

Optimum Learning for All Students
Implementation of Alberta's 2018 Professional Practice Standards
A Literature Synthesis

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Chapter One

THREE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE STANDARDS: A WATERSHED MOMENT

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Three Professional Practice Standards: A Watershed Moment

February 7, 2018 marked a watershed moment for excellence in Alberta's education system (Himpe, 2018). On that day, Minister of Education, the Honourable David Eggen, signed to Ministerial Order three professional practice standards (Government of Alberta, 2019), reaffirming a mandate to serve all children and youth, and codifying an "ongoing commitment to learning demonstrated by teachers, school leaders, school jurisdiction leaders, and superintendents" (para. 1). The existing *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS) has been updated for the first time in twenty years to reflect contemporary social conditions and our evolving understanding of effective teaching. New to the profession, the *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS) and the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* (SLQS) complete the trilogy. The LQS and SLQS describe the competencies expected of all school and school jurisdiction leaders, and school superintendents, respectively.

These professional practice standards bring to fruition the aspirations of *Every Child Learns. Every Child Succeeds*, the final report and recommendations submitted in 2003 to what was then Alberta Learning by Alberta's Commission on Learning. Whereas the TQS has already been in play for Alberta teachers, recommendations for a "quality practice standard...for principals" (Alberta Learning, 2003, p. 122) resulting in "professional certification" (p. 123), and a "targeted program...for preparing superintendents" (p. 127) have been in waiting. More than one iteration of leadership competencies has been proposed since that report, however. Prior to the Ministerial Order these had been taken up, as Bedard and Mombourquette (2016) put it, as "a not yet official policy" (p. 2). Among the variations, the *Alberta School Leadership Framework* of 2005 (Mombourquette, 2013) and the *Principal Quality Practice Guidelines* of 2009 (Bedard & Mombourquette) have served as orienting devices for some school authorities across the province. And, outside of Alberta, the previous "unofficial" leadership framework has been legitimated through scholarly scrutiny (e.g.

Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019), the three professional practice standards that will come into force this September mandate the competencies and create uniform expectations for excellence among all professionals. By this Order, all teaching professionals in Alberta public school authorities are “accountable for their applicable standard to the Minister” (Government of Alberta, 2019, para. 8). Tying these professional practice standards together is student learning; student learning is the *raison d’être* for what happens not only in the classroom, but at the school and system levels. How these standards unfold, what difference this makes to teaching, and in what ways principals and superintendents become the “learning-centered leaders” (Murphy, 2017, p. 6) that educational standards intend is our concern in this research study. The following synthesis is thus positioned.

The Goals of this Literature Synthesis: Covering the Waterfront

Our ambition in this longitudinal mixed methods study is to gain insights into how and how well the three standards are being put into place, how the standards are impacting practice, and what changes occur over time in teaching and learning. Indeed, our longitudinal design is premised on “uncovering sustained changes and implementation success” (Derrington, 2019, p. 8). Given this, our goals in preparing this manuscript were to (a) synthesize scholarship on policy processes so that we can situate our inquiry into the standards in a process-oriented way; (b) provide a jurisdictional review of standards-based approaches to teaching and leadership and what we know to be effective with respect to this approach so that we can discern how Alberta’s standards and pathways to certification are positioned compared to others who have gone before us; and (c) synthesize scholarship that demonstrates the link between the professional practice standards and quality teaching and leadership so that we are anchored to evidence when interpreting the forthcoming empirical data. Considering the comprehensiveness of the professional practice standards, we covered

the waterfront, so to speak. But though we plumbed many strands and sources of knowledge, we do not claim it to be exhaustive or necessarily complete.

Parameters for the Research Synthesis

Onowuegbuzie, Leech, and Collins (2011) argue that literature is but one source of information for grounding a study. We partially borrowed from their four-part innovative framework of documents, images, talk and observation to complete our task. While text was our predominant source, we included talk, diagram, and observation in limited fashion because we wanted to provide a narrative of what is known (Baumeister, 2013). Further, some information necessary with respect to standards was not available as an archive, and we felt it was necessary to complete our understanding. Thus, we took up Hart's (2018) poetic description of releasing our research imagination to incorporate peer reviewed empirical studies, theoretical works, meta-syntheses, literature reviews, commissioned studies, grey literature such as professional publications, policies and leadership programs, organizational documents, and, in a small way, information from conversation and interaction with key informants. Given the scope and nature of works consulted, we concur with Onowuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins' argument that research *synthesis* is a more apt description than literature *review*.

As a research team, we agreed to focus primarily on scholarship published within the past ten years in national and international venues. This time frame is coterminous with when the precursor to the LQS and SLQS, the *Principal Quality Practice Guidelines* of 2009 (Bedard & Mombourquette, 2016), entered educational discourse in Alberta. We assumed examining the state of the field following that year would lead to a valuable update. License was taken to include scholarship outside of this boundary, however, if it was appraised to be foundational for the topic. Robinson (2010), for example, has been instrumental in providing

statistical evidence for principals' impact on student learning. Though dated, her work stands virtually alone in providing a quantitative premise for leadership development.

Electronic subject-based databases and other web-based sources and search engines (e.g. Google Scholar) were used to launch key word searches. We used Boolean operators and other truncations for advanced searching of synonyms and alternatives (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010). We reserve specific descriptions of the search strategies for each section; we deemed this positioning most user-friendly considering the range of topics that were pursued.

To organize our synthesis, we begin with the end in mind: optimum learning. Optimum learning is both the organizing principle for and intended outcome of each of the three professional practice standards. Thus, we first synthesize our findings regarding a conceptualization of this term. Then we synthesize research on policy implementation and enactment. Following that, we provide a review of a jurisdictional scan of select educational systems that have adopted a standards-based approach for teachers, school leaders, and system leaders. This is followed by a section focused on implementation of standards, with a central focus on outlining elements of effective leadership development approaches. The final section synthesizes research that captures quality teaching and school and system leadership practices that contribute to student learning. Ending this way brings the synthesis full circle to the reason why these standards have been introduced.