

## Learning for All: Supporting Students with Significant Disabilities A Community of Practice for District Leaders and Consultants

*The key to transforming schools begins with school and district leaders. Michael Fullan writes that "Leadership for Change requires a bias for action, a sense of urgency and a mix of pressure and support."*

Successful schools are organized around learning. Their leaders are knowledgeable about effective pedagogy and about what works for the individual needs of different students in their particular contexts. While teachers are responsible for ensuring that all students achieve to the best of their ability, they will be supported in their work by school and district leaders' deep knowledge about teaching and learning. This knowledge enables leaders to discuss changes with teachers and helps them to make informed decisions about instructional organization, resources and practices.

### Community of Practice for District Leaders and Consultants

Alberta Regional Professional Learning Consortia (through the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium), in collaboration with Alberta Education, is hosting a one-year community of practice for **district leaders** and **consultants** supporting teachers of **students with significant cognitive disabilities**.

This community will be organized around principles and practices that promote and support inclusion, accessibility and literacy and numeracy learning for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Participants will participate in an online community from September 2014 to June 2015.

The goals of this community of practice are to:

- collaboratively develop, collect and share information and strategies for building district, school and teacher capacity to better support students with significant disabilities
- explore and share best practices related to creating meaningful learning opportunities and effective supports for students with significant disabilities
- explore ways in which learning opportunities and supports can better address diverse learner needs, including how technology can change ways in which students engage in their learning

This project will build on the work of the 2011—2015 *Literacy for All* and *Numeracy for All* Communities of Practice. To learn more about these projects, visit: <http://literacyforallab.ca> and <http://numeracyforallab.ca>.

Depending on the priorities of participants, this community of practice will focus on a number of topics that could include:

- Creating cultures of high expectations
- Increasing participation and learning
- Understanding how UDL and assistive technology fit together
- Exploring augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) solutions for learning
- Balancing academics and functional life skills
- Rethinking the role of educational assistants
- Creating opportunities for social interaction and friendships
- Revisiting special education practices: Barriers or opportunities?

*Sample community of practice invitation letter for district leaders and consultants*

In addition, participants will have access to the webinars for both the Literacy and Numeracy communities of practice for teachers.

As a participant you would be committing to:

- Participating in a two-day face-to-face orientation session on **September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014** (travel to be covered by project)
- Exploring the use of resources, strategies and technologies to support students with significant cognitive disabilities
- Participating in four one-hour webinars throughout the school year to discuss topics, share experiences, learn new strategies and network with other participants
- Contributing to discussion and the development of content on a dedicated project website (including sharing of teacher-made material and samples of student work)
- Responding to two online surveys and reflecting on your district's experiences with these strategies, resources and approaches.
- Participating in a one-day follow-up session in May/June 2015 to share success stories (travel to be covered by project)
- **Collaborating with other participants to plan, organize and deliver at least one related professional learning opportunity for teachers in your geographical region during the 2015-2016 school year**

The following table offers a snapshot of learning characteristics typical of students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Students with a moderate cognitive disability	Students with a severe cognitive disability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may be developmentally functioning significantly below same-age peers</li> <li>• may be learning basic communication skills and may require a communication system</li> <li>• may be an emerging reader (is beginning or can identify most letters of the alphabet most of the time and is engaged and interested when books are read to them)</li> <li>• may require adult support around basic routines such as lunch, getting ready for the bus etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have significant delays in all or most areas of development</li> <li>• have associated disabilities including physical, sensory, medical and/or behaviour</li> <li>• have limited communication skills and may require a communication system</li> <li>• be an emerging reader (is beginning to identify most letters of the alphabet and is interested when books are read to them)</li> <li>• requires modifications to most learning activities to participate</li> <li>• requires adult support for personal care and to participate in most activities</li> </ul>

### WHO SHOULD APPLY?

District leaders and consultants who support teachers working with students with significant cognitive disabilities are invited to participate in this community of practice. Students with significant cognitive disabilities are individuals with unique learning needs and interests.

If you are interested in participating in this leadership opportunity, please complete this application and submit to (name) at the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium by email (email) or faxed to (number). This opportunity is limited to 30 participants total, maximum three participants per school authority.

[Sample community of practice invitation letter for district leaders and consultants](#)

**Application for Learning for All:  
Supporting Students with Significant Disabilities  
A Community of Practice for District Leaders and Consultants**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

District Assignment \_\_\_\_\_

District Name \_\_\_\_\_

School Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print clearly!)

*I understand and commit to the expectations of this project:*

- *Participating in a two-day face-to-face orientation session on **September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014** (travel to be covered by project)*
- *Exploring the use of resources, strategies and technologies to support students with significant cognitive disabilities*
- *Participating in four one-hour webinars throughout the school year to discuss topics, share experiences, learn new strategies and network with other participants*
- *Contributing to discussion and the development of content on a dedicated project website (including sharing of teacher-made material and samples of student work)*
- *Responding to two online surveys and reflecting on your district's experiences with these strategies, resources and approaches.*
- *Participating in a one-day follow-up session in May/June 2015 to share success stories (travel to be covered by project)*
- ***Collaborating with other participants to plan, organize and deliver at least one related professional learning opportunity for teachers in your geographical region during the 2015-2016 school year***

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email applications to (name and email) or faxed to (number) by **September 10, 2014**