

the province's desire to be the most improved province following the next Pan Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) assessment which will take place in spring 2019.

**Economic** – From an economic standpoint, addressing this problem of practice stands to have an impact on the economy. The more students who are highly literate, the better off they are in the future job market which translates to a society in which everyone is able to contribute fully. When people have well-paying jobs, they are able to buy homes, cars and purchase other goods and services which supports a healthy economy.

**Social** – The social standpoint is the most important for this problem of practice because it continues to be a matter of social justice that our Indigenous students are not succeeding at the same rates as their non-Indigenous counterparts. The cycle of failure needs to be replaced with a system where all children truly can learn and reach their full potential.

**Technological** – There is no technological challenge or requirement for this problem of practice. The schools have the requisite technology required to support learners in diverse contexts. The proposed solutions will not explicitly require a technology component for successful implementation.

**Environmental** – A scan of the environment encompasses the views of the parents and the communities that encompass Koinonia School Division. We would be wise to continue to invite parents to be part of this process and engage in them in ways to support ongoing learning at home.

**Challenges.** A challenge of this problem of practice is the lack of clarity around determining grade level reading outcomes at the classroom, school and provincial levels. There is no single tool that is common among educators to determine students' abilities in grade level reading comprehension. While Koinonia School Division has taken steps to have all grades 1-8 students assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (Fountas & Pinnell Literacy, 2019), there are apparent discrepancies in assessment practice among educators relating to students' results which are especially evident when students transition from one school to the next. Although educators have access to the previous years' data, sometimes there is an inexplicable drop in a students' abilities that does not align with previous assessments or report card data specifically in reading. The province does not have indicators at each grade level to support teachers in determining report card grades making report card data problematic.

A second challenge to this problem of practice is with competing ideologies at work within and around the organization. A neo-liberal Ministry of Education that is focused on improving the economic outcome of people in the province, a conservative Board of Trustees that prides itself on fiscal responsibility while meeting the needs of students stands in some opposition with a more liberal minded senior leadership team who prefer less government involvement and more autonomy to do the right kind of work to meet students' needs within the local context.

### **Guiding Questions Emerging from the Problem of Practice**

There are several questions of inquiry around leadership and the principals' abilities to determine whether or not there is effective reading instruction taking place in each classroom on a daily basis. As principals are supervising their teachers, are they seeing effective, high quality

instructional practices taking place in each classroom, every day? Do they recognize quality guided reading lessons or do they assume because the teacher is with a small group of students around a horseshoe table that it must be a quality lesson? Principals come to the role with a variety of backgrounds and experiences and not all have a strong understanding of early literacy. It becomes necessary to create a supportive culture where principals and vice principals are able to talk about their strengths as well as their limitations and to create opportunities for them to develop their skills and hone their abilities to recognize quality literacy instruction.

Other challenges that emerge from the problem of practice are ensuring that all parts of the system are aligned in supporting quality reading instruction. Further, each classroom needs resources to adequately teach children to read. These resources include classroom libraries with high quality children's literature and books that are organized, accessible and visually appealing to children. Books should be at children's eye level and made available to them to take home and practice reading. School libraries should have a variety of fiction and non-fiction books as well as poetry and magazines available to engage children on topics that relate to other curricular areas as well as topics that will spark students' attentions.

Currently there is an inequity in the way classrooms are resourced. Veteran teachers have spent years collecting books for classroom libraries, which vary in quality because they come from garage sales, second-hand stores or have been left by previous teachers. New teachers have not yet amassed a classroom library so children in those classrooms do not have the same access to books. This can be rectified by determining a minimum number of books for a classroom library and then resourcing schools to be able to purchase books to meet the requirement.

There are several additional lines of inquiry that emerge from this problem of practice. The first is a line of inquiry into quality reading instruction. Do teachers have the ability and capacity to effectively teach primary children to learn to read? Allington and Gabriel (2012) identify six elements of reading instruction which include: reading something that a student chooses, reading accurately, hearing an read aloud, reading something they can comprehend, writing something of their own choice and talking about writing with peers. These are echoed in the work of Miller (2009), Atwell (2015), Boushey and Moser (2006), and Ripp (2018) who talk about the need that children have to read something of their own choice and to read for sustained periods of time every day. Is early years reading instruction centred around the pillars of literacy – comprehension, fluency, phonics, phonemic awareness and vocabulary? Are children receiving personalized instruction to assist them in their growth and development as readers? All these questions relate to the skill and experience of the classroom teachers who are teaching children to read.

Contributing to the problem of practice where many students are unable to read and comprehend text at high levels is poverty and transiency. Children come from homes where school is a safe place and much time and energy is spent in schools ensuring that children feel cared for and secure. This comes at a cost of instructional time and sometimes, children are not encouraged to attain high levels of achievement because of their socio-economic status. Teachers spend their time caring for the children and teaching them basic skills but may not maintain high expectations for all students. Consequently, they modify the instruction so students are able to be successful with grade level outcomes. After multiple years of not independently meeting grade level expectations, the gap widens and becomes increasingly difficult to close and keep students engaged in meaningful, grade level work.

### **Vision for Organizational Change**

The vision for organizational change was originally co-constructed by the Superintendent and myself as the Assistant Superintendent. After reviewing report card data specific to reading comprehension and comparing it to the Provincial Assessment data at grades 3 and 8, it is clear that students are not achieving at high enough levels. Lower achievement rates are impacting graduation rates especially for more vulnerable students. In some instances, there is a gap between students' report card achievement and their Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (grades 1-8) (Fountas & Pinnell, 2019) or Scholastic Online Assessment of Reading (SOAR) (Scholastic Canada, 2009) (grades 5-12) Lexile score. While the report card data specific to reading comprehension showed that the majority of students were getting a 3 or a 4 on the four-point scale, this does not align with how students perform on a reading comprehension assessment or the numbers of students who are “meeting expectations” on grades 3 and 8 Provincial Assessments.

There are gaps when students transition from grade to grade but more significantly from school to school such as from grade four to grade five. Students who had been performing well beyond grade level on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment in the spring of grade four slid to below grade level in the fall of grade five. These students had presumably already made the shift from learning to read to reading to learn so “summer slide” should not have been a significant factor.

The principals and vice principals, upon reviewing their own disaggregated data, reinforced the need to work harder at supporting students to be successful. As senior administration, we recognized that teachers and principals were already working really hard but



we were not having the desired impact on student learning and student achievement. The Board of Trustees also reviewed broad, Divisional data and echoed the need to have improved reading comprehension as part of the Divisional Learning Vision and one of the Division's goals.

Aligning with Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis, the vision is articulated in two statements.

1. All students will be reading and writing at grade level at the end of grade 3.
2. All students will demonstrate a year of growth in reading and writing in a school year.

(Koinonia School Division, 2015)

These statements speak to both growth and progress and recognize that students may begin the school year not reading at grade level, but they need to make significant gains in order to match the progress of their peers. Also, students who are reading above grade level at the beginning of the school year must also experience growth through enrichment and not be allowed to stagnate simply because they are already capable of handling the grade level materials. Making these statements instilled both trepidation and excitement in principals, vice principals and teachers. There were some who were ready to accept and embrace that challenge. Others were fearful that their students were so far below grade level that there was no way that they would make enough gains in their reading comprehension to come close to reading at grade level. This begs an additional question, do the teachers and principals really believe the students are capable of reading at grade level?

Having a vision cannot come without a balance of pressure and support. Principals and vice principals needed to know that we were supporting them in developing the requisite skills to be able to support their teachers in this challenge. There are also priorities within this change process as the Indigenous students are further behind by the time they are in high school than

their grade level peers. Since two of the schools have students entering from the federally funded First Nations schools at grade nine, that is Koinonia School Division's first opportunity to support these students in their learning journey. Until the students reach high school, there is a disconnect between the two systems and the staffs do not work together on any professional learning or moderate student work together to develop a common understanding of what grade level work might look like across schools.

Fullan (2011) identifies several key drivers for whole system reform which are intrinsic motivation, instructional improvement, building capacity by working together and engaging in work collectively as an entire system. Through transformational leadership, principals, vice principals, the Board and teachers are inspired and motivated to engage in the real work of improving reading comprehension outcomes for all students. There is also excitement when teachers consider that they have an opportunity to create enriched learning opportunities for students who have already met grade level reading outcomes and are ready to reach for bigger goals and expand their learning journeys. Fullan (2011) expresses that the drivers of change need to focus on the collective and not just on the individual teacher or the individual principal. To have the greatest impact, the entire system has to be moving forward towards the same goal.

The Board, as elected representatives of communities and as key stakeholders in the School Division, have a vested interest in seeing children be successful. The parents and guardians of the children want the best for their children and continue to be optimistic that the teachers will have the skills to do the best that they can for their children. There may be opportunities through this change process for parents and community members to engage more actively with supporting children to improve their reading levels. This may look like pre-school

programs working closely with the schools to develop quality early literacy programming to engage the children prior to their entry into Kindergarten. It may involve community resources through some of the library programs and even the community recreation programs which could engage in some literacy activities. Regardless, the principals, vice principals, teachers, staff and the larger community recognize and understand the value to their communities of having children who are highly literate.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) clearly describe the importance of having a shared vision and clarifying values both personally and organizationally. The act of co-constructing a shared vision supports a broad level of engagement from principals and vice principals as well as the Board and community members. They contend, “Leaders ensure that everyone is aligned through the process of affirming shared values – uncovering, reinforcing, and holding one another accountable to what “we” value” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 58). For this OIP, principals and vice principals affirm the value that every child must be able to read and comprehend text at high levels and willingly work together to achieve that goal.

As one of the key change leaders in the School Division, my leadership focuses on several factors. I direct the work of the Divisional Literacy Lead Teacher and thus provide the necessary framework and supports to ensure that she is able to spend most of her time in schools and in classrooms. Through the budget, each teacher is allocated one full day with the Literacy Lead Teacher but most teachers access more support than that through their school-based budgets and use of roving substitute teachers. I lead through my work in the schools and the support that I provide principals specific to their literacy data and the next steps that need to happen in the schools to support teacher learning and student achievement. I meet with principals

and vice principals each month and review their school data, tour classrooms, debrief and plan for next steps specific to their identified priority learners. The other vital piece of my leadership is protecting the schools from things that will distract from the real work.

### **Organizational Change Readiness**

This organization's readiness for change began in 2012 when we embarked on a Divisional change process. The Superintendent invited teachers to attend an after-school meeting in December. At that meeting she informed the assembled group of teachers that although they were working hard, student achievement was not aligned to the hard work of teachers and continuing to do the same things was not yielding different results. Something had to change to improve student achievement and student engagement. That evening, 70% of teachers were in attendance. Most of them agreed and continued to participate in this change process. Koinonia School Division embarked on a journey called "Reimagine" which led teachers through a five-step design process over the course of two years. The process was supported by the School Board which allocated thirty thousand dollars that year and in subsequent years to support teachers in reimagining learning and teaching in their schools and classrooms. Teachers were asked to think of ways that they wanted to teach and where they believed there were roadblocks. If a roadblock was money, then these additional funds would support removing the roadblock and making the idea a reality. Teachers and principals delved into research, participated in learning tours in the province, in Canada and in the United States to look at exemplary practice and bring ideas back to their context. Additional support was provided by the Provincial Ministry of Education in the form of a Consultant who supported the process with expertise in the design process. Finally, funding was also provided by a local university who had received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council–Community-University Research Alliance

(SSHRC–CURA) grant to study projects that supported students to stay in school through innovative means.

The School Division, having already experienced success with a defined change process in “Reimagine”, is ready to continue the journey of change and continuous improvement. The high level of trust in the system between teachers and principals and between principals and the Assistant Superintendent makes for fertile ground in moving forward with further change. As well, the people within the system have a clear understanding that children are continuing to fall short of grade level expectations and are not experiencing success. Further, children who are well beyond grade level are limited from further opportunities because there is not a clear plan for what to do with those children and how to enrich their programming. By and large, the teachers are working hard and want the best for their students—they need tools to equip them to accomplish this goal.

Principals and vice principals will need to undertake tasks to determine their school’s readiness to embark on this change process. Considering their school improvement plans, they will need to think about which goals can be removed from the current plan. The focus of their plan should be narrow and deep in order to maximize their impact on student learning. Some goals that the schools have been working on may need to shift to a maintenance mode in order to allow more time to be spent on a reading comprehension goal.

In the spring, as schools begin to consider their staffing, putting the best teachers in front of the most vulnerable students will be a consideration. This will be part of the larger divisional conversation as we take a holistic examination of the current status of staff and consider where openings may exist and examine the needs of teachers who are qualified to fill these positions.

Napier, Amborski and Pesek (2017) stress the need for organizations to determine readiness prior to embarking on a change process rather than partway through. Reeves (2009) offers a helpful change readiness continuum rubric (p.160) that would help determine the readiness of the staff in a school Appendix A provides one tool that may be used with staff. The purpose of this rubric is to have the principal and vice principal complete the continuum, based on their perceptions of their teachers. The intent is not to have it completed by teachers as a self-assessment. While this may seem counterintuitive, the purpose is to extend the principal's understanding of staff readiness based on perceptual data. Working through the continuum systematically, staff member by staff member, causes the principal to stop and reflect on their relationship with the teachers and then to consider them in relation to their readiness. Doing this for each teacher and subsequently analysing the results will allow the principal to determine what steps they need to embark on the change process in the fall. The largest staff has twenty teachers and the smallest has three so this is not an onerous task.

Another tool that principals could use is adapted from Weiner (2009) as a simple chart for principals to determine the readiness of their staff (see Appendix B). Either the continuum from Reeves (2009) or the adapted chart from Weiner (2009) will be helpful in determining the readiness of a staff to begin a change journey. Without a critical mass of staff who are ready, a change process may indeed not be successful. The principal's analysis needs to include not just having a majority of staff who are ready but also consider the personalities of the staff. Although a majority might be ready, if a key influencer on staff is not ready that could sabotage the change initiative and would require additional efforts to engage that person. Offering a choice of tools is consistent with transformational leadership which encourages multiple approaches to reach an outcome. Whichever tool a principal wanted to use would work provided the outcome of

determining the staff's readiness was met at the end of the process. These tools would also be used by Senior Administration to determine the readiness of their team, the principals and vice principals.

Instructing principals to be literacy leaders will be another aspect of organizational readiness. At this juncture there are several who are highly skilled in early literacy and can be mobilized to support their colleagues as we engage in conversations about the elements of quality literacy instruction. Using those people and being deliberate about grouping principals and vice principals at leadership meetings will allow us to leverage their skills to teach the entire group. Given that some have already begin the change process in spite of the Division, these administrators can also offer perspectives on strategies that they have employed with success as well as those that have been less successful.

There are competing forces, internal and external, that factor into the change process. Prior to embarking on this particular process, schools were busily engaged in the work of learning and teaching. Principals, teachers and school communities had to understand that the goals that they had been working on up to this point were not being dismissed or disregarded but they were being moved, for the most part to maintenance goals rather than being the primary focus. Some schools already had school cultures that are conducive to change where the principals have high capacity and are able to engage with teachers and staff to make change. Others are at different places and all principals do not have the same skillsets to engage staff in getting better at literacy instruction.

One external factor that has arisen through this process is a Provincial English Language Arts Curriculum refresh that is slowly unfolding across the province. Although the communication from the province was to have implementation in the 2018-2019 school year, the

roll out plan includes personnel from the Ministry working with select school divisions (3-4 per year) on curriculum implementation. As a Division that is not partnering with the Ministry on their roll out plan, there is no real impetus for immediate change but it does create some anxiety for teachers who struggle when new curricula and implementation expectations are unveiled. Compounding this problem is the fact that within the refreshed curriculum there is no explicit place where children are to be taught to read. It exists as a function of a quality English Language Arts program but the support for teachers is generalized and vague. Although teaching reading is an expectation of early years' teachers, it becomes a Divisional expectation that within the literacy block at the early years, there will be time devoted to explicit reading instruction. This Division considers it a leadership imperative that a renewed focus on reading instruction take place and not just as a function of provincial expectations.



## **Chapter 2: Planning and Development**

This chapter will focus on integrating transformational leadership and Kotter's 8-Step Change Process as a way to engage all stakeholders in Koinonia School Division in the change process. The chapter will conclude by identifying three possible solutions to address the challenges of students' low levels of reading comprehension.

### **Leadership Approaches to Change**

Transformational leadership is the primary approach to drive change forward in Koinonia School Division. As part of the Superintendent Team, I will approach this Problem of Practice (PoP) by co-constructing a vision for student learning and achievement that will be clearly understood by all stakeholders. This is in essence the 'north star' towards which the division is moving and will become an embedded component of the School Division's strategic planning and direction. The vision will be achieved by encouraging and supporting risk-taking by principals, vice principals and teachers who will experiment with a variety of pedagogical strategies to achieve the goal at the school and classroom levels. A piece of my role as the Assistant Superintendent will be to remove barriers within and across school environments so teachers and principals can collaborate with a focus on improving achievement for students. Collaboratively, as a School Division, we can celebrate the victories that will be achieved when the staff, working together see the direct impact that they are having on student learning. Engaging in and leading this work will pull the system together with cohesiveness and optimism that improvement is possible.

Northouse (2016) identifies transformational leadership as a "process that changes and transforms people" (p. 161). It involves a relationship between both the leader and the follower

with an emphasis on intrinsic motivation and follower development which makes it somewhat different than other leadership approaches that have less of a focus on the well-being of the follower and focus solely on the leader. Northouse (2016) identifies emotions, values, ethics, standards and long-term goals as areas of transformational leadership (p. 161). These concepts underpin what is important to the transformational leader as they relate to their followers. Not only would transformational leaders seek to identify and understand the emotions, values and ethics in their followers but they would also seek to embody those characteristics themselves. This concept of transformational leadership is further explored by numerous researchers (Bass, 1999; Bass and Riggio, 2008; Duda, Scott and Scott, 2017; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008) and the common thread is the reciprocal nature of the relationship between leader and follower in addition to the charismatic nature of the leader. These characteristics support organizations to transform themselves and in the case of schools to lift learning outcomes for all students.

As the Assistant Superintendent in Koinonia School Division (KSD), my portfolio includes the areas of curriculum and instruction. It will also be my work to lead and inspire my followers, who are primarily the principals, vice principals and teachers. I will focus on developing their intrinsic motivation to see that every child in our system is able to read and comprehend text at the highest possible levels. This is, in fact, not only our pedagogical requirement but also a moral obligation to the children of our communities. Having what Breakspear (2016) calls an “agile mindset” supports the work of leading school improvement. “Agile leaders typically seek to get better all the time by following the maxim: start small, learn fast and fail well” (p. 7). In this way, I would also embrace aspects of creative leadership because it is critical to educate children for their future. The world is changing at a rapid-fire pace and it takes creativity and innovation to chart new paths.

One aspect of transformational leadership focuses on considering and understanding the emotions of followers. Currently, the principals and vice principals in Koinonia School Division (KSD) are working hard to support teachers and students however, their work is not consistently translating into improvements in student learning and achievement. This is not a case of a lack of hard work or will on the part of our staff. Their cars are in the parking lot early in the morning until late in the evening. It is not uncommon to see teachers' cars in the parking lots on the weekends as they prepare for, plan and assess student work to help students to be successful in meeting grade level outcomes. As I travel from school to school, it is my perception that most teachers want the best for their students. As this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) progresses, two items remain central to my work as a leader. The first is to honour and champion the work done by teachers and principals every day in our schools. The second is to apply the necessary pressure and related support by supporting the increase of teaching and learning tasks that will have an effect on improving student learning outcomes. I want to maximise teachers' impact particularly in the area of teaching reading comprehension.

A second area of transformational leadership focuses on the values of the organization and the values of the people who work within it. Kouzes and Posner (2012) identify having clear values and a shared vision as two important leadership practices. The divisional vision was articulated earlier in chapter 1.

Some teachers were wary of the divisional goal statements when they were first shared. They were concerned about the accountability that this placed on them to be responsible for students' achievement. They expressed concern about the feasibility of having all children be able to meet these goals. Some felt the pressure knowing that their classroom composition was

such that they had numerous learners who were not meeting grade level expectations. Still others were up for the challenge, understanding that there would be support for them along the way.

Another tenet of transformational leadership is establishing long-term goals. The Division's reading comprehension goals are lofty and not designed to be completed in one year as part of a checklist. I will need to continue to keep a pulse on the long-term goals as well as support the day to day work of principals and teachers as they work toward the goals.

Two additional practices of Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggest include: challenging the process and enabling others to act. There is a need in education and in school systems to challenge the status quo; we can no longer continue to lead and to teach in the same ways that we have been because doing so is not having the desired impact on students' achievement. However, as stated by Capper and Green (2013), "Because of their epistemological unconsciousness (described later) practitioners often fail to realize that what is touted as "new" or "innovative" in education, often emanates from status quo (i.e., structural functional) epistemologies" (p. 64). This lack of challenge to the status quo has implications for the strategies which will be discussed in later sections. It is expected that some of the strategies that will be applied to this problem of practice will not be new but they will be approached with deeper systemic awareness and pressure as well as greater fidelity than they may have been in the past. One of the leadership challenges is to find the balance between moving to a different strategy and giving one enough time to develop and become embedded before dismissing it as ineffective to assist with solving the problem.

Although my own leadership plays a significant role in this problem of practice and I have the positional authority to make changes within the organization and to make decisions to

support teaching and learning at high levels, none of this is being done in isolation. Given that Koinonia School Division is a small system, much of this work is co-constructed between the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent. We plan professional development and leadership development sessions together. We attend school visits jointly and work together alongside principals and teachers as a function of modelling joint leadership and creating a unified leadership team for the School Division.

Other leadership approaches may be effective in providing the necessary leadership to this problem of practice. Certainly distributed leadership where leadership is shared among the stakeholders could work as well as servant leadership with its focus on serving the principals and teachers to build their capacity as leaders and strengthen the overall system. However, it is the charismatic nature of transformational leadership as well as the strong, interconnected relationship between the leader and the followers that puts transformational leadership at the forefront of leadership approaches for this problem of practice. Given the stability of the senior leadership team as well as the relative inexperience of the school principals, there is a place for the deepening of relationships and understanding the learning needs of each principal. It is important to know in what way each principal needs to develop to bring more strength and cohesiveness to this organization and improve our ability to work towards a solution of the problem.

There is a specific skillset required of principals to draw teachers into a learning community. Principals will need to be adept at determining how best to support their teachers while not undermining their authority in the classroom or making them feel wholly inadequate. This will demand relational trust between principals and staff as well as opportunities to examine

classroom data. Using data as Lipton and Wellman (2012) call a “third point,” is one way to review data objectively and look from a stance of support rather than from a deficit position.

The other leadership lens that ought to be considered is social justice leadership. Theoharis (2007) describes social justice leadership as Principals who identify marginalized students and make advocacy for those historically marginalized groups central to their leadership vision and practice. For Koinonia School Division, approaching this problem through a social justice lens supports continued work towards equity for all students.

### **Framework for Leading the Change Process**

To address this problem of practice, it is necessary for change to happen in incremental stages and to avoid being reactive to the problem. While there is a sense of urgency as children continue to fall further behind not making the requisite gains toward grade level learning outcomes, there is a need on the part of the stakeholders to develop a really clear understanding of the problem. It is the teachers, within their school teams, who need to examine the data with a critical eye and then collaboratively determine their next best teaching steps to ensure that each child experiences success.

Kotter’s (1995) Eight-Step Change Process is one framework for change in this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP). Bolman and Deal (2013) offer a human resources frame, with four main assumptions to help us better understand the organization. The first assumption according to Bolman and Deal (2013) is the mutual relationship between organizations and people – organizations require people to do the work and people require organizations in which to be gainfully employed. A good fit between people and the organization benefits both groups and likewise a poor fit between people and the organization can be highly

problematic. It behooves the organization to be careful in its hiring practices because hiring the right people is paramount to a strong school system. This is sometimes a challenge for a small, rural school division as many new teachers prefer to remain in larger, urban centres rather than move to small, rural communities. As a leader, my approach is to be proactive and begin the hiring process early before the larger, more bureaucratic systems begin their hiring processes. As a small school division, all human resources functions fall to the superintendent rather than a director of human resources. Thus, I attend recruitment fairs at local universities and speak to the strengths of a smaller school division which includes small class sizes, school-based and divisional supports for all teachers as well as a healthy budget that enables teachers to access professional learning resources.

Along with teacher and principal recruitment and hiring is the importance of having a clear professional growth model for teacher and principal evaluation. Teachers are evaluated in their first and second year of teaching and then move to a professional growth model where they identify goals and work collaboratively with the principal to develop strategies to meet their learning goals. Their goals must align with school and division plans which include overall literacy and specific reading comprehension goals. This is the avenue for principals to support teachers in building their capacity and this is the avenue for me to work with principals in developing their leadership skills.

A second assumption of Bolman and Deal's (2013) human resources frame is getting the right fit between the employee and the organization. If there is a misfit between two, employees need to be supported to help them find a correct fit within their organization. This may mean ensuring access to different professional learning opportunities, pairing a teacher with an

experienced mentor or helping the teacher to make a shift in teaching practices because that is what is needed for the students in the classrooms. Leithwood, Reid, Pedwell and Connor (2011) report on mentoring initiatives within Ontario that have been successful in supporting school leaders. They contend, “for mentees, such benefits include the development of a better understanding of their role, an increase in their confidence, improved leadership knowledge and practice and expanded opportunities for reflection” (Leithwood et al., 2011, p. 343). Strengthening school leadership skills will better support teachers as they undertake challenging roles.

A third component of the human resource frame is the reciprocal nature of the relationship between organizations and people. There would be no organizations if there were no people to make up the employee base and employees require job security and a paycheque. However, while important, the acquisition of money is not the only need for people. Bolman and Deal (2013) note that, “there is a broad agreement that people want things that go beyond money, such as doing good work, getting better at what they do, bonding with other people, and finding meaning and purpose” (p. 120). This also becomes a challenge as schools seek to change to improve learner outcomes. In his presentation at a Provincial Superintendents’ session, Breakspear (2017) shared that, “Effective teacher learning is the core lever for improving student learning” (NP). Mabey (2003) describes a tension within the human resources frame. When individuals have autonomy over their own learning then there is an increased likelihood of innovative and creative thinking. However, if learning is not connected to the organization’s goals then the learning will have no impact on the greater improvement of the organization. This begs the question as to whether the learning should be primarily good for the person or for the organization.



The final component of the human resources frame is the concern about having a poor fit between people and organizations. In examining the context of Koinonia School Division and this problem of practice, Collins (2001) suggests that it is important to get the right people on the bus and then have the right people to drive the bus, so it can move forward in the best possible direction. Given that the divisional focus is on improving students' reading comprehension levels, the human resources practices employed by the division should align with that goal. Bolman and Deal (2015) state, "if you hire good people and support and engage them, good things will happen" (p. 37). This is true in education at all levels; people require the supports to do the jobs they are hired to do. When the fit between teacher and school or leader and system is not right, schools and divisions must have the courage to make the right decisions for the benefit of student learning because this organization cannot bear the weight of ineffective teachers.

Paterson, Luthens and Jeung (2013) describe the idea of thriving at work. They posit that "...vitality will likely fade if [employees] do not have opportunities for learning and growth, which replenish their vitality" (Paterson et al., 2013, p. 435). Leaders must then support people to find ways to develop their own learning and capacity through professional growth plans and conversations and by helping to foster networks among teachers where learning can be enhanced to support student achievement. Creating these kinds of environments is challenging in remote and rural locations where internet connectivity may be inconsistent or non-existent and the sparseness of population means that people work in isolation much of the time.

The change process that I will use to address the problem of practice in this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) is Kotter's Eight-Stage Change Process. Kotter (1995) first identified the steps as reasons change fails to transform organizations. Kotter's Eight- Stage

Change Process has been well documented in the literature (Brăduțanu, 2012; Cawsey et. al., 2016; Hughes, 2016; Kotter, 1995). Mento, Jones and Dirndorfer (2002) describe Kotter's process along with two other change processes and calls it "...an exemplar in the change management literature" (p. 45). Pollock and Pollock (2014) studied Kotter's process as it was used in an Australian financial institution. That study concluded that the progression is extremely linear and multiple incarnations of the process were required at each level of the organization rather than one process for the top level. Similarly, this will likely happen at the school division level where there will be a large change process and then smaller, manageable processes at the school level to engage the teachers in the change. Hughes (2016) provides a critique of Kotter's model citing a lack of empirical evidence as well as the lack of revisions in the second edition of Kotter's (2012) book as diminishing its academic credibility. Hughes calls Kotter's work "a-theoretical" (p. 450). Although this criticism exists, the clear stages of the process can be used as a framework for this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP). The potential pitfall is its linearity which may be a challenge in a school division where linearity is not always present.

Cawsey et al. (2016) and Kotter (1995) describe the eight steps and these can be aligned with actions taken in Koinonia School Division (see Appendix C). The first step, having a sense of urgency, is critical to this problem of practice because there is an innate sense of earnestness and a moral purpose as children's lives are eventually compromised if they lack the appropriate literacy skills. The children do not have time to wait while the educators figure out how to help them comprehend text. Step two is to form a "powerful guiding coalition" (Kotter, 1995, p.61) which in this case is with the principal of each school. They are the ones who need to be lead literacy leaders to effect the change within each school. They, in turn, are led by the superintendents' team. The third step is to create a vision which has already been co-constructed

with the principals to ensure that each student makes a year's progress for a year in school and that each student reaches grade level expectations. The strategies borne from this vision will in part be co-constructed and others will be determined at the school level. The leadership through this process is one of both pressure and support. It becomes part of my role to examine students' reading data and pose questions of the principal as to where each student is in relation to grade level reading outcomes. I also ask principals to identify their school's priority learners – those students who require additional supports to close the achievement gap. Finally, I ask what supports teachers require, in terms of their skillsets, to adequately teach their students. My role is to provide what Fullan and Quinn (2016) call *pressure* and *support*.

The next two steps are to communicate and empower teachers to do the work that is needed to ensure that every child can be successful. The communication would come from the superintendents' department through leadership development sessions and shared with teachers to solicit buy in. Empowering teachers also requires a professional learning plan that allows them to access any professional learning they require to help students to improve in their reading comprehension.

Ensuring that teachers and students see progress and success as well as consolidating to ensure that the change continues are the next steps in Kotter's process. Principals will need to support teachers and celebrate all successes to generate more motivation and energy when continuing through the change process. Likely there will be some early wins with students who are close to meeting their reading goals and some targeted intervention will help them to meet their targets. This will serve as ongoing, positive reinforcement when teachers begin to work

more intensely with those students who are not making the requisite gains and continue to struggle to read and comprehend text at grade level.

Finally, the last step in Kotter's change process is to ensure that any strategies that are showing broad success for students across classrooms continue to be modelled and used on a wider scale to support student learning.

### **Critical Organizational Analysis**

Koinonia School Division (KSD) is ready for change. The current state of the organization is such that there is a high level of trust between the Superintendents' Department and the schools. It is not uncommon for either of the Superintendents to be visible in the schools and the classrooms. The students recognize the Superintendents as adults who are familiar to them although they may not entirely understand the role that we play in their education. Burke (2018), Cawsey et. al. (2016), Nadler and Tushman (1980), Tushman and Nadler (1986) describe Tushman and Nadler's (1986) Congruence Model which is a helpful way to approach this organizational analysis.

Beginning with inputs such as the environment, described in the organizational context section and in the PESTE analysis section, Koinonia School Division is aware of and continues to monitor the environment for the current climate of education in the province as well as to build a longer term vision. From a historical perspective, much groundwork has been laid going into this change process including developing the document, *A balanced literacy framework K-8: 8 components of a balanced literacy program* (Koinonia School Division, 2015) which supports principals and teachers in defining and describing the components of a quality literacy block in grade bands. It was created so that principals could understand promising practice in literacy and

to enable them to have conversations with their classroom teachers regarding practice as it connects to the teaching and learning cycle and supports students' growth and achievement. Resources, another input in the Congruence Model are allocated equitably and schools are adequately staffed and funded to enable students and staff to be successful.

Pertaining to the transformation component of Nadler and Tushman's (1986) Congruence Model, another aspect of change readiness is having all teachers from grades 1 to 8 using the same assessment tool to gather information on students' reading levels. Several years ago, there was no consistency within schools or throughout the School Division as to which assessment tool to use for determining students reading comprehension levels. It was a relatively seamless transition to shift to using a common tool. Alongside the consolidated use of an effective assessment tool was an opportunity for professional development for all teaching staff from Kindergarten to grade 8 to support consistent implementation across the Division. The Division provided enough funding to purchase additional Fountas and Pinnell Baseline Assessment kits to allow for ease of access so teachers did not need to unduly share resources.

The third element of the Nadler and Tushman's (1986) Congruence Model is the output, or well-prepared and literate students. At the end of their formal, public school education, students graduate with the necessary skills to embrace all that life has to offer them following their official schooling. Koinonia School Division is managing the inputs, environment and resources, to create the desired output.

A gap remains for high school teachers and their place in this change process. Much of the focus has been and continues to be on early literacy yet, the influx of Indigenous students at grade 9 from First Nations communities has meant that high school teachers need to address low

reading comprehension levels in their students but many do not have the requisite skills in upgrading or teaching aspects of literacy to support them. Some of this can be attributed to a need to shift understanding of what teaching reading means at the high school. There is a misconception that reading is equal to decoding. Most students have in fact mastered decoding at the early years' level. Where there is a gap is in content area vocabulary and having a clear understanding of the language of any given discipline. This requires the content area teacher to have the skills to teach disciplinary literacy to high school students. Many students in rural areas from low socio-economic backgrounds lack the prior knowledge to be able to grapple with and understand content area text. For example, in social studies, they lack the language to discuss geographical features and have not had the experience of travel to have a first-hand understanding of the vocabulary so the text that they read does not attach to their existing schema.

There are several changes that need to occur within Koinonia School Division. Kotter's (1995) change process identifies having a sense of urgency as the first stage. While there is some sense of urgency present for some teachers and some principals, a high enough level of urgency does not yet exist to motivate teachers to change their practice. Through the lens of transformational leadership, urgency has to develop intrinsically and not be driven by divisional leadership as it might through a transactional leadership lens. It can develop by having a shared understanding of student data within each classroom in every school. Lipton and Wellman (2012) provide protocols and frameworks for supporting staff to look at their data as a third point and not as a point of criticism of any one teacher's practice. The evidence needs to be neutral and viewed as an opportunity to determine solutions and next steps for both the teachers and the learners.

Principals need to take the lead on the change process within their schools. As a group, they have varied skillsets and not all principals are literacy leaders. This leaves a knowledge gap in some schools, unfortunately, a number of teachers, recognizing this gap, take that as an opportunity to continue with their current practice rather than work at more promising practice. Closing the gap hinges on expanding the principals' understanding of quality literacy instruction.

### **Possible Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice**

As a problem of practice is a complex matter, there is no single solitary solution that will provide all the answers to the problem. In this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP), three possible solutions have been explored as possibilities to support improved reading comprehension skills for students. Those solutions include: maintaining the status quo, developing a comprehensive professional development plan for principals and teachers to expand their skills in the area of teaching and leading reading comprehension and the third possible solution is to examine a tier three reading intervention, such as reading recovery, to support students who require individualized interventions in order to be successful.

**Potential solution 1.** The first solution is to maintain the status quo and continue monitoring students' growth in reading comprehension. Hattie (2009) notes that students will expect to experience a year's growth for having spent a year in school. This growth will happen regardless of the teacher's capacity to teach, although he goes on to explain in his meta-analysis that the teacher is the key factor in the classroom relating to students' achievement. When teachers employ teaching strategies that have a positive effect size on student learning, this increases the potential student growth in achievement outcomes.

In Koinonia School Division, provincial assessment data has consistently shown that student results on the grade three provincial assessment in literacy are in line with the provincial average which is quite low (Table 2). The grade eight reading and writing assessment show similar low numbers of students who are meeting in all of the categories of the provincial assessment. Neither the grade three assessment nor the grade eight assessment is associated with a particular instrument, both are based on teachers' professional judgments and use classroom tools to generate the data to make the determination whether students are not meeting, approaching or meeting the learning outcome. The grade three assessment is completed in October of the students' grade three year and is based on end of grade two learning outcomes. The grade eight assessment is completed in February and represents mid-year performance in grade eight.

Table 2: Grade Three Reading Data 2009-2017 (Province and Koinonia School Division)

	<b>Number of Grade 3 students assessed in <u>Reading</u> from Fall 2009 to Fall 2017</b>	<b>Province 102,209</b>	<b>Koinonia SD 714</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous Students</b>	<b>Indigenous Students</b>
<b>Percentage of students who met expectations in the Reading sub-competency</b>	Reflects on and sets reading goals	57%	56%	64%	48%
	Uses strategies during reading to make sense of texts	59%	56%	63%	50%
	Demonstrates comprehension	57%	55%	62%	48%

Note: Divisional data supplied by the province. Adapted from "Reading comprehension report – Grades 1-12 2017-2018," 2018, Koinonia School Division.



When disaggregating the data to show self-declared Indigenous students and Non-Indigenous students, the data is even bleaker for the self-declared non-Indigenous students who continue to not meet grade level outcomes in reading comprehension.

Table 3: Grade 8 Reading Comprehension – Mid Grade 8 Level Performance (Province and Koinonia School Division)

	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
Reading Comprehension	Meeting Mid-Grade 8 Level of Performance									
	Division	Province	Division	Province	Division	Province	Division	Province	Division	Province
Student understands key ideas and messages in a variety of texts.	57%	62%	54%	62%	59%	63%	55%	63%	56%	65%
Student interprets a variety of texts.	36%	58%	56%	58%	56%	59%	55%	59%	52%	61%
Student responds critically to a variety of texts.	28%	50%	38%	50%	45%	51%	54%	53%	42%	52%

Note: Data supplied by the province. Adapted from “Reading comprehension report – Grades 1-12 2016-2017”, 2017, Koinonia School Division.

The grade eight data shows a similar picture to the grade three data with the divisional averages falling below the provincial average and hovering around 50%. Further, the grade three and grade eight data sets are similar in that there are neither significant gains nor significant losses from when students are in grade three to the time they reach grade eight. Students have made little gain on provincial assessments.

Maintaining the status quo requires that nothing change. Teachers will continue to teach using the same pedagogical strategies that they have used to date. The eight-year span for the grade three data and the five-year span for the grade eight data show fairly consistent results year

over year. So, despite an annual teacher turnover rate of about 10% each year, the system could carry on with similar expected results. No particular resources are required to maintain the status quo other than maintaining the budget for classroom resources and for teacher professional development. Koinonia School Division spent 1.2% of its annual budget on professional development in 2017-2018. This places the School Division within the top ten school divisions based on per pupil spending on professional development. The provincial average is 1.2% of funding is spent on professional development (Manitoba Education & Training, 2018).

There are some benefits to maintaining the status quo, namely, limiting the stress and strain of change on a system that is already stretched thin. Teachers within a small system are required to be highly flexible and highly skilled. It is uncommon for teachers to have the identical course load two years in a row which puts a strain on teachers and does not allow them to achieve mastery. They do not have the opportunity to go back to previous lessons and reflect on their successes and challenges to really fine tune their craft. All early and middle years' teachers teach in multi-age settings because of a philosophical belief that the benefit of multi-age classrooms as well as the need to manage student numbers. All K-3 classrooms fall under the soft cap of 20 students per classroom. Teachers would continue to focus on their classrooms and do their best to teach the students in their care.

The challenge to maintaining the status quo has ethical implications. Given the provincial data, students are not doing well and continue to do poorly moving from grade three to grade eight and this projects to grade 12 graduation rates which have ranged from an overall grade rate of 41.6% to 58.3% for a four-year, on time graduation from June 2013 to June 2016. Students

require more than this in order to be successful and to have the kind of life that they imagine for themselves.

**Potential solution 2.** The second possible solution, and the solution most likely to reach a majority of students, is one whereby teachers and principals work on improving their understanding of teaching reading through professional development. Not all teachers have entered the workforce with a strong background in literacy pedagogies. There is an additional focus on collaboration, examining student data together and working on specific interventions for learners. Teacher practice needs to change to reflect the needs of the students. Some of the practices, which may have been effective in the past, are no longer serving students well. When reviewing teaching strategies, caution should be exercised in making judgements because the strategy may not be inherently poor; it may simply not be effective for the current students' needs. Thus the teaching practice may need to be refined to reflect the classroom context or replaced with a strategy that will have the desired impact on student achievement.

Current practice in Koinonia School Division includes having a period of *Strong Beginnings* in September in each classroom from Kindergarten to grade 8. Teachers are allocated time, up to two days, where they can assess students individually and in small groups in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Teachers use the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (Fountas & Pinnell Literacy, 2019) kits to determine students' instructional reading levels. All teachers were provided with a full day of professional development when the School Division moved to using the Fountas and Pinnell tool exclusively. However, in subsequent years, new teachers have been given a shorter training session or have been trained by their teaching colleagues at the school level.

While it is important to have good assessment data as a baseline, the piece that has been given short shrift is the use of that data in determining classroom and grade level profiles and then using the information to inform next steps in teaching practice. It is one thing to know the information and another to use it with impact to determine what each child needs next in order to be successful. Teachers may then require professional learning as well as embedded collaboration time to ensure that they have the skills to best teach the children in their classrooms.

The goals of the School Division, which have been focused on improving literacy outcomes for students for years, can remain the same but the practices will need to change. Given that there are fewer than 1100 students in Kindergarten to grade 12, and teacher/pupil ratios are low, Koinonia School Division is poised to make a difference for every student in every classroom by having teachers narrow their focus and by honing in on what each child needs to be successful.

Koinonia School Division, could focus its energies on becoming a literacy-focused school division. Drawing from the work of Irvin, Melzer and Dukes (2007), they describe the necessary components to implementing district-wide literacy strategies to support student achievement. In the planning stages, principals would need to support teachers in examining their beginning of the year reading data. They could engage school teams in data processes as described by Lipton and Wellman (2012) whereby teachers examined their students' reading comprehension data, deconstructed it to determine where students were making errors and grouped children to focus their classroom instruction and possible interventions.

The next part of the strategy is to support principals and teachers in determining what the next steps are once they have identified the children who are struggling with reading comprehension. This would require some intensive and focused professional development for teachers and principals. In terms of leadership, this will require a model where the plan is co-developed between the teachers, the principals and the Assistant Superintendent to obtain buy in from teachers as well as ensure that the professional learning is ‘just-in-time’ as well as embedded in the life of the school. Some of this may be accomplished by using the skills of the literacy support teacher. Fullan and Knight (2011), in writing about coaches as change agents, place a high level of importance on the role of the coach as part of the system improvement strategy. There is a need in system improvement to focus on “Such reform drivers as capacity building, teamwork, pedagogy, and systemic reform [which] are much more compatible with the strategies of good coaches (Fullan & Knight, 2011, p. 50). So, it would be prudent to ensure that the literacy coach has the capacity to support teachers in meaningful ways to ensure that students are improving in their reading comprehension.

Once teachers, individually and collectively, agree on the importance of gaining additional skills to support students in their classrooms, this will require some processes to be in place at the school level. Some additional fiscal resources to support the professional learning plan as well as collaborative time for teachers to work together to review student assessments and to determine possible next steps. A process to support working collaboratively may benefit teachers who, may not be immediately comfortable sharing their practices and moderating student work with their colleagues. For some, teaching has been a private practice held between the teacher and the students in the classroom. The system needs to shift to increased openness

where teachers can observe each other teach and give each other feedback on their lesson as it relates to the students' learning outcomes.

In order for any change effort to be fully successful, teachers and principals need to feel a sense of efficacy in the work that they are doing in their schools. Numerous scholars have theorized that if people believed that they could do the work that was required of them, with a strong sense of self-efficacy then they would indeed experience increased success (Bandura, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Versland, 2016). Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2004) write that, "It is not enough to hire and retain the most capable principals – they must also believe that they can successfully meet the challenges of the task at hand" (p. 582). Further, Donohoo (2017) and Katz and Dack (2013) describe processes that teachers can use to support their collective efficacy as they work collaboratively within their schools and across the school division. They talk about the power of purposeful visits to each other's classrooms and describe protocols that focus on student learning that could be useful for teachers and principals.

Teachers, in addition to increasing their pedagogical repertoire in teaching reading comprehension strategies and engaging with colleagues to build capacity and self-efficacy, could use a process such as that described by Breakspear (2018) called Learning Sprints. Learning Sprints are short, action research cycles whereby teachers, focusing on the outcome they plan to teach next, to the children that they currently teach, determine a strategy that they want to try in order to improve the success for a targeted child or small group of children. The teacher would engage in some formative assessment to determine which outcome and which children should be the focus of the sprint, plan their lessons with a particular focus on their pedagogy and how that supports improved student achievement, teach and assess the impact that the teaching had on the

students they were trying to support. These short cycles of inquiry are focused on pedagogical change and the impact that it has on students' achievement levels. At the end of the cycle, the teacher or group of teachers, analyses the results of the assessment to determine whether or not the change had the desired result and then they determine which outcome to focus on next with which learner or group of learners. While it sounds like a simple process, the hard work happens in the teacher's shift in practice, moving away from automaticity to really trying a new strategy which requires hard work (Breakspear, 2018).

**Potential solution 3.** A third solution to improving students' reading comprehension skills lies in utilising a tier 3 intervention such as Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is a trademarked individualized reading intervention program designed for grade one students who are not making any gains in reading with regular classroom instruction and who, based on a teacher's running record assessment are the lowest performing readers of their class. Implementing Reading Recovery across would require significant supports at a system level, namely, financial support to implement Reading Recovery with fidelity. In many instances, Reading Recovery teachers are also grade one teachers and can use the extensive professional learning and training they receive to support the learning of all students. To implement requires additional staffing in schools because of the need to replace the Reading Recovery teachers' time when they are away from their classrooms when they are involved in program implementation. This additional staffing is, at a minimum, a half time teacher position in each school implementing Reading Recovery. As well, the initial two years of teacher training is extensive and requires multiple training sessions requiring substitute time in the classrooms.

In addition to the time required and the travel to attend training sessions, determining who should be trained is a challenge. While ideally the grade 1 teacher is the one trained in Reading Recovery, this may not be feasible due to a teacher's personal circumstances and willingness to participate in additional training. This becomes a political piece if it becomes a systemic requirement that grade one teachers participate in the training and those who are unwilling would have to be transferred to a different grade level or role to make way for teachers who are willing to be trained. This may not create the climate and culture that is conducive to student learning. In instances where the grade 1 teacher may be reluctant to be trained, the principal or the Learning Support teacher could be trained and implement the program. The challenge with these teachers being trained is ensuring the fidelity to model because both of these roles require time out of the school for a variety of meetings and professional learning sessions related to their roles.

Based on studies of Reading Recovery, the What Works Clearinghouse (2013) found three studies that met their criteria and all three showed small positive effect sizes in four areas of reading: alphabets, reading fluency, reading comprehension and general reading achievement. Despite the low impact on student achievement, it seems to be the favoured tier 3 intervention in the province. Students who have successfully been discontinued from the program have gone on to be successful in their ongoing schooling. Ervin (2008) identifies that there should be a process to determine how students are identified for tier 3 interventions because of the complexity of this task. Once a student has been identified for interventions, then a clear plan should be in place to identify the intervention, the resources required as well as the length of time for the intervention prior to an evaluation to determine whether or not the intervention was successful and the end result was achieved.



In summary, each of the three proposed solutions has pros and cons. Other than maintaining the status quo, improving teachers' capacity through professional development and implementing Reading Recovery require that teachers do some specific, job-embedded learning to support students' achievement. The major difference between the two approaches is the number of students who may be impacted by the intervention. Whereas Reading Recovery may only impact a limited number of students at a time, making changes to teachers' pedagogy has the potential to increase the impact significantly. To date, the emphasis has been on early years' data including the Early Development Index (EDI) that shows students' readiness for grade one as well as grades three and eight Provincial assessment data. By implementing increased and concentrated professional development with a focus specific to improving the pedagogy to improve students' reading comprehension, more teachers and thus more students can benefit and receive increased support and improve their collective skills. The chosen solution for this Organizational Improvement Plan is to focus on changing teachers' pedagogy and supporting principals and vice principals in recognizing quality literacy instruction and leading that process in their schools.

Ultimately, the entire system would be moving forward with the systemic piece using Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model (1995) and the school and classroom-based piece would see engagement in Learning Sprints (2019) to change teachers' pedagogy as they work to improve learning outcomes for specific students in their classrooms. The large systemic cog and the smaller, school and classroom gears will be working in harmony to propel the entire system forward in a cohesive manner that will ultimately improve student achievement specific to reading comprehension.

### **Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change Issues**

One of the overarching purposes of education is to prepare students to not only live in the world of their future but also to have a voice in making the requisite changes to that world so that it is a place where all humans can live in harmony and be healthy, happy and productive. Starratt (2004) identifies that,

The work of educational leadership should be work that is simultaneously intellectual and moral; an activity characterized by a blend of human, professional and civic concerns; a work of cultivating an environment of learning that is humanly fulfilling and socially responsible. (p. 3)

One of the overarching ethical concerns is to have every student graduate with functional literacy. It is a matter of social justice and ethics that students who graduate are capable of navigating complex texts to remove the personal vulnerability that comes with an inability to read. Further, people deserve to have the ability and capacity to engage in meaningful employment and that comes with the ability to read and comprehend a variety of texts at high levels. For this Organizational Improvement Plan which is grounded in transformational leadership and uses Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model (1995), there are numerous ethical implications inherent in both the leadership and change processes.

Toor and Ofori (2009) ascertain that "...authentic transformational leaders have a moral character, a strong concern for self and others, and ethical values which are deeply embedded in the vision" (p. 534). There are four tenets of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2005; Bass, 1999; Northouse, 2016). Transformational leadership, with links to Weber's

ideas of charismatic leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2005) has some ethical pitfalls. While charisma can be used to persuade and influence people to follow, in its darker form, a charismatic leader can indoctrinate followers to doing things that are morally despicable (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). When the leader demonstrates integrity, honesty and authenticity towards followers, this impact can be mitigated and positive results can be achieved for the organization. Krek and Zabel (2017) also caution against using an ethic of care blindly without consideration for moral education. One cannot just engage in an ethic of caring and then continue as if anything is acceptable. There are still areas where society considers there to be clear delineations between acceptable and unacceptable.

Inspirational motivation can be powerful within an organization when the leader is deeply passionate and desires a better future for the people within the organization which, in this case, are the students of Koinonia School Division. There is a further desire to ensure the well-being of staff which comes when people are able to perform the duties that are expected of them because they have the skills and tools to do so. Starratt (2005) reminds leaders that they have a responsibility to be human beings. While motivation can serve to generate enthusiasm instill excitement in followers, a need remains to continue to treat people with dignity and respect and be cognizant of the fact that not all people embrace change in the same ways. Some people require multiple conversations, opportunities to ask questions, and time to reflect before they begin to see and understand themselves in the change process. To sidestep that process would be unethical and violate the responsibility of being human.

Idealized influence comes when followers are motivated by a belief in the vision and can see the possibilities that emerge when the vision is laid out before them. Teachers and principals

want children to read and have been working at that goal for some time. An ethical consideration is the fine line between encouragement and motivation without denigrating or dishonouring the work that has already been done. One can not make the assumption that a lack of success is the result of a lack of effort or caring as this may simply not be the case and could alienate teachers and principals from the leadership. Simola, Barling and Turner (2010) identify a strong connection between transformational leadership and an ethic of care. They note that there is an overarching idea that the tenet of idealized leadership relates to a community which links it to an ethic of care. Community is a place where leaders and followers work collectively through a problem rather than approach it from a we/they or us/them angle. This collaborative approach links it to Noddings' (2005) ethic of care. She says, "Responsiveness is at the heart of caring and also at the heart of teaching themes of care" (Noddings, 2005, p. xxv). This demonstrates the leader's need to consider their followers carefully and using conscious and deliberate means co-construct approaches to address change in the organization.

Through intellectual stimulation and individual consideration, the transformational leader supports followers with the challenge of the problem of practice, inviting followers to think creatively about possible solutions to the problem. Simola et al. (2010) note that with an ethic of care, solutions are considered for competing ideas rather than being selective about which ideas to pursue. To care is to be thoughtful and reflective in the process and to honour others' ideas and solutions which may differ. Each follower in the organization is at a different point in their learning journey and each requires individual attention. It is prudent to exercise some caution lest some followers perceive inequities in the attention and resources that the leader bestows on the followers. As well, an ethical leader will ensure that there is transparency and equity in resource allocation.

Leadership is one aspect that requires ethical consideration as does the chosen change process. For this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP), each step of Kotter's Eight-Step Change Process (1995) has implications for an ethical position. In creating a sense of urgency, the leader has to take care not to overwhelm or discourage followers who may already believe they are doing their very best. This is relevant to having a really clear change message that can be shared at every school within the school division and does not rely heavily on the principals' interpretations. Some schools will feel a greater sense of urgency because their data reflects that students are not performing as well as in other schools. This may create a sense of fear in teachers as they consider how their teaching practice has an impact on their students.

Creating a vision for change and a coalition has ethical implications because the vision needs to be understood by the followers and not be the sole vision of the leader. When working with a coalition caution needs to be exercised so that some people are not left out because they hold differing opinions on the vision or the approach to change. Starratt (1991) reminds us to pay attention to what he identifies as an ethic of critique. Within this ethic, the leader pays attention to whose vision is being proposed and who stands to gain from the pursuit of this vision. Hierarchical structures within the school system are criticized and a need exists to pay attention to how the greater good of the organization is served. The structures may simply protect the people who are in positions of power according to the hierarchy. All of this ought to be communicated in ways that are sensitive to the needs of the stakeholders which include the teachers and other staff as well as the parents and members of the community. When one communicates change, it needs to be framed in such a way so as to not alienate those who may benefit from the change. For example, in wanting to improve reading comprehension it is

important not to lay blame on parents or teachers for a deficit but rather to envelop and engage them in an environment of support and encouragement.

The next steps of removing obstacles and celebrating short term wins again requires a consideration of the ethic of critique as one considers some of the structural components of a school. One of the obstacles might be the need to make adjustments to the timetable to accommodate increased time in a literacy block. This shift in time could come at the expense of something else so a careful critique of the overall allocation of time in relation to the staffing and the vision is necessary. Short term wins may involve analysing data for trends and gains that have been made by students. This data needs to be considered thoughtfully and carefully and as Ehrich, Harris, Klenowski, Smeed, and Spina (2015) acknowledge, looking at data to determine gaps in achievement cannot be done naively but with consideration of other factors as well. Students are more than simply a sum of qualitative data; they can demonstrate their learning in multiple ways which should be taken into account when examining data.

The final stages of Kotter's change process are to build on the change and embed the change into the culture of the organization. With any cultural shift, comes a sense of loss for those that hold historic knowledge of the organization. This loss should be acknowledged alongside the new gains that have been made. Throughout the change process, there may also be a shift in the followers as some choose to leave the organization and new people are hired. As the change is embedded into the organization's culture, the leader should sense that the followers are fully engaged in the change process and have gained valuable skills and a deep understanding of the process along the way.

There are potential ethical dilemmas in both leadership and change processes. There are potential ethical dilemmas in both leadership and change processes. As Fullan and Ontario Principals' Council (2003) write, "Leaders, because they are in positions of authority and power, must role model new governing values based on relational trust and disciplined confrontation of problems" (p. 67). Leaders must lead with integrity and with moral fortitude to ensure that all children have the opportunity to maximize their potential as learners in schools. It is the principals' responsibility to ensure that, in the words of Noddings (2005), "Classrooms should be places in which students can act upon a rich variety of purposes in which wonder and curiosity are alive, in which students and teachers live together and grow" (p. 12). It is through this ethic of care that relational trust can grow and flourish and impact powerfully on learning environments.

### **Chapter 3: Implementation, Evaluation and Communication**

This chapter focuses on examining ways to implement proposed solution 2 – shifting teachers’ practice and using data strategically. Evaluating and communicating the plan are also examined in this chapter.

#### **Change Implementation Plan**

While there are numerous strategies that Koinonia School Division (KSD) could employ to actualize their goal, the focus will be on employing a variety of strategies that are customized for each school’s context to allow as many educators as possible to have entry points into the change process. For example, if the Division were to solely focus on Reading Recovery as a tier 3 strategy, that would engage only a select few grade one teachers, and would leave the rest of the division to carry on status quo, without being part of the change process. Maintaining the status quo is not an option in a learning organization. By engaging in a more holistic approach to improving reading comprehension it allows principals and teachers to find an entry point where they can engage in the change process as part of their school community and as a part of the larger, Divisional community. (Appendix D is a chart of the implementation plan).

**Establishing the vision.** As discussed earlier, Koinonia School Division spent time on co-constructing a vision for literacy learning and achievement. Prior to year one of the process, there was time spent on establishing the vision for the Division. A longstanding Learning Vision with a focus on literacy exists in Koinonia School Division. This was co-constructed with the principals more than eight years ago and has been collectively reviewed annually since its inception. This Learning Vision is understood by stakeholders as the direction of the School Division. The Superintendent has clearly communicated a message that the vision must be



focussed on two key priorities rather than spread over numerous outcomes because of its size and limited resources. The statements of the Learning Vision are clear to stakeholders but the missing piece, until this time, is the measurement of growth and progress towards the literacy goal.

Establishing trust is key to the success of any change initiative and Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) note the complexity of education systems and say, “As with any complex system, members in the system are both actors and acted upon by the system” (p. 67). In education, there is not usually a direct causal link between one action and the desired outcome; rather there is an interconnectedness among stakeholder groups and how they adapt to the change process. Having trusting relationships will aid in the smooth acceleration of change acceptance among stakeholders. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), building a culture of trust will also support collegial environments in schools which will in turn support cultures in which it is acceptable to share vulnerabilities and work collaboratively to seek solutions to complex, common problems.

With an established and articulated Learning Vision, the next steps are to determine organizational readiness. The Division underwent a large change process several years ago and had success in rethinking pedagogical approaches in general ways, engaging in ways to use technology more effectively in classrooms and considering how the physical environment enhanced learning outcomes for students. More than 80% of teachers and principals were involved in some sort of action research project over the course of three years. These projects were supported by professors from a local university. Further, the Board of Trustees supported teachers by publicly making a statement that they were setting aside money in their budget to

support and resource teachers' and classroom needs in this action research. On the heels of that success, a culture of risk-taking has evolved in the Division and it is known that risks are supported provided that there is a focus on improving student achievement.

While there is an existing culture of support for innovative practice, there are still teachers who remain resistant to changing their own pedagogies to better reflect the current student population and learning environment. Those teachers will be encouraged by principals to examine the evidence of their students' progress and achievement and then will be supported to make small adjustments to focus on one learner at a time and one strategy at a time.

**Year one implementation - Board of trustees, principals and vice principals.** In the fall of year one, the change plan will focus on the ensuring that two key stakeholder groups have a clear understanding of the change process and are ready to implement the vision in their respective sites. The first group to engage in the process is the Board of Trustees. Since they guard the governance of the overall vision, it is important that at the August Board meeting they are re-engaged with the Reading Comprehension learning goal for the School Division and that any assumptions or misconceptions are surfaced during their discussions. Given the wide variety of backgrounds of the trustees, I anticipate that they will have questions about how we will measure students' growth in reading comprehension, and those with children in the system will want an understanding of how this might impact their own children. They will also be keenly interested to know the financial implications of engaging in this work to the School Division.

At this time, no additional money has been allocated to this change initiative however, personnel will be spending time within their allocations working on implementation. For example, the Literacy Lead Teacher will be allocating more of her time to schools for direct

support and less to meetings and office time as schools increase their requests for her time. Some of the professional learning sessions that she would have led divisionally will become direct school support time so teachers can benefit from in-class support. Despite a climate of fiscal restraint, the Literacy Lead Teacher position has been maintained as a way to continue to move the literacy work forward. Within existing funds, money continues to be allocated to resource classroom libraries ensuring that classrooms are equipped with high quality literature to use as teaching resources. A Divisional classroom audit completed by the Literacy Lead Teacher resulted in a recognition of the inequities between schools and classrooms in the number and quality of books in classroom libraries. Teachers who have many years of experience have large libraries, not necessarily high quality. Teachers with less than five years of experience have limited libraries and resources to use to teach reading. This needs to be rectified in an equitable way over the next several years. If the Division is asking teachers to teach reading, the Division also needs to supply a quantity of high quality, richly diverse literature to use in classrooms.

The second stakeholder group that is important to implementation of a change process and which requires support in the fall of year one is the principals and vice principals because they have to lead the work in their schools. The principals and vice principals will meet, as they do each year, at the end of August. Part of that meeting will focus on clarification of the Divisional goals for reading comprehension and surfacing any lingering questions or queries that come from the group. Given the stability of that group of leaders over the years and the work that was done the previous spring, this should be fairly straightforward with few questions about the vision at this time. The majority of the time together will be spent on the various strategies that schools may wish to employ in order to improve students' reading comprehension in their own contexts. Teachers have a variety of expertise, skills and strategies that they are already

employing. The challenge for principals and vice principals will be to ensure that teachers are using strategies for maximum impact with current students and using evidence to inform their next steps in teaching. Additionally, a change for teachers will be examining the evidence they have collected to determine if their current strategies are having the desired impact on their students. At this point in the implementation plan, it is noteworthy that schools are able to determine which strategies will work best given their contexts and student populations. Teachers need to have ownership of their own learning and have confidence in their abilities to make a difference for students. No part of the change process is deliberately designed to undermine the capacity of teachers to teach effectively. As Weiner (2009) suggested, “Change efficacy is higher when people share a sense of confidence that collectively they can implement a complex organizational change” (p. 2). Empowering teachers to take ownership of the change process as it relates to their students should support the successful embedding of change at the classroom level.

Battilana, Gilmartin, Sengul, Pache, and Alexander (2010) suggest in their study on leadership behaviours and change management that more people-oriented leaders will have a greater focus on communicating the vision and need for change. This is a clear part of the implementation plan and requires ongoing communication at all levels. Follow up with each principal and vice principal will be required to ensure that they receive the support that they may need. Initially, this work will be shared between the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent with assistance from the Literacy Learning Support Teacher. At the beginning of the change process, support will be more substantial as people find their place and gain footing. Once school teams are feeling equipped, support will shift to a maintenance, check in model as school leaders and teachers gain confidence in their abilities and understanding of Divisional expectations.

**Year one implementation – teachers.** One of the necessary links for the evaluation of the success of this OIP is the ability to collect data at a Divisional level and the ability to triangulate that data. In its current state, I am unable to make statements about how, for example, the grade one students are reading as compared to year end benchmarks. How are our children performing? This necessitates the implementation of a Division-wide common assessment tool. Early conversations with school leadership teams show that currently schools are using one of two purchased reading assessment kits across the Division and it will not be a significant implementation challenge to use a common tool. Conversations with the principals and vice principals have led the Division to make the decision to purchase Fountas and Pinnell Baseline Assessment System (Fountas and Pinnell Literacy, 2019) for all K-8 schools with enough kits in the schools to allow for ease of access to the tool. Along with the tool, there will need to be professional development to train teachers in the use of this specific assessment. One of the considerations in choosing this particular kit is access to a trainer who can train the entire K-8 teaching staff in a one-day professional development session in the fall. This session will be planned for the second day of the school year allowing for an Administrative day on the first day and Professional Development on the second day meaning students will return to classes on the Thursday of the first week in September. An early start to professional learning will be paramount in enabling teachers to start the year off using the assessment during what is known as *Strong Beginnings* time.

*Strong Beginnings* is a time near the beginning of the school year where teachers meet one on one with individual students and administer formative assessments primarily in literacy and numeracy. Some schools and teachers extend this to include a learning styles inventory and an interview to get to know the students better. The purpose is to allow teachers to deepen their

understanding of the individual students in their classrooms and to allow them to personalize their instruction according to the learners in their classrooms. Current practice has students attend for a half day out of two days of assessment but that will likely shift as schools are asked to think creatively about how to group students so as to allow teachers to continue to have time to complete assessments and not lose significant learning time in the process. Using specialty teachers, educational assistants, and regrouping children will allow for a special learning activity to occur and still permit classroom teachers to have valuable time with students to complete assessments. *Strong Beginnings* signals the start of the Plan Do Study Act cycle (Moen & Norman, 2006) because it provides teachers with baseline reading data so they can formulate their next best teaching moves (Breakspear, 2019, Katz & Dack, 2013).

Following *Strong Beginnings*, teachers will meet in grade level teams or vertical teams (multi-grade) to create class or grade level profiles. There are a variety of templates available to us for creating profiles, Appendix F and G are provided as examples. The purpose of these meetings is to allow the school team to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of the class and then to take specific action to support individual and small groups of students who may require different strategies in order to be successful. This class review will form the start of the Prepare, Sprint, Review cycle (Breakspear, 2019). Teachers will determine the reading outcome they will be teaching next and the very specific strategies they will try with a targeted, small group of students. While this may be effective whole class instruction, the specific purpose is to move the learning forward for those targeted students. At the end of the pre-determined time, the teachers will re-assess and determine if, in fact, student learning took place. Then they will repeat the cycle either with the same students and their next best teaching move or with a different student

or small group. This process continues throughout the school year in an ongoing, cyclical process.

At the high school level, implementation looks slightly different because of the structures of the high school. As schools are small, with none over 200 high school students, it is possible to work in grade level teams to support and improve student reading outcomes. High school teachers do not have *Strong Beginnings* time like the K-8 schools but will need to find time within their first few weeks of school to have students complete the Scholastic Online Assessment of Reading (SOAR) (Scholastic Canada, 2009). This is a computer-based, individual assessment and since currently most high school students have a division issued laptop, this should be feasible within the classroom setting either whole class or a few students at a time. The program allows grade level teachers to print their class's results and the learning support teachers and principals have access to the entire student population's results. The same class profiles as found in Appendices F and G can be used at the high school level. Of great importance is the ability to differentiate between those students who are well below grade level in reading comprehension and those that are at grade level and above. This distinction is critical to effectively plan for differentiated instruction in the class. Much like at early years, high school teachers will need to consider the different reading levels of their class in order to propel student learning forward. There is an important distinction to be made about high school learners and high school teachers. When high school teachers hear that they are supposed to teach reading they do not understand it to be content area reading strategies and content specific vocabulary.

One of the limitations of the implementation plan is the need to have ongoing financial resources to continue with *Strong Beginnings*, even in a modified form. In the climate of ongoing

Provincial budget cuts to rural school divisions, ensuring that the resources remain available will be an ongoing challenge as budgets get tighter and the limit to local taxation continues to be imposed by the Provincial government.

Other limitations include the ability to engage in ongoing training for the Fountas and Pinnell Baseline Assessment System (Fountas and Pinnell Literacy, 2019). It is feasible to train the entire K-9 teaching staff but it becomes increasingly cost prohibitive to train a few teachers each year especially if training is unavailable in a nearby city. Ensuring fidelity to model suggests that it would be most effective to have each teacher participate in training rather than have a form of school-based training in place.

Overall, however, the effectiveness of the implementation of this OIP does not rest on the financial requirements, it rests on the leadership capacity of the School Division and the ability to support school-based teams to understand where each learner is at in their reading comprehension levels, to strategize effectively and then to assess whether or not the strategies have had the desired impact on learning.

### **Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation**

The change process for this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) is multi-layered, and as such the monitoring and evaluation of the plan must also be multi-faceted. The overall change process at the macro level, using Kotter's eight steps of change, belongs to the Superintendents and the Board of Trustees. They are looking to determine whether or not the entire system is improving and they seek answers to several questions:

- Are students improving in reading comprehension in relation to grade level outcomes?



- Are students experiencing growth in reading comprehension relative to where they started at the beginning of the school year?
- Are teachers improving in their pedagogical practices pertaining specifically to teaching reading comprehension?

The Superintendents and Trustees are seeking data analysis in broad ways by looking at grade level data across the Division. They are also intent on examining disaggregated data of historically marginalized populations such as that of students in care and Indigenous students.

**Leadership and monitoring change.** The leadership approach for this OIP is transformational, which supposes a need to transform the stakeholders within the system. Although all four tenets of transformational leadership are important, at the early stages of the change plan, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration are priorities because to move people to action requires an understanding of where people are at, their fears and their motivations as well as finding ways to tap into their intellectual capacity to engage with the proposed change (Bass, 1995). Duda, Scott and Scott (2017) stress the importance of teacher and principal voice in policy development and this would extend to any systemic change process taking place (p. 47). Fullan (2011) cites the significance of the synergy required to enact whole system reform and expresses emphatically that the focus be on the right drivers in education one of which is pedagogical practice.

The first step in Kotter's change process is to develop a sense of urgency (Cawsey et. al., 2016, 48). Educational systems, schools and classrooms may or may not have a sense of urgency about what to change or what to improve. There may be teachers at the beginning of their careers for whom everything is a change and they do not yet possess the capacity to differentiate

between regular classroom practice and what requires an urgent response. Veteran teachers may be well along in their careers and have seen a variety of projects or initiatives come and go depending on who is leading at the school and system level. Sometimes these teachers embrace the project or initiative and other times they wait for it to pass. For Koinonia School Division, the sense of urgency is emerging from all levels, teachers, principals and superintendents. There is a general understanding by stakeholders that students are not able to read and comprehend grade level texts well enough to allow them to be successful once they make the shift, in about grade 3, from learning to read to reading to learn.

Transformational leadership, and its four main tenets, directly affect the measurement and evaluation process in this OIP. The tenets of individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence shape the way that that the leader would consider systems monitoring and program evaluation (Bass, 1995). While there will need to be an overarching, systemic look at success, each school is treated as a microcosm of the whole system. Since leadership is not transactional or driven from the top down, there is some latitude in evaluation and more latitude in the strategies that teachers employ to teach students how to comprehend text.

Individualized consideration focuses on the concern that schools have autonomy to approach the problem of reading comprehension from their own context and perspective. While there are promising practices in pedagogy and the Division has created a Balanced Literacy Support Document (2015) for teachers, there is room for schools to determine how they will best address the problem. For example, one school might rethink their classroom configurations for their literacy blocks so that specific teachers, best able to meet the students' needs, work with

those students rather than maintain discrete grade levels which have students with a range of abilities within them. Another school might have a school-wide structured literacy block where teachers are focusing on a continuum of skills and yet another school might utilize its learning support teachers and educational assistants in ways to maximize the kinds of support that are available to the students.

Intellectual stimulation, a second tenet of transformational leadership, would engage stakeholders in the intellectual process of monitoring and evaluating their progress towards their goals. For teachers this would mean monitoring their progress through their Learning Sprints team conversations, where through the “review” phase teachers, both individually and collectively, would determine whether or not the strategies they employed had the desired impact on student achievement. Through the sprint process, the teachers would have gathered some formative assessment prior to the start of the sprint and again at the end of the sprint. This data collection would then inform the next sprint in terms of the outcome to be taught, and the students who are the target of the sprint. This is an ongoing cycle and there will be a variety of sprints occurring in each school as teachers work collaboratively to determine how best to meet students’ needs.

The Board of Trustees is ultimately responsible for student achievement and as such they engage on a governance level in the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Cycle (Moen & Norman, 2006). The Board operates on a Policy Governance model and as such they have ENDS policies which delineate issues of organizational purpose. These are separated from the MEANS which encompass the daily operations. (Carver, J. & Carver, M., 2016). Through their ENDS policies they direct the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent to manage the day to day operation

of the schools which includes the learning agenda of all the schools. Senior Administration is then tasked with developing or in this case co-constructing a plan with principals and vice principals to improve students' reading comprehension abilities. Appendix E provides a visual of the monitoring process in Koinonia School Division.

Subsequently, senior administration then engages in a PDSA cycle which includes a number of strategies as well as ways to intellectually engage the principals and vice principals in monitoring teachers. There is already a process in place in Koinonia School Division which has a critical friend, a contracted external support person, attached to the schools. Critical friend visits take place quarterly and are used to provide support primarily to principals and school leadership teams whereby the team can openly and frankly talk about their student achievement data and the progress they are making as a school with their reading comprehension goal. These visits provide an additional layer of support, from a highly experienced educational leader without the principals fearing that their possible questions or lack of clarity in next steps would be a part of the evaluation process. Katz, Dack, and Malloy (2018) articulate the need to reflect regularly on small learning moves in order to determine both its impact and the move that will occur next in the sequence. Having a critical friend is one way that school teams are able to talk through their next learning move in a safe, supportive environment.

As the Assistant Superintendent, I make regular visits, about every six weeks, to each school as part of a school review process. I examine student data and request updates and analysis from schools on a regular basis. I encourage teams to share their observations with me in between visits and some principals send "good news stories" by email as they happen in their schools. These good news stories are another source of data collection because as students are

increasingly successful, the stories provide inspiration for school teams, they share them with each other at principals' meetings (Leadership Council) and inspire the Board to continue with their strategic direction.

The monitoring cycles at the classroom level begins with the collection of reading comprehension data at the start of the school year. Although the Fountas and Pinnell Baseline Assessment (Fountas & Pinnell Literacy, 2019) and the Scholastic Online Assessment of Reading (Scholastic Canada, 2009) measure different aspects of reading comprehension, they serve the broader purpose of teachers being able to gain an understanding of the students in their classroom and the assessment results allow teachers to group students together for the purpose of individualized or small group instruction. Students who are identified by these assessments as reading two or more grade levels below their grade level can be recommended for further assessment and specific reading interventions to support their own capacity to grow as readers, not to remove the importance of continuing to teach students how to read and comprehend text with specific strategies. One of the challenges that remains in schools is using support personnel, like Educational Assistants, to read to students or for students rather than teaching the students how to read and comprehend text themselves.

An important stakeholder group in the monitoring process is the students. They have often been excluded from the improvement process although they are the ones that are ultimately going to need to do much of the hard work. Through classroom observations and walk-throughs, I expect conversations with students will begin to change. Currently, when I ask some students the question, "What are you learning today?" they are not consistently able to articulate what they are learning in any given classroom. By implementing this organizational improvement

plan, and placing emphasis on students' abilities to read and comprehend text, the students' ability to articulate the specific learning outcome that they are working on should also be an indicator of success.

Parents, as stakeholders, also play a role in monitoring because they are involved in their children's education. Parents need information to be able to support their children specifically with reading comprehension. Many regions of Koinonia School Division are in low socio-economic areas and parents are either busy working to generate enough income for their families or they are supporting their families while one spouse works away from home to support the family. The school system can not expect parents to do the instruction but it is helpful when parents can read to their children and listen to their children read as part of a daily routine. If that time can be spent engaging in reading as a joyful past time, then it will support the children in recognizing that reading is an important part of life and not something which is relegated to a chore or something to be endured.

**Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Cycle.** When connecting this OIP with the Plan, Do, Study Act (PDSA) cycle (Moen & Norman, 2006), one of the first steps on the macro level in the planning stage is to gain an understanding of the organization's readiness to proceed with a change initiative. Although it is not necessary to achieve complete readiness, there does need to be a critical mass of people who are willing to embrace the change process. In the case of Koinonia School Division (KSD), principals and teachers, will use their school-based data to determine which students are underperforming and struggling with success which may be attributed to low or limited abilities to read grade level text. While there is a macro, systems-

level change initiative, there are much smaller, school-based initiatives that are concurrently taking place to effect change for students.

At the micro or school level, principals are looking at how the students in their schools are faring in reading comprehension as that relates to growth and achievement. They are examining report card data, Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System data (grades 1-8) (Fountas and Pinnell Literacy, 2019), Scholastic Online Assessment of Reading (SOAR) (Scholastic Canada, 2009) data (grades 5-12) as well as anecdotal evidence from teachers at team meetings. Teachers are focusing on the students in their classrooms as they are working to help each child to make progress towards grade level outcomes. They are looking at their classroom assessments including Fountas and Pinnell data, SOAR data and using their professional judgement to determine students' growth and achievement over the course of the school year. One of the significant challenges is the lack of provincial grade level benchmarks and the lack of a consistent understanding of what "grade level reading comprehension" means. Even within a school, teachers do not necessarily have a common understanding and therefore report card data becomes less reliable in the eyes of school and system leaders. The need for triangulation and developing a common understanding of grade level reading outcomes among teachers and between schools is increasingly important in a time of greater accountability and with a less than positive perception of the value of public education.

At the micro level, each school needs to work within a Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle (Moen & Norman, 2006) or as in the work of Breakspear (2019) a Learning Sprints cycle of Prepare, Sprint, Review. Once teachers have their students' data organized in class profiles, they can then prepare a learning sprint by determining which outcomes the teacher will be teaching next,

which students will be the focus of the sprint, and which measure they will use to determine whether or not the sprint was successful. If after a three to six-week period, the sprint was successful because the students mastered the learning outcome then the teacher would review the classroom evidence and engage in another iteration of the Prepare, Sprint, Review process. This would continue until the end of the year and as students gain success, different students may become the focus of the sprint or the focus of the sprint itself changes focus to a different learning outcome. As previously highlighted, Appendix D provides a summary of the process.

While there is an understanding that students' reading comprehension abilities is a problem, there is also a lack of understanding by teachers and principals about how to improve the situation. Factors such as poverty, transiency and high numbers of students in care remain significant challenges for schools. Principals will gather their school's reading comprehension data, compile it and do some analysis to make statements as to how the students in their school are progressing towards grade level reading comprehension outcomes. The initial data collection will provide evidence that this problem requires focused, systemic attention. In one community where the students' Early Development Instrument (EDI) data shows that students are consistently ready for grade one; their school's reading data is quite good. They will be able to shine the light on particular students who required additional support and on students whose programming could be enriched because they came into Kindergarten with basic literacy skills. Overall though, this data collection and analysis provides baseline data from which to begin the strategy development to lead to students' improvement in reading comprehension.

Following the initial data collection and analysis at the school level, teachers and principals must determine their own next steps to be able to support the children. Schools will be



allocated school funds so they can bring in substitute teachers while they engage in class review meetings with the principal and the school-based learning support teacher. They may also engage the Divisional Literacy Support Teacher if they would like or require additional assistance.

The primary tools for data collection will include report card data for grades 1-12. Grades 1-8 have a report card category specific to reading comprehension and in high school it is the English Language Arts marks. Given that there is a broad understanding of what constitutes a 1-4 on the report card for reading comprehension, Fountas and Pinnell Baseline Assessment (Fountas and Pinnell Literacy, 2019) data and Scholastic Online Assessment of Reading (SOAR) (Scholastic Canada, 2009) data will also be collected. Additionally, provincial assessment data for reading comprehension at grades three and eight will also be collected. Through these baseline and formative assessments, it should become possible to draw conclusions about which students and what percentage of students are meeting grade level expectations as well as experiencing growth in reading comprehension. This data will be collated by me as the Assistant Superintendent on a divisional spreadsheet for all the students in the school division. Given that the entire school division population is around 1100 students, this is feasible using an excel spreadsheet. The school-based data will then be shared back with schools as well as the Divisional Literacy Support Teacher and the Board of Trustees to determine Divisional next steps as well as ongoing resource allocations to schools and classrooms.

### **Communicate the Need for Change**

Communication is a critical element of any change process and having a clear, well thought out communication plan is necessary to move the change forward. A well-defined communication plan ensures that stakeholders not only have an opportunity to receive a consistent message but also have a chance to share information and celebrations with leadership.

It is that two-way communication that is critical to the success of a change process. The communication plan for this OIP focuses on the needs of the stakeholder groups for information, dialogue, input, understanding the evidence and celebrating successes. Caldwell, Chatman, O'Reilly III, Ormiston, and Lapiz (2008), note in their recommendations that a change process requires the commitment of its change participants and one way to achieve this is through “direct, relentless communication” (p. 132). When stakeholders are clear on the expectations and understand what is required of them, there is a greater chance of them being actively engaged in the change process.

This problem of practice is essentially one of ensuring equity and social justice and the desire to educate every child. Low literacy skills continue to be a barrier for people as they enter the workforce and are forced into low paying jobs with no opportunities for improvement. Being able to read and think critically are but two of the aims of public education. In a recent opinion article, Wiens (2019) reminds people that, “If we are true to the original purposes of public schools, our children and young people will have achieved the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for democratic citizen participation when they graduate or leave” (p. A13).

Building trust with the team and gauging readiness for change are paramount to the process. For Koinonia School Division there was an appetite for change in large part because of past successes. Principals and vice principals enjoy a collaborative, consultative working relationship with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent which translates through the school-based administrators to the schools themselves. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) note that principals who demonstrate authenticity and work collaboratively with staff on matters relating to instructional practices and student achievement are more likely to have staff who work together to examine instructional practices and problem solve. Drago-Severson and Blum-

DeStefano (2018) point out that when leaders drop the “leader mask” they allow staff to take a legitimate part in planning and finding solutions to school-wide problems (p. 56). Continuing to nurture these trusting relationships, together with a comprehensive communication plan is important to the ongoing success of increasing teacher capacity to support all students.

Communication is necessary to ensure that people are aware of the vision that has been co-constructed by the school division, to provide clarity and define roles, as well as to nurture a culture of expectation and invitation. Engaging the various stakeholders within the system will support communication of a consistent message to all stakeholders. Reeves (2009) notes that the role of hierarchy in communication may result in the message being lost as it is communicated throughout the system. Although information may have been communicated, it may not always be heard and understood by all of the people.

**Communication and the board of trustees.** The problem of practice is consistent across stakeholder groups however, the information requirements of each group is different. For the Board of Trustees, it is a problem that falls under the purview of their governance and as such, they seek to provide a message to stakeholders including parents and staff that literacy is important to them as the governing body of a school division. Having already been engaged in the co-construction of the vision and directing the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent to enact the vision and make it come alive in schools, trustees require high level communication. Some of the questions that trustees might ask are: How are students doing in relation to grade level outcomes? Knowing that reading at grade level by the end of grade three is a marker for future success in graduation, how do Koinonia School Division’s grade three children measure up next to that indicator? What are we doing to help the students who are struggling? How do we

support students who are already reading at grade level? Do students have an opportunity to have enrichment? As part of the Board's governance model, Trustees are concerned with their ENDS Policies which includes:

ENDS Policy E - 2.2 All students will have opportunities to achieve their utmost potential in the areas of:

- a) Literacy
- b) Numeracy
- c) Technology
- d) Problem-solving
- e) Critical thinking
- f) Accessing information

(Koinonia School Division, ENDS Policy document, 2010)

In the initial year of implementation, the Board would receive communication in fall that would contain summary baseline reading data according to grade levels. The data would be disaggregated to show evidence of how specific groups are faring as compared to other groups such as boys, girls, self-declared Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. Some caution is required to ensure that the communication and the information provided remain at a high level to allow for governance decision-making and direction setting without devolving into management's jurisdiction. Ultimately, I want to be able to make statements to the Board, based on evidence that students in Koinonia School Division are improving in grade level reading comprehension outcomes.

By the third year of this improvement plan, we will be able to take, for example, the grade 1 cohort of children and map their growth through grades 1-3. Having the ability to communicate in this way will provide the Board with the necessary evidence to inform their decisions at budget time and will allow the School Division to put resources in the places where the evidence suggests that students would benefit from an additional classroom teacher or learning support teacher time. It may also inform the need for professional development that will be required in certain areas of the school division and where we need to support whole-system learning. The Board would continue to receive informal communication at two or three points during the school year as part of the Superintendents' report and then receive a more formal report in June with a complete data analysis.

Another level of communication with the Board will be school presentations which occur monthly as a regular part of the Board's meeting schedule. Each school will have an opportunity to present once during the year. Schools will be asked to narrow the focus of their presentation from an overall progress report in meeting their school's goals to a specific focus on how they are meeting their students' needs in reading comprehension. Presentations may involve teachers, students, analysis of various data sources and video. The presentations and the opportunity for dialogue between trustees, principals and school staff allow the Board to see how the vision and change plan are brought to life within each context. It is the school personnel who are able to tell the stories of their students' and teachers' journeys through evolving reading instruction and successes that will be indicators for the Board of the overall success of this OIP. Trustees and the principals can have a conversation and answer questions related to implementation, access to professional development and resources without going through senior administration. Since the Board has been stable in the last two terms with only one seat changing in that time, there has

been time to develop positive relationships between trustees and principals so they will be able to share information sensitively but honestly.

**Communication with schools.** Principals and vice principals are the communication hub for information that comes from the Division and for information that goes to teachers and vice versa. The school leaders are the ones who need to share the key points of the plan and articulate the roll out to the staff in their schools. The Division has placed some pins in the map in terms of data collection points in the fall and the spring but it is up to the schools, with support to determine how to go about making the improvements.

Bolman and Deal (2013) note a need to map a political terrain and identify “channels of informal communication” (p. 211). School visits by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent are planned occurrences and agendas are co-constructed and circulated well in advance of those meetings. As these visits always include a tour of classrooms, this could become an opportunity to observe the strategies employed by teachers and then communicate observations with teachers and with the school administration. Communication at the school level is paramount to the success of this organizational improvement plan. If principals and vice principals feel that they do not have autonomy over decisions that are best for their students, staff and school communities then any proposed change model will be held up at that point in time because communication with teachers and the engagement of teachers in the process will be sabotaged.

Principals and vice principals will be involved in co-constructing the vision and then contextualizing the strategies for their own schools. Some strategies such as the use of Fountas and Pinnell Baseline Assessment System (Fountas and Pinnell Literacy, 2019) and the Scholastic

Online Assessment of Reading (Scholastic Canada, 2009) are intended to be implemented division-wide, while other strategies, specifically pedagogical and organizational approaches are locally determined by school teams. Thus, communication needs to be both from divisional and school-based perspectives. For example, it is important that I communicate directly to teachers the purpose of division-wide assessments which is not to label students with a letter or a numerical score, rather it is to inform next steps in teaching for the classroom teacher and for teacher teams who are providing intervention and enrichment to students. Direct communication from the Assistant Superintendent will be to principals through regular Leadership Council meetings as well as school visits. The principals then in turn take the responsibility to share the message with teachers and staff as well as their parent community. They are keenly aware of and deeply understand their contexts and know best how to communicate any necessary information.

Occasionally, due to the small size of the school division, teachers may communicate directly with me and as a transformational leader, it is appropriate to encourage this interaction. It is also necessary that principals are aware of this communication occurrence and while there may be direct communication between the Assistant Superintendent and the teacher, this is not to circumnavigate the principals who are able to address any concerns at the school level. According to Men (2014), “Leaders who clearly and persuasively communicate a vision gain the confidence of followers” (p. 258).

Followers will be engaged through the transformational practice of intellectual stimulation and supporting teachers to engage with practice that differs from their current practice but may be a better approach for their current students in their classrooms. Teachers will

also be supported in gaining the knowledge and expertise required to try new pedagogies for teaching reading.

Klein (1999) notes there are several strategies to engage in effective communication during a change process several of which include repeating the message and engaging in face to face communication. One of the initial communication strategies in year one of this plan will be a Divisional professional development day devoted to understanding the Division's vision for improving reading comprehension outcomes for students and envisioning appropriate strategies for each school and classroom across the Division. A Divisional day typically begins with an address from the Superintendent and this would focus on communicating the message and inspiring teachers and principals to get on board with the vision. Generally, principals are involved in brainstorming ideas for a Divisional day so they can ensure that they understand the message and can do some prior work with their staff to prepare them for the day. During the planning phase it is opportune to surface any potential resistance from staff and plan the message to target that resistance.

There may be numerous questions from teachers as they gain a deeper understanding of their role in helping students to improve in reading comprehension. Teachers may be asking questions such as: How do I teach reading to students? How do I know what grade level reading looks like? What professional development opportunities are available to help me to learn? One subgroup that has not been a significant part of this OIP is Educational Assistants who may have questions such as: What is my role in supporting the classroom teacher? Has my role changed in the classroom? How do I help students other than reading for them?



**Communication with Parents.** Parents are a large stakeholder group with whom to communicate about their children's learning. Much of the communication between parents and the school is done through the classroom teacher. Parents may have questions of the school and the classroom teacher such as: Where is my child in relation to grade level reading expectations? How do I help my child at home? These questions are best answered directly by the classroom teacher possibly with support from the school-based learning support teacher. Parent-teacher-student conferences provide an opportunity for direct communication between parents and the school about their child's progress towards grade level outcomes. Some schools also choose to have information evenings for parents where they engage with the Divisional Literacy Support Teacher and plan an after school event designed to support parents with strategies to use at home to support reading. The desire is never to have the parents do the work of the teacher but have them support their children at home. Some schools may choose to host book fairs or create lending libraries to support general literacy practices between home and school.

**Communication with additional stakeholders.** There are two additional stakeholder groups that factor into a Divisional change initiative communication plan and those are the local teachers' association president and students. The teachers' association president is part of the Divisional Leadership Council and as such has an opportunity to provide input into any change plan as well as considerations for professional learning opportunities that may be important for teachers. The Division currently enjoys a positive working relationship with the Teachers' Association and ongoing, open, transparent communication will continue to be important as the plan unfolds into action.

Students are another important stakeholder group and they need to receive a clear message from their teachers that reading is really important in our schools. To improve at reading students must practice and their teachers and educational assistants are there to provide assistance. It is also important that students are clear on the purpose of assessments that are being done and that the results are shared with students along with next steps. At a recent Provincial Student Leadership Forum held on February 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019 high school students were asked to reflect on the changes they wished to see in education. One comment that appeared in their notes was the importance of two-way communication between students and their teachers. They commented that rather than parent-teacher conferences, teachers should have time for regular check-ins with students as frequently as every two weeks (Student Leadership Forum notes, 2019). This comment speaks to the ongoing need to include students and invite students to have a legitimate voice in their learning.

There are multiple stakeholder groups and all of them are important when creating a communication plan for Koinonia School Division's vision to improve reading comprehension outcomes for students. As Men (2014) noted, "Transformational leaders convey a strong sense of purpose and collective mission and motivate employees by communicating inspirational vision and high performance expectations. This form of leadership creates an emotional attachment between leaders and followers" (p. 259). For this change initiative to be successful, there needs to be clarity of communication and opportunities for all stakeholders to engage in conversation, be able to challenge the plan respectfully and find entry points within the plan so that they can feel supported in making the changes to support increased student learning.

### **Future Considerations and Next Steps**

As the Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) moves through year one and into the second year and beyond, consideration needs to be given to sustainability and embedding the Learning Sprints cycle into regular practice at the school and classroom levels. As teachers hone their pedagogical skills and become increasingly skilled at targeting their instruction to specific students' learning needs, then it stands to reason that the sprints cycles will become crisper and more focused over time.

There will be a need to continue to celebrate the efforts of students, teachers, principals and vice principals as the experience increasing success throughout the change process. The Board of Trustees can look forward to celebrating increased student achievement at future graduation ceremonies and other public events.

A significant consideration will be to ensure that processes are embedded as staff continue to turn over at a rate of about ten percent per year. As enrollment continues to decline slightly and shift from one community to the next, teachers and principals may find themselves moving to other schools in the school division as schools need to reduce or increase staffing to accommodate enrollment shifts. Having a Divisional culture that focuses on improving reading comprehension for all students and having common assessment tools will support personnel as they make employment shifts to other schools.

A future consideration will be to examine the role of high school teachers and how they engage students in content area literacy. There is a need for further professional development in this area and some promising practice has been found in the work of Shoenbach, Greenleaf and Murphy (2012) on Reading Apprenticeship. Reading is not done in isolation of the other areas in

English or English Language Arts and more work needs to continue on the connections between reading and writing as students develop their skills. There is also opportunity to examine the importance of oral language and the role that it plays in the early years' classroom, especially in Kindergarten and grade 1 as students work to develop their pre-reading skills.

### **Conclusion**

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) is one with a strong focus on leadership in the system, school and classroom to improve reading comprehension outcomes for all children within Koinonia School Division. The foundational work, prior to year one of implementation focused on ensuring that stakeholders were a part of the visioning process and then have a firm understanding of how that vision needs to be achieved within the school and classroom levels. The Board was engaged early in the process and used Koinonia School Division's data on Provincial assessments as compared to the Provincial results as one impetus for change. An additional impetus for change was high school graduation rates and the understanding that low graduation rates were related to students' abilities to read and comprehend text at high levels.

Also, in the time prior to year one of the implementation plan, principals and vice principals were engaged in thinking about their own school's readiness to embark on a change initiative and their role in leading the change within the context of their own schools. School leadership teams considered the strengths of their teachers, the skills, years of experience and current level of engagement in teaching reading and began to consider and plan for how they would enact this change process within the school. They engaged their teachers as well as their community of parents and guardians in talking about the importance of all children being able to

read at grade level. They also began looking at research that connected reading by the end of grade three to future success in high school.

Year one of the implementation plan focused specifically on gathering baseline reading data for all children in grades 1-12, creating classroom profiles and then determining how to effectively teach children who were reading significantly below grade level. It is one thing to gather the data and complete the analysis but it cannot be left at that stage, and not go a further step to supporting those children to make significant gains in their reading comprehension skills.

Although much emphasis in year one of the implementation plan is on grades 1-8, further consideration must be given to high school teachers in improving their pedagogy as it relates to reading comprehension in content area disciplines. High school teachers need to focus on content area vocabulary and comprehension strategies that would enable students to access a variety of texts in a variety of disciplinary areas. Being taught by a disciplinary specialist becomes even more critical at the high school level because those specialists have a depth of understanding of their content that is unmatched by those who are not as well versed in a particular subject area. One area that continues to be a systemic travesty is the use of support personnel to read to high school children which, although an acceptable adaptation and a way for students to access content, it does not support students' independence and capacity building as they move toward graduation. At some point, it is necessary to find time in the structure of the school day to support children in building the necessary reading comprehension skills to foster their independence as learners within the school system as they work toward the goal of graduation. It is also necessary so that they are independent outside of the school system without those supports in place.

A final challenge moving ahead is the current, ongoing political climate within the province. While the province engages stakeholders in a review of the educational system, it falls to system leaders, Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents, to maintain a clear focus on student achievement toward curricular goals and student growth in learning. An unwavering focus on principal leadership, teacher pedagogy and student learning will create a system where all students can achieve.

This journey has been both deeply personal and intensely public. As I move to a new organization, I have taken pieces of my learning and implemented ideas and processes with a new group of principals and vice principals which has enabled them to join me in this learning. The learning that I take to a new organization is a level of scholarship and expertise that allows me to work within a new system to support student achievement.

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### Appendix A

#### Change Readiness Continuum Rubric

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Ready</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Not Ready</b>
<b>History</b>	Views previous changes as positive and generally successful.	Has no experience with previous change. Views previous change as having insignificant effect on group.	Views previous change as generally unsuccessful. Has negative experience.
<b>Need for Change</b>	Recognizes that present conditions are unacceptable and that change is required at this time if progress is to be made.	Realizes that things could be better but is not completely dissatisfied with things as they are.	Does not view present condition as so negative or troublesome that this change is required. May see need for others to change but not self.
<b>Willingness to Change</b>	Is willing to make difficult choices (personal and group) to bring about change. Is willing to accept that change will be difficult, possibly with a long period of discomfort.	Will change if the change does not require a significant inconvenience to group.	Sees no need to change. Is resistant to doing anything significantly different that may create discomfort for group.
<b>Faith in Leadership</b>	Believes that the current leaders have the ability to accomplish the change.	Has no strong opinions toward leadership either positive or negative due to past experience or lack of knowledge.	Is negative toward current leaders' capabilities and/ or motives in general. Doesn't believe leaders can accomplish the change.
<b>Change Plan</b>	Has a good understanding of the vision for the future associated with the change plan. Believes that the change plan, as presented, has	Does not have a clear understanding of the vision for the future associated with the change plan. Has doubts about major components	Does not agree with the vision of the future after the change. Does not believe the change plan, as presented, is necessary or has the

	the potential to achieve the goal(s).	of the change plan as the right approach to achieve the goal(s).	potential to achieve the goal(s).
<b>Skills Necessary to Implement</b>	Believes the group represented has the knowledge and/or skills necessary to implement the plan.	Believes the group has some of the knowledge and/or skills necessary to implement the plan and believes that many of those who do not will be able to acquire the knowledge and/or skills.	Has serious doubts that the group represented has the knowledge and/or skills necessary to successfully implement the plan and doubts that most members of the group can acquire the knowledge and/or

From: Reeves, D. (2009). *Leading change in your school: How to conquer myths, build commitment, and get results*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, p. 160.

**Appendix B**

Readiness for change

Change Initiative \_\_\_\_\_ to improve student learning outcomes.

Reason for Change → Staff Member ↓	They want to (they value the change)	They have to (they have little choice)	They ought to (they feel obliged)

Adapted from: Weiner, B. J. (2009). A theory of organizational readiness for change.

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### Appendix C

#### Kotter's 8-Step Change Process and Koinonia School Division (KSD)

<b>Kotter's 8-Step Change Process</b>	<b>Koinonia School Division (KSD)</b>
1. Establish a sense of urgency	School Division data, reviewed by the Leadership Team (senior administration, principals and vice principals), shows that not enough students are meeting grade level expectations in reading comprehension.
2. Form a powerful guiding coalition	The Leadership Team (senior administration, principals and vice principals) are the coalition.
3. Create a vision	The vision was co-constructed with the Board of Trustees and the Leadership Team.
4. Communicate a vision	This was communicated to all teaching staff through principals and vice principals via the Superintendent.
5. Empower others to act on the vision	School teams have autonomy to choose strategies that will support improved student achievement outcomes for students. A Balanced Literacy Support Document was created to shape and define quality literacy instruction as well as provide some expectations for teachers and principals.
6. Create short term wins	Using the Learning Sprints process (Breakspear, 2019), classroom teachers will determine their next learning outcome, related to reading instruction, focus on a targeted group of children and engage in the strategy for a short burst of time. The principal or vice principal will support implementation and the monitoring of the strategy. Following a 3-6-week period, the teacher will determine the success as it relates to student achievement. This process then repeats indefinitely.
7. Consolidate more improvements and create more change	High leverage, research informed strategies are shared among staff and the improvement cycle continues.
8. Institutionalize new approaches	High leverage strategies are embedded in classroom practice.

### Appendix D

#### Implementation Plan – Year 1

Supporting Principals to work with teachers to improve students' abilities to read and comprehend grade level text.

Action Plan	Purpose	People Involved	Timeline
<p>The Superintendents' team will spend time at the August Leadership Meeting reviewing the two divisional goals around reading comprehension.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By the end of the school year all students will be reading and comprehending grade level text.</li> <li>2. By the end of the school year all students will have improved at least one year in their reading comprehension skills.</li> </ol>	<p>To review the divisional and school plans as they pertain to improving students' reading comprehension.</p> <p>To review the strategies and timelines that have been outlined in the plans.</p>	<p>Superintendents, principals, vice principals and the literacy lead teacher</p>	<p>August</p>
<p>The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent will review the divisional reading comprehension goals with the Board of Trustees. They will also review the action plan and the communication plan with the Board.</p>	<p>To ensure that the Board of Trustees has an understanding of the work at a governance level.</p>	<p>Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent</p>	<p>August</p>



<p>Principals will review the two divisional goals as outlined above with the teachers in their school. This will be done prior to the <i>Strong Beginnings</i> student assessment period in September. Principals will also review the strategies in their school plans with the teachers.</p>	<p>To ensure there is a clear understanding of the goals among the teaching staff and to ensure that teachers have a common understanding of the strategies that make up the school plan.</p>	<p>Principal and teaching staff</p>	<p>September</p>
<p>During <i>Strong Beginnings</i> teachers will assess all students to determine their beginning of the year reading comprehension skills. Following the assessment, classroom teachers will analyse the student data, they will establish a class profile to inform next steps in teaching as well as the supports that may be required for students to be successful.</p>	<p>To determine students' individual reading levels.</p> <p>To determine how to group students to maximize classroom learning opportunities.</p> <p>To inform next steps in teaching the students.</p>	<p>Teachers</p>	<p>September</p>
<p>Class review/grade level review meetings</p>	<p>To share information and collectively determine some next steps for students who may require additional supports. To determine supports for students who may require enrichment to their programming.</p>	<p>Principal and student support team. This may also involve divisional support personnel as applicable.</p>	<p>September/October (as early in the school year as possible)</p>
<p>Data is shared with the Assistant Superintendent</p>	<p>To create a divisional profile.</p>	<p>Assistant Superintendent/ Literacy Lead Teacher</p>	<p>October</p>

	To begin to inform dollar allocations for professional learning. To inform conversations during school visits.		
Teachers/School teams engage in learning sprints	To practice specific strategies on specific students for short periods of time. ( <a href="http://www.learningsprints.com">www.learningsprints.com</a> )	Teachers	October/November and ongoing
Teachers review evidence of learning	To determine the impact of the teaching strategy on the selected students	Teacher/Learning teams	October/November and ongoing
Repeat the process of the learning sprints (prepare, review/gather baseline data/practice a new teaching strategy/assess the impact of the strategy on the students with an assessment tool).	To continue to improve teachers' pedagogical practice.	Principal/Teacher /Learning teams	November to June
Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent review the data around students' growth in overall reading comprehension as well data about the students' growth over the school year.	To check if the students have made gains over a school year against the two divisional goals. To allow for an adjustment of strategies and potentially for a shift in supports as necessary so all students can be successful.	Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent	Fall and Spring each year

**Appendix E**

Monitoring the change in Koinonia School Division

**Board of Trustees**  
 Monitoring Reports from the Assistant Superintendent in the spring and fall to present divisional reading comprehension data. Included will be grade level reports and disaggregated data (M/F, Self-Declared Indigenous) Reports will use report card data, Fountas and Pinnell and SOAR data.

**Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent**  
 Monthly school visits in every school  
 Review school level data (Fountas and Pinnell, SOAR, classroom observations and conversations with Principals/Vice Principals)  
 Review other school level data  
 Ensure schools are adequately resourced (human resources and supplies)

**Principals and Vice Principals**  
 Supports classroom teachers, reviews report card and Provincial Assessment data (grades 3 and 8)  
 Meets monthly with and Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent

**Literacy Support Teacher (Divisional)**  
 Reports to Assistant Superintendent  
 Supports classroom teachers with literacy instruction.  
 Reviews classroom data as part of the support process.

**Classroom Teachers and Learning Support Teachers (School-Based)**  
 Report to Principals and Vice Principals  
 Assess students, gather and analyse reading comprehension data, plan next steps in instruction and review.  
 Meet as part of a larger school team to review data and plan instructional moves.

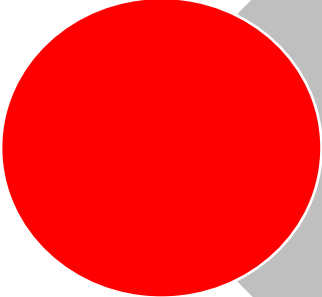
**Parents/Guardians**  
 Support their children at home with daily reading  
 Confer with teachers as necessary.  
 Review report card data, classroom assessments with their child and their child's teacher.

**Students**  
 Actively engage in classroom work and assessments and have conversations with their teachers about their next learning goals and strategies to achieve them.

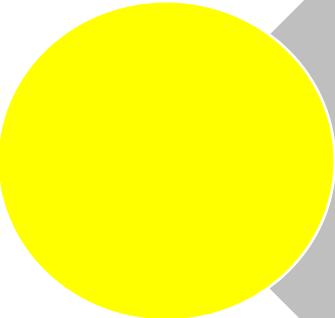
Please note: this is not an Organizational Chart for Koinonia School Division.



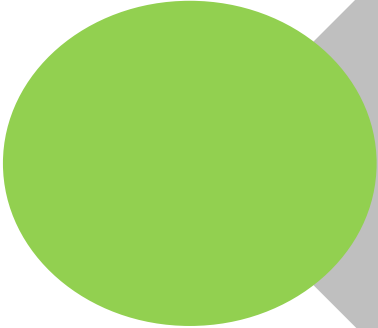
**Appendix G**



**Students reading two + grade levels below**  
Next teaching moves based on evidence.



**Students reading one grade level below**  
Next teaching moves based on evidence.



**Students reading at or above grade level**  
Next teaching moves based on evidence.

How long will I try these moves?

How will I know if these moves had the desired impact on student learning? (assessment)