

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

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**Chapter Four**

**WHO USES A STANDARDS-BASED APPROACH TO IMPROVING  
PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE, AND WHY?**

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## **Who Uses a Standards-based Approach to Improving Professional Practice, and Why?**

Countries around the world identify standards of practice for teachers and leaders, varying from complex and specific expectations to more generalized guidelines. Likewise, jurisdictions identify a variety of purposes served through the implementation of these standards, including accreditation, professional growth, and student learning. This section of our synthesis includes a definition of a standards-based approach supporting effective practice. This is followed by a summary of select examples of national and international jurisdictions that have adopted professional standards, and a discussion of rationales for the existence of teacher, school leader, and system leader standards of practice.

### **Review Methods**

Websites of ministries and departments of education were the primary resource used to inform this national and international synthesis. Once accessed, various search terms were used: “professional standards”; “teaching standards”; leadership standards”, “competencies”, and “performance indicators.” We also examined the websites of professional bodies responsible for the creation and/or the implementation of professional standards, if this information was available. By necessity our search was limited to the policies and documents accessible on these websites specifically related to professional teaching and leadership standards. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) website was valuable for locating research and working papers related to professional standards and synopses of OECD member countries’ ministries and departments of education.

### **Definition of a Standards-Based Approach**

An Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Working Paper published by the Centre of Study for Policies and Practices in Education (2013) stated the following about standards regarding teaching and learning:

Standards can be understood as definitions of what someone should know and be able to do to be considered competent in a particular (professional or educational) domain. Standards can be used to describe and communicate what is most worthy or desirable to achieve, what counts as quality learning or as good practice. Standards can also be used as measures or benchmarks, and, thus, as a tool for decision-making, indicating the distance between actual performance and the minimum level of performance required to be considered competent. In other words, standards can be understood as defining the dimensions of performance or the domains of learning that are valued and that are worthy of being promoted, but they can also be used to assess if what is valued is actually being achieved or not. Thus, standards can be used in the sense of a banner or flag and also as a yardstick or as a measuring rod. (p. 14)

Based on the above, standards serve multiple functions that are epistemological, professional, regulatory, evaluative, and philosophical. Writing from the American context, where the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, now the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders [PSEL]) has been in place since 1996, Murphy (2017) is succinct: “[Standards] provide a framework that underscores issues meriting operationalization” (p. 4). For students, standards reflect teachers’ expectations and hopes that students will “do better, learn more, and achieve at a higher level” (Berry, 2018, p. 129). Leadership standards are similarly aspirational in that they define leadership quality in terms of heightened insights, an extensive knowledge and pedagogical base, and deep understanding of human and social

development, to name a few. And while Berry acknowledges such aims as laudable and in line with what we hope schools experience from their leaders, his description of standards is both apt and cautionary: “educational leadership standards are a floor and not a ceiling” (p. 129). Thus, a standards-based approach to teaching and leadership can be described as a jurisdictional framework of competencies to ensure attainment of a minimum level of professional practice (Call, 2018).

Alberta is unique in Canada, and among many education systems internationally, in that all three professional practice documents serve as an umbrella term under which competencies are situated to describe the interrelated sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for teachers. The competencies point to specific aspects of teaching that are developed over time to support student learning. In Alberta, we would say teachers have one standard that describes multiple competencies. In contrast, outside of Alberta and Canada jurisdictions incorporating a standards-based approach to teaching and leading use the term standard to mean a specific metric to guide practice, rather than as an overarching term. What is a standard for others is a competency for Albertans. Some jurisdictions, then, have many standards. For clarity, this literature synthesis will adopt the terminology used most widely: multiple standards for teaching as well as multiple standards for school and system leadership, recognizing that what is described as a standard outside this province most closely correlates with Alberta Education’s definition of a competency.

### **National and International Jurisdictions with Teaching and Leadership Standards**

Citing Sachs (2005), Call (2018) outlines two purposes for teaching standards: developmental and regulatory. A survey of national and international jurisdictions yielded numerous examples of a standards-based approach to teaching and leading, with both developmental and regulatory intentions. We used the terms “teaching standards” and “standards of practice for teachers” to search among Canadian, American, and international

jurisdictions. We reviewed online documents including Ministry and professional organization web pages that turned up from this search. This overview highlights teaching standards, school leadership standards, and system leadership standards in Canada, the United States, and select international countries. In our review we were not only interested in who has standards and what they look like, but we were also interested in identifying whether standards serve a developmental or regulatory function.

### **Standards for Teaching Practice in Canada**

A number of jurisdictions in Canada have what they call “teaching standards” which guide certification processes. British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick have standards for teachers. These standards are separate from the specific competencies that drive teacher education programs in these provinces, although there certainly is overlap. Louden (2000) suggests that in order for teaching standards to have a positive impact, they should be brief, clear, specified according to level and discipline, focused on teaching and learning, and contextualized. The standards we reviewed in the five provinces appear to align with these. The number of standards or competency categories ranges, and Alberta’s TQS scheduled for implementation in September 2019 falls in the middle:

- New Brunswick = 3
- Ontario = 5
- Nova Scotia = 6
- **Alberta = 6**
- British Columbia = 8
- Saskatchewan = 10

New Brunswick’s *21<sup>st</sup> Century Standards of Practice for Beginning Teachers in New Brunswick* (Government of New Brunswick, n.d.), has three global standards, but these are

expanded with a number of indicators suggesting what teachers should know and do. Saskatchewan's *Standards of Practice* (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2017a), however, is comprised of ten global statements, but no indicators are specified. In general, the standards in these provinces capture the broad categories of teacher knowledge and pedagogical skills, attention to student diversity, and habits of mind and values that include reflection, professionalism, lifelong learning, ethics, and collaboration with stakeholders, such as parents.

No Canadian province specifies standards in relation to a discipline or grade level. Rather, standards outline expectations that teachers are committed, post-baccalaureate, to the values and competencies embedded in their teacher preparation. For example, a foundational document from the Department of Education in the province of Nova Scotia describes "what teachers should know and be able to do, from initial certification and throughout all stages of their careers" (Province of Nova Scotia, 2016, p. 2).

Given that student-centered teaching, professional judgement and lifelong learning are common to these standards, we conclude that they primarily serve a developmental purpose. Teaching standards in these Canadian provinces are ultimately focused on teaching excellence so that all students have positive school experiences and learning outcomes. New Brunswick might be interpreted as an exception, for in the preamble to their Department of Education (n.d.) document, it states standards "describe the knowledge, skills, competencies, values and personal commitment expected of *beginning* teachers after having completed a teacher preparation program in order to teach in New Brunswick's inclusive public education system" (emphasis added). Alberta's current TQS is similarly applied; the TQS is used as an evaluation tool for teachers seeking to be promoted from interim to permanent certification, as well as for contract purposes. In a recent review of the *Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy* (1997), Brandon et al. (2018) found "inconsistent application of the

*Teaching Quality Standard* informing Professional Growth Plans” (p. 186). Based on qualitative data collected through focus groups conducted in seven school authorities in that study, early career teachers were most likely to report using the TQS to guide their planning and professional development. Those teachers who had achieved permanent certification reported completing Professional Growth Plans to be compliant, but perceived them to serve “a managerial and accountability function” (p. 187). Furthermore, there was little evidence of teachers specifically documenting how their professional growth planning impacted on student learning. In the revised TQS interim certification has been eliminated. The revised TQS is described as “a framework for the preparation, professional growth, supervision and evaluation of all teachers” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 2). It is a goal of our current study to discern whether and/or how revising the TQS to apply equally to all teachers will lead to changes in how teachers employ it to guide their practice.

### **Standards for Teaching Practice in the United States**

Teaching standards have been in existence in the United States since 1946 when the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards (NCTE/NEA) was created (Call, 2018). As such, teaching practice standards are positioned within a relatively intricate architecture compared to Canada. At the macro level in the United States there are standards related to the accreditation of teacher preparation programs, such as those defined by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (2015). In Alberta the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) (2017) may be considered equivalent as an arms-length body overseeing teacher education programs. But while CAQC is the sole mechanism for ensuring quality in teacher education programs in Alberta, the United States has various instruments for public assurance.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (2019), for example, is teacher-comprised and led, and aims to develop “consensus among educators



about what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do” (para. 2). The National Board uses the language of “core propositions” rather than standards, suggesting developmental aims. Their five core propositions coalesce around foci that align with other states’ teaching practice standards, and are similar to Alberta’s TQS: student learning, knowledge of content and pedagogy, student assessment, reflective practice, and continual learning. Presumably, the core propositions serve to legitimate National Board certification. Teachers interested in National Board certification can choose from 25 certification areas in 16 content areas and four student development levels. This kind of specificity is in keeping with Louden’s (2000) criterion. Given that National Board certification, however, is characterized as the “gold standard” (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2018, p. 1) of “accomplished teaching” (p. 2), this casts it as a professional credential for those who self-assess to be eligible, rather than as a unifying standard. And though the National Board declares its existence is to ensure all teachers achieve at this level, because it is optional and not intended for beginning teachers, it cannot be viewed in the same light as state-entrenched teaching practice standards. Saskatchewan’s teacher accreditation process parallels National Board certification in this way. Certified teachers in Saskatchewan can become accredited after two years of experience that would qualify them for “determin[ing] the final mark or standing of students in specified Grade 12 (level 30) subjects” (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d., para. 1).

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), a national non-partisan body comprised of heads of state education departments, supports ongoing teacher development through its Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) (2013). The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) somewhat parallels this American body in that it includes pan-Canadian representation from departments of education, but CMEC does not play a role in teaching standards. On the other hand, InTASC promotes the Model

Core Teaching Standards, and according to Call (2018), 40 states have adopted these standards. These are the “common core [of] the principles and foundations of teaching practice that cut across all subject areas and grade levels and that all teachers share” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 3).

The CCSSO refers to the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards as policy, although standards are articulated as “progressions” that act as a “support tool for improving instruction” (2013, p. 12). Importantly, the concept of progressions emphasizes development, and the core progressions are set up to guide teachers’ development from “basic competence to more complex teaching practice” (p. 12). Further, the standards set up common language for stakeholders such that the progressions can inform curriculum development for teacher preparation providers; they can be a guide for school leaders whose role is to evaluate teachers and plan for professional development; they can be a reference for policy makers tasked with setting up licensure systems; and teachers themselves can use them as an on-going self-assessment and reflection tool.

When InTASC originated in 1992, the standards applied to beginning teachers only, but today they apply to all career stages. The core teaching standards are informed by research regarding student learning and effective teaching, and student learning is unequivocally identified as the driver. The CCSSO emphasizes that the standards not only serve to create a vision and direction for teaching and learning, but they also define a bar for performance and provide direction for school systems to make decisions about resources required to support teachers. This suggests the standards may be taken up to both regulate the profession and emphasize teachers’ career-long development.

Given education is a state function, it is not surprising that standards are taken up and applied in varying ways across the United States. In Texas, for example, Angelo State University has “crosswalked” the InTASC standards with the National Board for Professional

Teaching Standards (Angelo State University, n.d.). Based on a comparison between this document and the six Texas Teacher Standards, there seems to be considerable alignment.

We also reviewed websites of other states such as California, Oregon, Washington State, and Virginia to gain insight into how standards were positioned. A clear focus on student learning is evident in the standards for teaching practice from California, Oregon, and Virginia. Unique among them is California's connection between professional standards for teachers and leaders, student learning content standards, and professional learning standards that, "establish an outcome for professional learning, increasing educators' capacity to assist students in reaching expected learning outcomes" (California Department of Education, 2018, para. 1). Teaching excellence in California is guided by two standards: *California Standards for the Teaching Profession* and *Quality Professional Learning Standards* (State of California Department of Education, 2018). The standards are described in developmental terms: "The standards are not set forth as regulations to control the specific actions of teachers, but rather to guide teachers as they develop, refine, and extend their practice" (State of California Department of Education, 2012, p. 2). Since these are housed on a web page entitled "Educator Evaluation Systems" it is clear, however, that the standards are used for regulatory purposes. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that development is the central goal for California, as a formative evaluation assessment system is emphasized. For example, teachers are encouraged to be reflective and self-assessing, using items such as the *Continuum of Teaching Practice* as "a tool for self reflection, goal setting, and inquiry into practice" (State of California Department of Education, 2012, p. 2).

Oregon adopted the *Model Core Teaching Standards* (n.d.) drawn up by InTASC. The four broad areas of instructional practice "outline the common principles and foundations of teaching practice necessary to improve student learning that encompass all subject areas and grade levels" (Oregon Department of Education, n.d., p. 1). Within these four categories are

10 standards. The standards are described as “the cornerstone” (Oregon Department of Education, 2018, p. 8) of Oregon’s evaluation system. Like California, Oregon emphasizes that evaluation must be more than summative, and standards are used to support a “growth process” (p. 8). Virginia teachers follow the *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards for Teachers* (2015), which categorizes six performance standards meant to provide a conceptual model for effective teaching, as well as to “establish a foundation upon which all aspects of teacher development from teacher education to induction and ongoing professional development can be aligned” (Virginia Department of Education, n.d., para. 3). Although professional learning is not specifically stated in the seven performance standards, it can be implied. Nonetheless, the Virginia Department of Education explicitly states that the standards are developed in recognition that “the role of a teacher requires a performance evaluation system that acknowledges the complexities of the job” (2015, p. 1). Indeed, the first line of the document is that “teacher evaluation matters because teaching matters” (2015, p. 1). Notably, 40% of a teacher’s evaluation is also based on “student academic progress, as determined by multiple measures of learning and achievement” (Virginia Department of Education, n.d. para. 1).

Despite variation, standards underpin the goals for teacher excellence in the United States. The content of the standards are reportedly based on educational research. It is unsurprising then, that the content has strong resemblance to Alberta’s TQS.

### **Select International Standards for Teaching Practice**

Our international scan considered both OECD and non-OECD countries. Seven Pan-Pacific countries, including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia. Eight additional countries were included in our European scan: Finland, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Germany, England, Ireland, and Scotland. At the time of this search, few

informative online documents were available for South American countries such as Brazil, Argentina, or Venezuela to permit us to make fair interpretations.

Of the Pan-Pacific countries, Hong Kong, Australia, and Singapore have variations of a professional standard for teaching practice. Australia's *Professional Standards for Teachers* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018) outline the elements of high quality, effective teaching in a framework comprised of seven descriptors used to:

recognize [teachers'] current and developing capabilities, professional aspirations, and achievements. [The Standards] could also be used as the basis for a professional accountability model, helping ensure that teachers can demonstrate appropriate levels of professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement. (p. 3)

Hong Kong's *T-standard*<sup>+</sup> (Committee on Professional Development of Teacher and Principals, 2018a) serves as an anchor document for teacher preparation institutions, continuing education and professional development providers, and "other supporting partners" to ensure that the country's teachers are: Caring Cultivators of Students' All-round Growth; Inspirational Co-constructors of Knowledge; and Committed Role Models of Professionalism. The T-standard<sup>+</sup> is the overarching frame for education in Hong Kong, espousing its goals for students as developing "key competences for adulthood", "change agility for tomorrow", and "whole-person wellness" (COTAP, 2015, para. 1). The framework guiding the PST for teachers includes "committed role models", "inspirational co-constructors", and "caring cultivators" (para. 1).

Appearing to still be in progress, the Singaporean Teaching Practice Model (Singapore Ministry of Education, n.d.) presents a career stage set of standards illustrated through five desired outcomes of continual learning expected from teachers in the areas of:

- The Ethical Educator
- The Competent Professional
- The Collaborative Learner

- The Transformative Leader and
- The Community Builder

At the time of writing, these standards were not explicated in public policy documents available online.

Of European countries included in the scan, Estonia, England, Ireland, and Scotland articulate versions of standards that outline knowledge, skills, competencies and/or conduct for teachers. While originating from government in the United Kingdom and from the professional standards body for teaching in Ireland, both countries have multiple standards, each with numerous descriptors of what constitutes effective practice. Notably, student learning and success is explicitly linked to teacher practice as outlined in their standards: “Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern, and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct (United Kingdom Department of Education, 2013, p. 10). Estonia’s professional standards for teachers specify six competencies, however, no indicators or descriptors are provided.

Among the Scandinavian countries reviewed, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark do not articulate standards independent of the post-secondary degree-granting system. Each country references the post-secondary baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate education system as providing a robust standard of teaching practice. This forms the basis of a pre-career certification process.

Like the Canadian and American jurisdictions reviewed, international education systems employ teaching standards in response to research that emphasizes the importance of teaching excellence for student outcomes. And, as indicated in the aforementioned, standards can support the growth of high quality teachers, and be used as part of a regulatory system that ensures standards are implemented in accordance with their intention. Explicating the rationales and purposes of standards as articulated by various systems is what follows.

## **Teaching Standards: Rationale and Purposes**

Reporting on an international study comparing the development, characteristics, and implementation of standards in various OECD countries, the OECD Working Paper (2013) identified four objectives for defining teaching standards: “to support the improvement of teacher performance; to certify teachers who are new to the teaching profession or who have attained a status as teachers; to assess teacher performance; and to evaluate and accredit teacher training institutions” (p. 32). We combine these with what we found in our review of jurisdiction websites, and outline four themes that reflect the reasons for the implementation of teaching standards:

1. To support student learning and success.
2. To guide teacher professional growth and ensure competence.
3. To credential and evaluate teachers.
4. To uphold the social standing of the teaching profession.

### **Rationale 1: To Support Student Learning**

Numerous jurisdictions reviewed identify student learning and success as a key objective in their development of professional standards for teaching. In Canada, the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2012) states: “The Standards should be a positive for educators that will honour their work and benefit the children of BC through supporting student academic success and social development and by developing an informed citizenry” (p. 3). Prompting reflection about student learning and teaching practice is the first purpose identified by the California Department of Education; it is also evident in Virginia’s rationale that links their professional standards to reflection on teaching practice and student learning. Similarly, the Oregon *Model Core Teaching Standards* (n.d.) document offers the following:

The Model Core Teaching Standards outline what teachers should know and be able to do to help all students improve, grow and learn. The standards outline the common

principles and foundations of teaching practice necessary to improve student learning that encompass all subject areas and grade levels. The standards reflect a new vision for teaching and learning critical for preparing all students for success in today's world and their future. (para. 1)

Hong Kong prefaces its *Professional Standards for Teachers* (PST) (Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals, 2018a) by stating that student development and learning needs are the centre of the *T-standard*<sup>+</sup>, and that the aims of all such documents is to ensure that educators cultivate three essential attributes of students: whole-person wellness, key competencies for adulthood, and change agility for tomorrow. Finally, the Australian *Professional Standards for Teachers* (2018) asserts that their teaching standards “define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st century schools that will improve educational outcomes for students” (p. 3).

Thus, student learning is the key justification for the implementation of standards. This is clearly a research-informed policy decision as every introduction to standards in the documents we reviewed were prefaced with the claim that standards aim to enhance teaching quality, which is directly connected to enhanced student learning.

## **Rationale 2: To Guide Teacher Professional Growth and Ensure Professional Competence**

All jurisdictions examined in this review identify the overall purpose of teaching standards as enhancing teacher professional growth. This objective is described in a variety of ways: as “guiding the professional judgement and actions of the teaching profession” (Ontario College of Teachers, 2018, para. 2); as providing “a common language and a vision of the scope and complexity of the profession by which all teachers can define and develop their practice” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2009, p. 1); and as offering



“a conceptual model for effective teaching . . . upon which all aspects of teacher development from teacher education to induction and ongoing profession development can be aligned” (Virginia Department of Education, n.d., para. 3). Standards can be used by teachers, as they are in Hong Kong, to “reflect on their professional roles and as a tool for their professional development planning” (COTAP, 2018b, Application of the T-standard<sup>+</sup>). Mirroring this, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2018) describes the purpose of teaching standards as informing the development of professional learning goals and providing a framework by which teachers can judge the success of their learning through self-reflection and self-assessment. It states that “the development of the Australian Professional Standards for the teaching profession is integral to ensuring quality learning and teaching in Australian schools” (p. 8). Again, this rationale is derived from an empirical research base that draws a connection between teaching excellence and student performance (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2000, Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011).

### **Rationale 3: To Credential and Evaluate Teachers**

The transition from using jurisdictional standards to guide teacher professional growth toward external evaluation of competence is evident in a key document from the United Kingdom Department of Education (2014):

[The Teachers’ Standards] can be used by individual teachers to review their practice and inform their plans for continuing professional development . . . and set a clear baseline of expectations for the professional practice and conduct of teachers and define the minimum level of practice expected of teachers in England (“Practicing Teachers Use Standards to Support Growth”, para.1, and “What are Teaching Standards?”, para. 1).

Specifically related to credentialing, this document states:

Those involved in training and inducting new teachers must use the Teachers' Standards to ensure quality of new entrants to the profession [and] must be used by schools to assess the extent to which newly qualified teachers can demonstrate their competence at the end of their induction period ("Those Involved in Training", para. 2).

And, for teachers in the United Kingdom who already hold a credential: "Headteachers and others should use the Teachers' Standards to improve standards of teaching in their schools, by setting minimum expectations and assessing performance against them" (para. 1).

The use of teaching standards for the purpose of teacher evaluation is also explicitly evident in three of the American states informing this scan. In the state of Oregon, the standards of practice guide the development of local evaluation systems that "promote professional growth and improved teaching and leadership practice" (Oregon Department of Education, 2018, p. 1). The Virginia *Standards for the Professional Practice of Teachers* forms the basis of a document entitled *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Teachers* (2015). As indicated in the previous section state-wide performance standards are directly tied to teacher evaluation procedures. The guidelines document states:

The uniform performance standards for teachers are used to collect and present data to document performance that is based on well-defined job expectations . . . The goal is to support the continuous growth and development of each teacher by monitoring, analyzing, and applying pertinent data compiled within a system of meaningful feedback. (p. 7)

By adapting their teaching standards into six performance standards, complete with comprehensive performance indicators, the State of Virginia (2015) provides school divisions "with the information needed to support systems of differentiated compensations or

performance-based pay” (p. 5). Finally, in documentation from the state of Texas (n.d.), the six performance standards are to be used “to inform the training, appraisal, and professional development of teachers” (para. 1).

So far it is clear that teaching standards are intended to promote and assess teacher development, learning, and performance. But standards serve a professional function as well in terms of legitimating teaching in society.

#### **Rationale 4: To Uphold the Professional Standing of Teachers Within Society**

Numerous jurisdictions in this national and international scan link a development of teaching standards to an increased socio-political awareness of the responsibilities of teachers and, more specifically, to raising the professional standing of teachers within their societal context. In this sense, then, standards are a method of assuring public confidence. For example, the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (2012) states: “Standards are a way of communicating to certificate holders and the public the description of the work of educators - what they know, what they are able to do, and how they comport themselves as they serve the public” (p. 3). Along a similar vein, the Ontario College of Teachers describes their teaching standards as “a collective vision of professionalism” (2018, para. 1). Irish professional teaching standards “may be used by the education community and the wider public to inform their understanding and expectations of the teaching profession in Ireland” (The Teaching Council, 2016, p. 4). The teaching standards in Hong Kong are clearly focused on teacher professionalism:

The T-standard<sup>+</sup> presents the professional image of the teaching profession and their contribution, which helps to attract and retain talent, sustaining a high-quality teaching profession. [Standards] have been developed with the teaching professional for the growth of the profession. (COTAP, 2018b, Application of the T-standard<sup>+</sup>, para.1)

In Australia, the professional teaching standards are described as a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality. Moreover, “standards contribute to the professionalism of teaching and raise the status of the profession” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018, p. 3) and provide a common understanding and language for discourse between multiple social groups.

As documents existing in the public domain, teaching standards are viewed by many jurisdictions as influencing awareness of professional responsibilities in addition to supporting student learning, guiding professional growth, and credentialing teachers and evaluating performance. Standards fulfill a legitimating function among other professions that operate within a standards paradigm, such as engineering, medicine, and law.

### **Standards of Practice for School Leaders**

Compared to teaching standards, standards for school and system leaders are a more recent development. In looking at leadership standards in Canada and in select jurisdictions around the world, there is considerable similarity in content and use. In presenting our findings, we follow the same structure as the previous section, outlining standards in Canadian, American, and international jurisdictions, and then discussing the purposes and rationale for standards.

### **Standards for School Leadership Practice in Canada**

Similar to teaching standards, the state of clearly articulated and accessible leadership standards across Canadian provinces and territories is uneven. What is common among those jurisdictions that make reference to standards or competencies for school leaders is that they are research-based and intended to support school leaders’ development with student learning as the ultimate aim.

Following the findings of their 2008 Education Reform, the Yukon Department of Education created the *Yukon Educational Leadership Framework* (2011). The document

reflects the regional context by closely aligning responsibilities of formal school leaders with informal teacher-leaders. The overall aim of the framework is to ensure quality leadership for student success. The framework is built upon two *dimensions*—self-identity and relationship building. Seven domains of effectiveness are built around the dimensions:

- Developing shared direction
- Leading teaching and learning
- Developing a learning culture
- Developing partnerships with Yukon First Nations communities
- Developing partnerships with parents and school councils
- Developing partnerships with community organizations and agencies
- Managing the school program (p. 5)

These dimensions draw on research by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004).

The framework was created collaboratively by educational stakeholders and is meant for principals and vice-principals as a self-assessment tool. The framework document clearly lays out a worksheet for individuals to identify strengths and weaknesses regarding each dimension, and to record reflective questions, actions, and evidence of how their practices are enhancing student learning. Although professional learning and growth is the primary rationale for the dimensions, they are also used as a guide for recruitment of principals and vice-principals. How it informs such processes, however, was not made clear.

Ontario’s Department of Education *Leadership Strategy* (2013) specifically distinguishes school leadership as “the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization’s vision and goals” (p. 5) that is comprised of five capacities: setting directions; building relationships and developing people; developing the organization to support desired practice; improving the instructional program; and securing accountability. The *Ontario Leadership Framework* (2013) coalesces around five core leadership capacities:

- Setting Goals

- Aligning Resources with Priorities
- Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures
- Using Data
- Engaging in Courageous Conversations (p. 8)

Numerous indicators outline expectations for school leaders' performance. The *Ontario Leadership Framework* outlines practices and personal traits of effective leaders, serves as a guide for professional learning, and is used for recruitment and development of school leaders. Uniquely, Ontario's framework includes a Catholic School-Level Leadership framework that interpret the leadership capacities for that context. Both leadership frameworks are the foundation of the Principal's Qualification Program developed by the Ontario Teachers' College, a program that qualifies teachers for the positions of principal and vice-principal (Ontario Teachers' College, 2017).

The British Columbia Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA) claims that the *Leadership Standards* (2015a) frame personal growth for principals and vice-principals. The framework is described as "generic, context dependent and aspirational" (p. 4). The framework was developed to guide curriculum development and create coherence among leadership development programs at the local and provincial level, and to support mentorship, coaching as well as individual reflection about professional learning and growth. There are four leadership domains: moral stewardship, instructional leadership, relational leadership, and organizational leadership. Standards are listed in each domain, and there are nine in total:

- Values, Vision, and Mission
- Ethical Decision Making
- Super Vision for Learning—Leading for Learning
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
- Intrapersonal Capacity
- Interpersonal Capacity

- Cultural Leadership
- Management and Administration
- Community Building. (p. 8)

Like in the Yukon, B.C.'s *Leadership Standards* is “not intended as an instrument for evaluation or the judgment of the individual performance of principals and vice-principals by districts” (BCVPA, 2015b).

Nova Scotia has a similar, although more formalized set up. The Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Academy (NSILA) Program is a joint program offered by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Nova Scotia Educational Leadership Consortium. The *Instructional Leadership Standards* (2016) are aimed at improving teaching and learning. The program is “designed for all instructional leaders”, however, priority is given to current participants include principals, vice-principals, and “board consultants and coordinators” (p. 3). The *Instructional Leadership Standards* include:

- Vision for Instruction
- Leading and Managing Change
- Collaborative Learning Culture
- Professional Learning
- High Quality Instruction
- Understanding and Using Data to Improve Instruction
- Positive Learning Environment. (p. 2)

As in other jurisdictions, the standards are central to defining curriculum for leadership development. There was no indication that completing the program was a requirement for taking up formal leadership, and in conversation with a NSILA program coordinator, we learned that leadership development happens at the district level as well. NSILA culminates in a leadership diploma (S. LeBel, personal communication, March 27, 2019).

Saskatchewan employs a “conceptual model” as the foundation for professional learning for principals (Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, 2017b), but there currently is no provincially designed program for principals or vice-principals. The conceptual model is purported to be developed from four dimensions of instructional leadership:

- Vision, Mission and Culture
- Instructional Leadership
- Strategic Resource Allocation
- Effective Relationships and Processes (p. 3)

It is clear in the document that the conceptual model was created in response to a perceived need for a “centrally organized and coherent approach to professional leadership development for principals” (p. 5). In the leadership document, developing a provincial leadership development program was suggested as a next step, and we confirmed with a staff member at the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation that a move towards mandatory professional development and standards for principals have been discussed but no definitive plans have been made (D. Stovin, personal communication, March 27, 2019). Even though there is no official standard, one can see standardization undergirds the Saskatchewan model as coherence among school leadership capacity was a key motivation.

Some provinces impose standards for principals and vice principals through requirements for professional learning and/or certification. Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are two examples. In a 2013 review of professional learning in PEI school systems, one of the findings highlighted the need for principals and vice-principals to be prepared as instructional leaders, not managers (Prince Edward Island Education and Early Childhood Development). The *PEI School Administrators’ Leadership Program*, an accredited university program is the “standard requirement for school leaders” (University of Prince Edward Island, n.d. para. 2). This program is endorsed by the ministry, and although no leadership standard exists, the preparation program “define[s] the expectations of skills,



knowledge, and mind-set required by principals and vice-principals, and ensures they are prepared to meet the demands of leading PEI schools” (Prince Edward Island Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013, p. vi). Based on information from the Prince Edward Island Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture, only teachers are certificated; therefore, the leadership program serves as professional learning but is not provincially mandated. On the other hand, New Brunswick requires principals and vice-principals have a certificate to take up formal leadership. In the New Brunswick Department of Education Policy 610 (n.d.) the terms requirements and standards are used interchangeably. Those seeking formal leadership must first obtain an interim principal certificate, which requires the completion of six Minister-approved modules at the district level, and 3 university graduate level courses: Current Administrative Theory, Supervision of Instruction, and Assessment and Evaluation in Education (p. 2). A successful one-year practicum following formal education is required before a principal or vice-principal can apply the Minister for a regular principal’s certificate. Principals and vice-principals must complete a successful year in the role before applying to the Minister to obtain a regular principal’s certificate. We learned that the Council for Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) have tentative plans to develop leadership standards, but like in Saskatchewan, there have been no formal announcements (K. Brien, personal communication, March 27, 2019).

### **Standards for School Leadership Practice in the United States**

Standards for school leaders arose in conjunction with the effective schools movement, a counter movement that developed in response to what educational researchers considered a damning report about schools by Coleman et al. (1966). The Coleman report concluded that home and other out-of-school factors had a stronger influence over children’s learning and achievement than schools (Berry, 2018). This spurred educational researchers to

demonstrate effects statistically, and to identify inputs that lead to positive student outcomes. School leadership is one factor of school effectiveness.

In the United States the national model for school leadership standards is the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (PSEL, 2015), which is a revised version of its precursor, the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards* (ISLLCS). Murphy (2017) claimed 46 states have adopted these standards, but according to current data provided on the website of the *Education Commission of the States* (2019), all 50 American states have adopted standards for school leadership and use them to guide the development of policy.

The PSEL (2015) includes 10 standards:

- Mission, Vision, and Core Values
- Ethics and Professional Norms
- Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- Community of Care and Support for Students
- Professional Capacity of School Personnel
- Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
- Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
- Operations and Management
- School Improvement. (pp. 9 – 18)

Each standard includes indicators which describe leadership effectiveness. Based on our careful review of the PSEL standards, it is clear that Alberta's LQS and SLQS reflect similar competencies.

While the PSEL standards emerged out of empirical evidence regarding the connection between school leadership and student learning, Murphy (2017) emphasizes that the standards also recognize that values, caring, and ethics are critically important to leadership. Murphy also argues the standards were designed to inform professional learning,

not simply leadership preparation and evaluation. The standards can be and are, however, used as a measurement of leadership effectiveness, and Murphy suggests that ensuring standards have indicators that are clear, and stipulate “different quality points for principals and superintendents” (p. 4) is important for standards to have the intended results.

As an example, Massachusetts’ documents reference the PSEL standards, but scaffolds standards, indicators, elements, and descriptors. Standards are the broad categories of knowledge, skills, and performance of effective practice that are detailed in the regulations. There are four Standards for administrators: Instructional Leadership; Management and Operations; Family and Community Engagement; and Professional Culture. Effective practice in the standards are articulated through indicators, which describe specific knowledge, skills, and performance for each Standard. Indicators are further described through elements, which are more detailed in describing the actions and behaviours related to each indicator. Elements delineate specific aspects of educator practice, and therefore provide a platform for evaluators to offer detailed feedback. And finally, descriptors are statements of observable and measurable action and behavior that align with each element and function as benchmarks for determining a leader’s level of performance (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). In setting up such a system, Massachusetts seems to have taken Murphy’s (2017) advice to heart.

We learned through a staff relations associate at the Education Commission of the States that since the PSEL standards are not mandatory, some states have adopted them in full whereas others have adapted them to meet their educational contexts (D. Scott, personal communication, February 27, 2019). Standards are used to develop leadership preparation programs, which may fall under the purview of universities, colleges, and other approved preparation programs.

### Select International Standards for School Leadership Practice

Berry (2018) notes that standards for leaders are not only adopted to ensure leadership quality and student achievement, but they also are a mechanism by which educational jurisdictions position themselves in the global order. Speaking from the Chinese context, Wei (2017) argues that the desire to establish legitimacy among competitors is a strong motivator for adopting leadership standards. For this reason, China and other countries participate in policy borrowing; the implementation of standards signals to the world that the Chinese education system values quality and rigor. For this section we scanned by continent, including Asia, Australia, Europe, and to a limited extent, South America.

In 2013, the Chinese Ministry of Education established national *Professional Standards for Compulsory Education Principals* (Wei, 2017). As part of this plan the Ministry requires newly-appointed principals to undertake 300 hours of leadership training with the first six months of their tenure and an additional minimum of 360 hours every five years thereafter. No other information about the composition or nature of these standards was described on the website.

In 1970 Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH) was established with the principal mission to identify educational development needs in Southeast Asian countries. In 2003, SEAMEO INNOTECH created an overarching competency framework that is applied to all School Heads throughout Southeast Asia. This has since been updated, and the *Competency Framework for Southeast Asian School Heads* (2014) now includes five competency domains, 16 general competencies, 42 enabling competencies, and 170 indicators. The five competencies are ranked to consider order of importance, as well as “frequency of performance, and amount of training school heads would need the most:

1. Strategic Thinking and Innovation
2. Managerial Leadership

3. Instructional Leadership
4. Personal Excellence
5. Stakeholder Engagement” (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2014, para. 2).

The competency framework is the launch point for initiatives to support the development of Southeast Asian school heads. From our reading of the website, the competency framework is not mandatory, and it complements other regional or national standards in the Southeast Asian countries.

With the exception of Hong Kong, no other Asian countries in our scan led us to leadership standards. Hong Kong is not a member of SEAMEO INNOTECH. Hong Kong’s approach to standards has a stronger aesthetic appeal compared to the managerial emphasis of SEAMEO INNOTECH. Hong Kong’s *Professional Standards for Principals* (PSP) (COTAP, 2015) emerge from the same guiding principles that drive the *Professional Standards for Teachers* (PST), the T-standard<sup>+</sup> framework. In Hong Kong, leaders strive to be “Ethical Enablers of All-Round Growth and Balanced Advancement; Versatile Architects of Vibrant Learning Organizations, and Visionary Entrepreneurs of Educational Transformation” (Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals [COTAP], 2015, para. 2). The COTAP website claims that extensive research was conducted to ensure that the guiding principles align with research and other jurisdictions around the world. COTAP invokes the metaphor of a journey to describe the application of the T-standard<sup>+</sup>, which includes both the teaching and principal standards. With a focus on growth, the PST bears resemblance to the developmental aims of Alberta’s LQS.

On another continent, the Australian *Professional Standard for Principals* defines three competencies that, in conjunction with the *Professional Teaching Standards* (2018), constitute the profile of a school leader as: leading the development of the vision of the school; understanding the practice and theory of contemporary leadership and applying that to school improvement; and recognizing the importance of emotional intelligence, empathy,

resilience, and personal wellbeing in managing the school and the community. Each of the requirements are further integrated with five professional practices that include:

- Leading teaching and learning
- Developing self and others
- Leading improvement, innovation, and change
- Leading the management of the school
- Engaging and working with the community. (p. 10)

Scotland adopts a comprehensive model of leadership for four levels of educational leaders: teacher-leaders, middle-leaders (defined as those with a specified leadership role such as learning support teachers, deputy head teachers, or principal teachers), school leaders, and system leaders. Education Scotland alludes to the characteristics to be demonstrated by school leaders:

As lead learners, school leaders ensure that a strong and consistent focus is placed on learning and teaching in their schools. They have, and outline, clear and high expectations regarding the standard of learning and teaching which they expect to see throughout their school and drive improvements in attainment and achievement. They are adept in motivating teachers to meet these standards and work closely with middle leaders to provide effective on-going support and challenge for teachers to ensure excellence in learning and teaching. (Scottish College for Educational Leadership, 2019, para.1)

In collaboration with the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (2019), a branch of Education Scotland, principals (or 'Heads') must achieve certification in the *Into Headship* qualification. This qualification focuses on building skills in six domains: leading for change, leading through collaboration, leading self-evaluation, leading culture, leading learning of self and others.

England has adopted a *National Standards for School Leadership* (n.d.) framework, created in partnership with the National College for School Leadership, that outlines five key competencies to be achieved by school leaders, including: leading strategically with vision; leading teaching and learning; leading the organization, people, and resources; leading people through effective relationships; and leading the community. Nine professional attributes are woven throughout these competencies:

- a positive, enthusiastic outlook, embracing risk and innovation
- commitment and dedication to social justice, equality and excellence
- engagement in collaborative partnership working, within and beyond the school
- integrity in relation to their own and the school's practice
- courage and conviction to achieve the best outcomes
- respect and empathy towards others
- resilience, perseverance and optimism in the face of difficulties and challenges
- decisiveness, consistency and focus on solutions
- drive for improvement and challenging underperformance
- capacity to be flexible, adaptable and creative. (para. 4)

Austria has cooperated with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden, to create *The Central European Competency Framework for School Leaders* that "defines the knowledge, skills and attitudes a school leader is expected to possess in order to be successful in a turbulent and fast-changing world" (Schratz, Laiminger, MacKay,. Křížková, Kirkham, Baráth, ... Soderberg, 2013, p. 7). Five Domains, and multiple key descriptors and competencies, establish a School Leader Standard in:

- leading and managing learning and teaching
- leading and managing change
- leading and managing self
- leading and managing others
- leading and managing the institution. (p. 7)

Based on further searches Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, and Germany do not have leadership standards, although it appears that Scandinavian countries

adopt a post-secondary certification approach to identifying and instilling leadership competencies. This approach is similar to New Brunswick and Saskatchewan where certification of school leaders is linked to completion of a set of post-secondary graduate courses in combination with professional development modules or courses sponsored by individual school authorities.

Finally, on the African continent, South Africa outlines eight key interdependent areas of school leadership that constitute the core purpose of the principal: to enable learners “to attain the highest levels of achievement for their own good, the good of their community and the good of the country as a whole” (Department of Basic Education: Republic of South Africa, 2015, p. 5). Across the Atlantic our search of South American countries was similarly limited. At the time of our search, no informative online documents were available for countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, or Paraguay. We did learn that in 2012 Ecuador developed school leader professional performance standards to: guide, reflect, evaluate, and self-evaluate; design and implement strategies for improvement; make decisions regarding assessment, support and advice, certification, merit, and opposition for entry into teaching, initial training, continuing education, and professional development education. (Ecuador Ministerio de Educación, 2012, p. 11)

In summary, school leadership standards exist in varying degrees of specificity in many countries; some have linked the creation and content of standards to post-secondary and private partners’ credentialing, others to aspirational standards that provide the content for cyclical evaluation, and others still to the sustained professional learning goals of principals and vice-principals. How standards are used is contingent upon why they exist in the first place. We discuss the rationales and purposes underlying school leadership standards in the following section.



## **School Leadership Standards: Rationale and Purpose**

Our national and international overview identified three dominant rationales for developing and implementing professional standards for school leaders. In addition to the broad and universal rationale of clarifying and delineating the role and function of school leaders, a number of jurisdictions couple this purpose with the unambiguous aim to support student success. Second, leadership standards are identified as a means to guide and facilitate continuous professional learning for leaders. An essential distinction emerging from our scan lies in the use of leadership standards either solely for the planning of individual professional learning or, ultimately, for the purpose of school leader evaluation. Thus, while leadership standards are viewed as supporting the professional growth of leaders they are, in some jurisdictions, also used to measure performance in an exacting manner. This section explores all three purposes for the development and implementation of professional leadership standards.

### **Rationale 1: To Support Student Learning and Well-Being**

Based on its international study, the OECD Working Paper (2013) reported that a key rationale offered by educational authorities for developing school leadership standards is to clarify and focus leaders' responsibilities and actions with respect to student success and achievement:

Standards for principals define what they must know and be able to do in the realms of their competence, hence guiding their work and outlining the goals that principals are expected to reach. Most countries perceive performance standards for school principals as a strategic tool for the improvement of quality of education. (p. 49)

Our present overview aligns closely with the findings of the OECD study. For example, leadership standards in Ontario are defined as the “competencies and practices that have been shown to be effective in improving student achievement” (Ontario Ministry of Education,

2019, para. 2). Similarly, the state of California (2014) offered this rationale for linking quality leadership with students' academic success:

To reach every student and support every teacher in meeting increasingly complex outcomes demands a cadre of increasingly committed and effective administrators. Transforming our state's system for developing and supporting administrators to become excellent education leaders requires consensus about high expectations that are attainable over time with quality preparation, induction, and ongoing professional learning. The CPSEL (California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders) serve as broadly supported leadership criteria that are a critical component of a coherent system of leadership development and support that ensures excellent education leaders throughout California. (p. 3)

The centrality of student learning and wellness is explicit in the professional standards for principals in Hong Kong (COTAP, 2015). Maintaining students' developmental and learning needs are the core of their standards. Principals are expected to focus on whole-person wellness, the competencies required for adulthood, as well as nurturing change agility for the future. Finally, the key document outlining Australian professional standards for school leaders states that:

The most effective leaders see learning as central to their professional lives. This document, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles, guides school leaders on their learning pathway. It will empower school leaders across the country to develop and support teaching that maximises impact on student learning. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015, p. 3)

While all jurisdictions surveyed in this scan maintain that leadership standards are meant to clarify and delineate the role and function of school leaders, some have purposely connected their standards to the overall aim of enhancing student learning and well-being.

## **Rationale 2: To Guide and Facilitate Continuous Professional Learning**

The second rationale explicitly or implicitly offered by educational authorities for implementing school leadership standards is to guide and facilitate professional growth and continuous learning. *The Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia* (2016) states: “The purpose of the document is to foster continuous professional learning in working towards effective leadership” (p. 4). Ontario’s *Leadership Framework* (2013) identifies its purpose “to guide the design and implementation of professional learning and development for school and system leaders” (p. 5). Moreover, the core capacities that comprise the leadership standards are strategically infused into provincial professional learning opportunities and resources:

For the purpose of professional development, the ministry has identified five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) that the research suggests are key to making progress toward the province’s current educational goals. These five CLCs, described below, are embedded in all provincially-sponsored professional learning and resources for school and system leaders. (p. 8)

In Canada, a theme weaved throughout many leadership framework documents is the desire to ensure coherence in leaders’ capacity. With or without mandatory standards, a goal of standardizing leadership capacity is a goal that undergirds leadership development approaches.

In Hong Kong, their rationale for the recent development of unified teacher and principal standards (T-standard<sup>+</sup>) is described as follows:

- The T-standard presents the professional image of the teaching profession and their contribution, which helps to attract and retain talent, sustaining a high-quality teaching profession.
- Teachers and principals can use the T-standard to reflect on their professional roles and as a tool for their professional development planning.

- The T-standard serves as a direction for initial teacher education and CPD of serving teachers and school leaders. (COTAP, 2018b, “Application of the T-standard<sup>+</sup>”).

Australia describes professional learning as a key attribute of leadership, and believes their standard to be instrumental in guiding this learning:

The most effective leaders see learning as central to their professional lives. This document, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles, guides school leaders on their learning pathway. It will empower school leaders across the country to develop and support teaching that maximises impact on student learning. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015, p. 3)

In addition, our scan revealed that some jurisdictions, most notably Australia and Hong Kong, have translated these expectations into on-line tools for self-reflection, complete with rubrics and stage descriptors. This developmental scope and sequence for each standard, readily available electronically, provides a framework for school leaders to identify professional needs and plan their learning accordingly. Additionally, as with professional standards for teaching, leadership standards can also provide a structure to direct the evaluation of school leaders.

### **Rationale 3: To Evaluate the Performance of Leaders**

The use of professional standards as a framework for the on-going evaluation of leaders is identified as an explicit purpose in most American states, although this is up to the local board or state department (D. Scott, personal communication, February 27, 2019). The California *Professional Standards for Education Leaders* (2014) are described as “a set of broad policy standards that are the foundation for administrator preparation, induction, development, professional learning and evaluation in California” (p 1). Grounded in state and federal legislation, the Oregon *Framework for Teacher and Administrator Evaluation and*

*Support Systems* (2018) describes the relationship between their professional standards and evaluation in this way:

Based on the standards of professional practice, the Oregon Framework guides the development of local evaluation systems that promote professional growth and improved teaching and leadership practice. Implementation of a sound evaluation system is critical to producing equitable outcomes where student success is no longer predictable based on race, socio-economics, language, and family background. (p. 1)

The State of Washington (2019) bases their principal evaluation and growth program on the five core principles that include:

- High quality teaching and leading are key to student success.
- Growth in practice is developmental in nature.
- Growth occurs best when there are clear standards of practice supported by quality professional learning and learning-focused feedback.
- Evaluation systems should reflect and address the career continuum.
- The focus for teacher and principal growth should be driven by student learning needs. (para.1)

Described as benchmarks, Washington's evaluation structure incorporates three levels of a career continuum for each strand in their six leadership standards. Virginia's standard for principals are explicitly called performance standards, so there is no question that it is intended to evaluate principals. The performance standards are used to guide the development of various evaluation sources, including self-evaluation, observations and site visits, portfolios, teacher/staff surveys, and goal setting, which are intended to demonstrate comprehensively that a leader is performing at the expected standard (Virginia Department of Education, 2015).

In Texas, the Texas Principal Standards provide the foundation for the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS (Texas Education Agency, 2019), which is described as a four-part, growth-oriented rubric upon which principals are evaluated. The

rubric includes the performance standard itself (e.g. instructional leadership), an indicator, a performance level (ranging from distinguished to not demonstrated/needs improvement), and a performance descriptor for each performance level. In addition, a detailed document called “Research-Based Responsibilities & Practices” outlines 21 “specific leadership responsibilities and 66 associated practices that demonstrate a statistically significant link between principal leadership and student achievement” (para. 6). For example, the first responsibility listed is affirmation, described as the “extent to which the principal recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures” (para. 7). A statistical measure indicating its impact on student learning, and associated practices are also included. This particular framework is intended to guide principals in “selecting the right work....to improve student outcomes” (para. 6). This is perhaps among the most prescriptive evaluation schemes we reviewed.

In Canada, jurisdictions emphasize leadership competencies as guides for practice. In Ontario, for example, it is proposed “leaders’ enactment of the practices will evolve as they move through various career stages, specialized assignments, and unique educational environments” (Ontario Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, p. 7). BC’s *Dimensions of Practice* (BCSSA, 2018) specifically states, “The Dimensions of Practice is not prescriptive and is not intended to serve as an evaluation instrument” (para. 3). Similarly, Yukon’s *Educational Leadership Framework* is “not intended to be prescriptive in nature, but rather to be used to support the individuals reflecting on their own learning needs” (2011, p. 2). In reviewing their principal evaluation process document, there is resemblance between Yukon’s leadership framework dimensions and the behavioural indicators; however, a framework adapted from Cooper, Fusarelli, and Randall (2004) guides the evaluation process for Yukon principals and vice-principals (Yukon Education, 2012). Leadership frameworks in Canada appear to be less high stakes than some of its American counterparts; however,

Alberta's move to require principal certification based on the LQS reflects stronger accountability.

Thus, leadership standards fulfill a number of purposes. At the most essential level, professional standards clarify and delineate a jurisdiction's expectations for the knowledge, skills, attributes, and competencies of its school leaders. All jurisdictions reviewed for this national and international scan describe their standards as supporting and facilitating the continuous professional learning of leaders, with student outcomes being the ultimate end point. Importantly, standards are also a mechanism of accountability, and are used to guide evaluation and certification/licensure of principals, and accreditation of leadership preparation programs.

### **Standards of Practice for System Leaders**

Factors such as culture and politics impact the governance structures and expectations for school system leadership; thus, there can be considerable variation in how the role is conceptualized, eligibility qualifications, and to whom the system leader is accountable. Among Canadian provinces and territories, the practice of identifying system leadership standards often appears to align with school leader standards, if standards exist. In provinces where there is no official standard, performance models reflect competencies that align with standards elsewhere. Overall, however, if teaching and school leadership standards are articulated, system leadership standards also appear in either a policy or framework. In this final section we point out some of the ways system leadership is situated.

### **Standards for System Leadership Practice in Canada**

The Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA), a national organization of school system leaders, emphasizes the importance of system leadership for student excellence. While this body provides a unifying message, it supports system leader learning and development without any reference to standards. As with teachers and school-

based leaders, therefore, the state of standards for school system leaders varies across the country.

In British Columbia, the British Columbia School Superintendent Association (BCSSA) outlines seven *Dimensions of Practice* (2014) that align with the British Columbia Principals and Vice-Principals Association (BCPVPA) school leader *Dimensions of Practice*. Seven dimensions and 21 descriptors outline the competencies of effective system leaders, which apply to superintendents, assistant superintendents, and directors of instruction or those in similar roles. The seven dimensions include:

- Leadership & District Culture
- Policy & Governance
- Communications & Community Relations
- Organizational Leadership
- Leading Learning
- Human Resources Development & Management
- Accountability

The *Dimensions of Practice* are described as a framework to support system leaders' continuous learning, and like the framework for principals and vice-principals, is not intended to be descriptive. We explored BC school board policies to discern whether there is a relationship between the *Dimensions of Practice* and board policies. Superintendent evaluation is locally defined, and therefore varies. The *Superintendent Performance Assessment Guide* appended to the policy handbook for Vancouver School Board (2018), for example, has indicators that reflect the sentiment of the *Dimensions of Practice*, but the dimensions are not specifically referenced.

In Ontario, district leadership is provided by supervisory officers whose role is set within a regulatory framework that incorporates leadership standards into a qualification program. The *Ontario Leadership Framework* (2013) outlines a comprehensive *District Effectiveness Framework* that provides senior district leaders with “what should be the



immediate goals for their work, with student achievement and well-being as the schools and classrooms to do their school improvement work effectively” (Ontario Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, pp. 16 – 17). The five core competencies that constitute the School-Level Leadership framework are briefly referenced at the system level; however, the System-Level Leadership framework is based on characteristics deemed to reflect strong districts:

- A broadly shared mission, vision and goals founded on aspirational images of the educated person
- A coherent instructional guidance system
- Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions
- Learning-oriented organizational improvement processes
- Job-embedded professional learning for all members of the organization
- Budgets, structures, time and personnel policies/procedures aligned with the district’s mission, vision and goals
- A comprehensive approach to leadership development
- A policy-oriented board of trustees
- Productive working relationships with staff and stakeholders (pp. 16 – 17.)

Mirroring the framework for principals and vice-principals there is an accompanying Catholic System-Level Leadership framework. These three frameworks form the basis of the Supervisory Officer’s Qualification Program (2017), whose guidelines are developed by Ontario Teachers’ College. This program is completed by those seeking a supervisory office if they have a master’s degree, five years of teaching experience, and have obtained the principals’ qualification or have at least two years of administrative experience in education (Ontario Teachers’ College, 2019).

The importance of system leadership for district effectiveness is recognized even if standards do not exist. In such cases, the developmental intentions of standards or competencies may be evident in evaluation processes although it is clear that the aim of continual professional learning is markedly different than the aim of evaluation. Manitoba, for instance, uses a framework by McGettrick (2004) to capture three broad elements,

including vision and values, governance and policies, and professional practices and board operations (Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). *A Framework for Superintendent and Board Evaluation* (MASS, 2008) is decidedly regulatory in that its focus is on the managerial elements, and school boards are evaluated according to the same criteria. The framework seeks evidence that superintendents and boards are performing according to descriptive indicators in the three broad categories. As in British Columbia, this framework is locally interpreted. For example, Hanover School Division policy describes duties and responsibilities for the Chief Executive Officer and Superintendent of Schools correspond to a long list of competencies: establishing and maintaining a focus on creating and maintaining a learning environment that enriches the lives of every student; promoting the safety, welfare, learning and inclusion of all students and staff within the diverse and multicultural context of a public education system and its communities; leading the development, monitoring, assessment, and revision of a framework for teaching and learning that meets the needs of all students and staff within the division; ensuring that the division operates in a fiscally responsible manner; dealing with personnel-related issues including the selection, promotion, tenure and termination of senior administrative personnel, professional education staff, paraprofessionals, and support staff; and interpreting Board policy to the staff of the school division and to members of the community.

As a final Canadian example, directors of education and superintendents of Saskatchewan school authorities are members of the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents of Saskatchewan (LEADS). LEADS became a statutory body in 1991 (LEADS Act, 1991), and expectations for system leaders are outlined in its accreditation policy (LEADS, 2010). These are articulated as “core leadership commitments: leader of leaders, servant of leaders, professional advocate, and steward of high quality education” (p. 3). Further, LEADS members are expected to “embrace and strive to

understand and practice the six fundamental commitments” (p. 3), which are stated as emerging from a research paper about leadership. The fundamental commitments include

- Personal conscience
- Professional convictions
- Professional constraints
- Common ethical principles
- Moral imagination
- Relational reciprocity. (p. 3)

While the language of standards is not invoked, there is clearly an expectation that system leaders engage in continuous professional learning, and that they must “[place] the needs of the student above all other considerations” (p. 4). While there are specific procedures for evaluation of the directors of education by the school board, evaluation procedures were the discretion of the board, and we found no direct reference to these professional commitments in the evaluation procedures.

### **Standards for System Leadership Practice in the United States**

American superintendents are guided by an over-arching national governing body, the American Association of School System Administrators (AASA). On its website AASA lists eight key competencies that characterize effective system leadership. These competencies focus on transformation, school board relations, equity, navigating politics, budgeting, instructional leadership, communication, and serving the community (2019). Various states appear to take up these competencies in various ways with different paths to achievement. System leaders must be licensed through an accredited program.

Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2019) requires superintendents to achieve four accreditation requirements in one of two ways: (1) through completion of a preparation program at one of 135 certified institutions, or (2) through an accredited private agency, after which they must pass an exam, presumably based on the eight competencies, to assess system level leadership readiness. Rhode Island (Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018) has

customized the AASA standards in order to reflect a nine-competency list that integrates school and system leadership indicators of effectiveness in order to allow principals to transition into system leadership roles. California, in 2014, created the California *Professional Standards for Education Leaders* (CPSEL) that is a comprehensive standards-based document to “serve as broadly supported leadership criteria that are critical components of a coherent system of leadership development and support that ensures excellent education leaders throughout California” (p. 3). Accordingly, the six standards for school superintendents reflect a close alignment with those for the school principal, namely to:

- Develop and implement a shared vision
- Provide instructional leadership
- Manage the learning environment
- Engage family and community
- Act with ethics and integrity
- Understanding the external context and policies (p. 3-11)

Washington State identifies six-nearly identical standards of effectiveness that are described through ‘strands’ in a multi-layered document for system leader evaluation (State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board, 2019).

Leadership standards or competencies for system leaders generally align with those expected of school leaders. And as is the case for school leaders, standards are articulated at the state level.

### **Select International Standards for School Leadership Practice**

Given that system level leadership differs in scope and expectation depending on international contexts, there is interesting variability among the countries we examined. The application of standards for system leaders in some cases falls outside a strict educational scope, which reflects differences in the labor/contract context for superintendents.

For example, Australia takes a unique approach to superintendent standards. The *New South Wales Public Sector Capability Framework* outlines five overarching skill sets that guide the work of all public employees, including those at the level of superintendent (or ‘Director’). Categorized as personal attributes, relationships, people management, results, and business enablers, each skill set is further comprised of four subsets that, taken together, form the basis for a generic profile of the system leader in a larger environment of other public employees (New South Wales Government, 2019).

Our Pan-Pacific scan was mostly unsuccessful in locating informative publicly-articulated standards or frameworks of system leadership effectiveness. Of note in many of these former British colonies or Commonwealth countries, however, is that reference to the role of *superintendent* usually assumes those tasks associated with military responsibilities and system leadership positions in education are often made by appointment of the state or national government.

In many European countries, education is centralized, controlled through a Ministry of Education, and operated under the auspices of provincial or municipal government structures. In some countries such as Denmark, the organizational equivalent of the school authority is the *municipality*. In terms of system leadership, then, administration is undertaken by a board or political committee with responsibility for the whole municipality i.e. the school district. There is wide variation in the title of these positions, and little information about a standards-based approach to leadership effectiveness available on ministry websites.

In a notable exception, Education Scotland (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2019) explicitly defines the superintendent’s role is to “provide the administrative leadership to all school personnel in carrying out the goals and objectives of the local school system”. The functions are described in a four-pronged set of responsibilities that include:

- **Developing Plans** - The superintendent conceptualizes the broad goals of the school systems, translates goals into plans, plans an organization structure capable of accomplishing the goals, assesses the degree to which policies and practices are attained and plans responses to assessed needs.
- **Developing and Maintaining the Educational Program** - The superintendent assures that the system's goals are represented by the educational goals in a manner consistent with legal, fiscal, organizational and community demands. This responsibility involves organizing and implementing an appropriate instructional program, evaluating the program, communicating support system needs to the board; maintaining appropriate working relationships with the board, staff, and community; and complying with the various demands placed on the school system.
- **Establishing and Maintaining the Program Infrastructure** - The superintendent assures that the system's goals are represented by infrastructure objectives pertaining to facilities, personnel, support services, and information management. The superintendent assures that board goals are translated into plans for the infrastructure, that plans are implemented and information is collected, maintained and communicated in an effective manner.
- **Developing and Maintaining Administrative Procedures** - The superintendent creates the administrative procedures necessary for implementing personnel and fiscal policies consistent with: system policies; assessed needs; and applicable laws, rules and regulations. Once developed, the superintendent assures that administrative procedures are implemented appropriately.

Locating information about standards for school system leaders was admittedly a challenge. There is, however, research on the role of system leaders in both supporting school-based leaders as instructional leaders, and the impact that system leaders have on student

achievement has been developing over the last decade (e.g. Hutchinson, 2017). Honig's work in the United States has been particularly influential in this regard (e.g. Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2015; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lortin, & Newton, 2010). Canadian researchers, too, have paid more attention to system level leadership (e.g. Leithwood & Azah, 2016). Most recently, Handford and Leithwood (2019) completed a mixed methods study in British Columbia that concluded school district leadership and characteristics made a difference to math and language achievement. Our study will therefore advance the conversation about how standards for system leaders impact upon excellence in teaching and school leadership, and whether and/or how this makes a positive difference to students.

Thus, based on our review of standards for teachers and leaders, it is clear that forward thinking and high performing systems are using standards and other educational policies to improve student achievement. As Darling-Hammond (2012) warns about teaching standards, however, rigorous standards that are weakly applied will not have the intended effect. A central factor in implementing standards is whether professional learning opportunities and supports are readily available for educators to develop and grow. This is the primary concern of the next section.