



## Optimal Learning Implementation Plan

### Why Optimal Learning, Why Now

Edmonton Catholic Schools is operating within an increasingly complex educational landscape. Classrooms reflect a wide range of student strengths, needs, and learning pathways. At the same time, educators are implementing new curriculum, supporting student well-being, and working toward high expectations for learning.

Through Division engagement, including the Community of School Councils (COSC), a clear message emerged: there is strong confidence in our educators, alongside a desire for greater clarity and consistency in how learning is experienced across schools.

School leaders have echoed this need. Without shared language and common reference points, strong practices can feel fragmented, and expectations can vary from classroom to classroom.

#### **Optimal Learning responds to this need.**

It provides a clear, shared framework that brings alignment to teaching, leadership, and professional learning. Rather than adding something new, it helps the Division focus on what matters most, creating the conditions where every student can thrive.

### Alignment to Mission, Faith, and Portrait of a Graduate

Optimal Learning is grounded in the mission of Edmonton Catholic Schools and our commitment to educating the whole child, academically, spiritually, socially, and emotionally.

The Portrait of a Graduate describes who we are forming our students to become. Optimal Learning focuses on **how we create the conditions for that formation to happen every day in classrooms.**

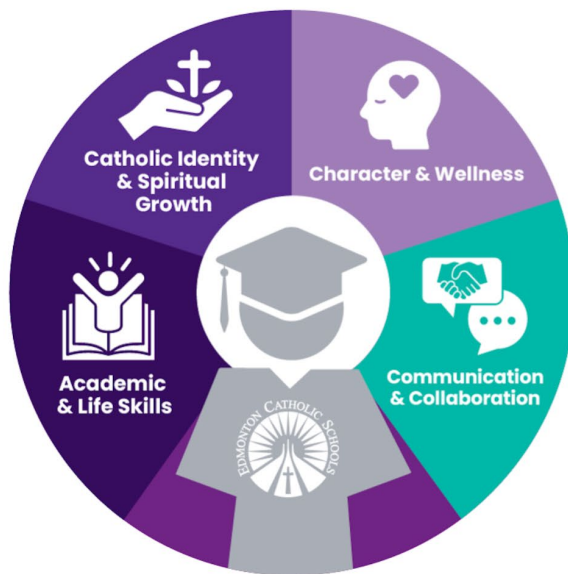
Faith is not confined to a single condition within this framework. While it is explicitly named in areas such as Catholic Faith Permeating and Well-being and Spiritual Formation, it is present across all learning conditions.

For example, in **Joy and Rigour**, joy is not understood as surface-level happiness. Drawing on the tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas, joy is experienced as the deep fulfillment that comes from meaningful work and growth, a sense of purpose, effort, and accomplishment. In this way, joy and rigour are not opposites, but partners. Students experience joy through challenge, perseverance, and success.

This reflects a Catholic understanding of learning as formation, where intellectual growth, personal development, and faith are interconnected.

**Optimal Learning ensures that our mission is not only stated, but lived in daily practice.**

## PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE



**When a student experiences Optimal Learning while attending Edmonton Catholic Schools, they will be:**

- Critical thinkers and problem solvers
- Creative and innovative
- Discerning believers and seekers
- Faith-filled stewards
- Lifelong Learners
- Empathetic and inclusive
- Resilient and wellness-focused
- Effective communicators and collaborators
- Ethical digital and global citizens

## What Is Optimal Learning?

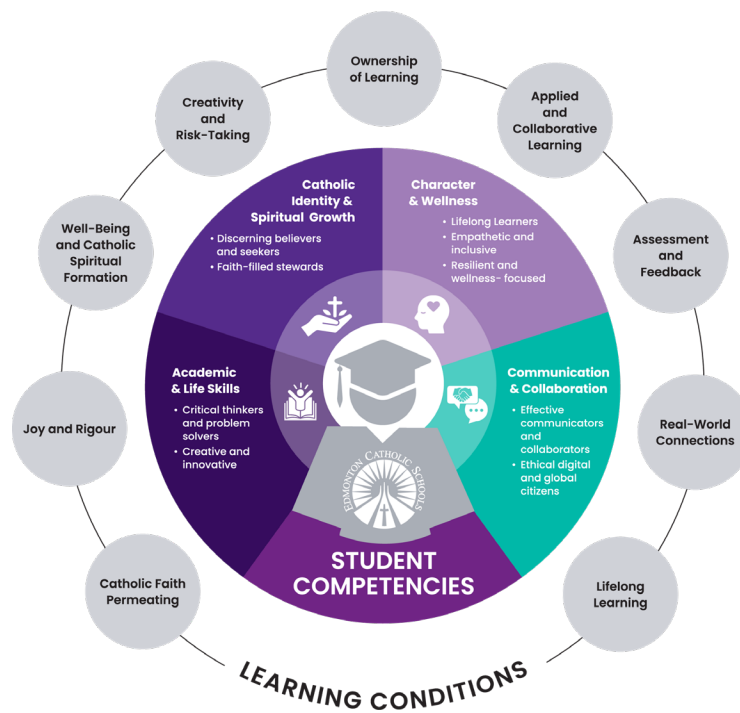
Optimal Learning is a shared understanding of the conditions required for effective teaching and learning across Edmonton Catholic Schools.

It is not a program or checklist. It is a framework that helps educators and leaders focus on the conditions that support student success, while allowing flexibility in how learning is designed within each school context.

At its core, Optimal Learning recognizes that strong outcomes do not happen by chance, they are the result of intentional conditions. These include:

- clarity of learning,
- purposeful instructional design,
- responsive teaching,
- meaningful assessment,
- and supportive learning environments.

The Learning Conditions provide a common language for these elements. They support planning, professional dialogue, and reflection, helping educators understand not just *what* to teach, but *how learning is experienced by students*.



<u>Catholic Faith Permeating</u>	<u>Joy and Rigour</u>	<u>Well-Being &amp; Catholic Spiritual Formation</u>
<u>Creativity and Risk Taking</u>	<u>Ownership of Learning</u>	<u>Applied and Collaborative Learning</u>
<u>Assessment and Feedback</u>	<u>Real-World Connections</u>	<u>Lifelong Learning</u>

## From Concept to Practice: How Optimal Learning Is Being Activated

Following the development of the framework, the Division has focused on thoughtful activation rather than rapid rollout.

### Leadership Academy

Leadership Academy served as the formal introduction of Optimal Learning, bringing leaders together around a shared understanding of learning conditions and instructional leadership.

Principals identified the value of having clear language to support conversations about teaching and learning, making expectations more visible and actionable.

### Aligning Professional Learning

Rather than introducing new structures, existing professional learning (School Teams, consultant support, leadership conversations) has been aligned to the Learning Conditions.

This ensures that professional learning is:

- connected,
- purposeful,
- and focused on improving classroom practice.

### Supporting Professional Conversations

The ECSD Success Matrix supports consistent, meaningful conversations across the system. It provides a shared reference point for reflection and dialogue, grounded in observable practice.

This strengthens alignment while honouring professional judgment.

## **Five Key Implementation Foundations for the ECSD Three-Year Education Plan 2026-2029**

### **1. Development of the Optimal Learning Framework**

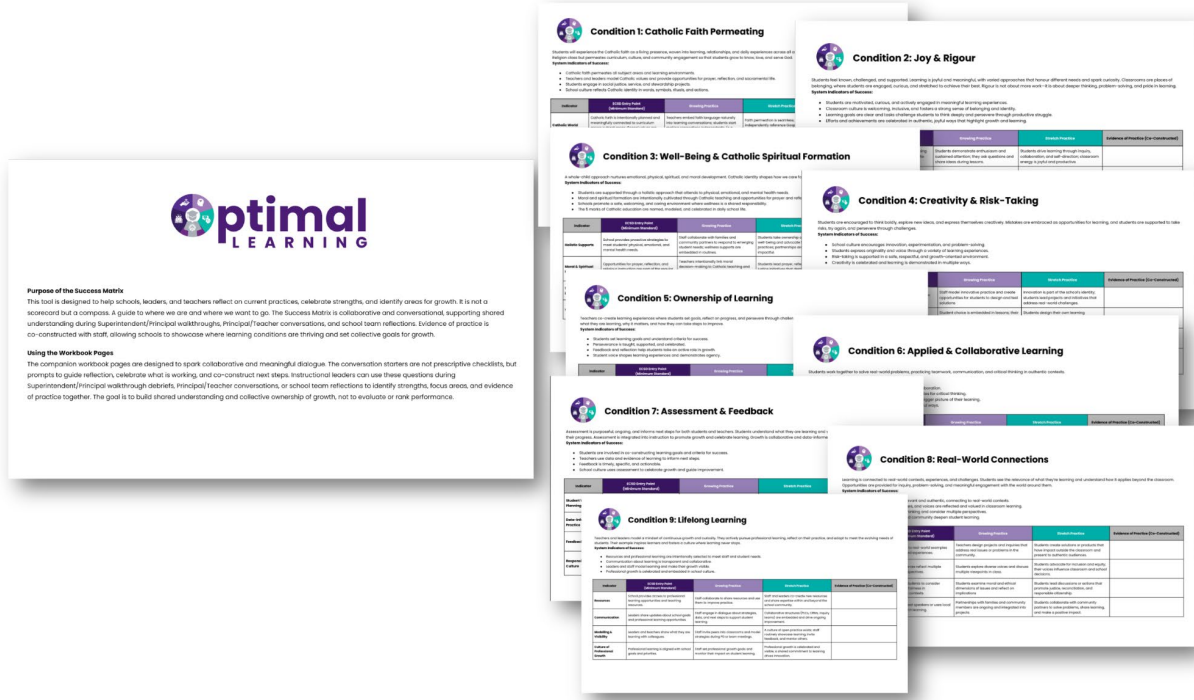
The Optimal Learning Framework was developed through an iterative, collaborative process grounded in research, professional standards, and system voice. Learning Services worked alongside school and system leaders to refine a shared understanding of what creates the conditions for student success. Drawing on Alberta’s Teaching, Leadership, and Superintendent Quality Standards, as well as the provincial curriculum architecture, the framework brings coherence to existing expectations rather than introducing something new.


Through multiple cycles of consultation, refinement, and application, the Division identified a set of learning conditions and student competencies that reflect both provincial direction and ECSD’s Catholic context. This work was strengthened through ongoing engagement with educators, leadership teams, and expert guidance, ensuring the framework is both research-informed and grounded in classroom reality. The result is a shared language that supports alignment across classrooms, schools, and the system, while still allowing for professional judgment and local context.

### **2. ECSD Success Matrix**

The ECSD Success Matrix is a practical tool designed to support reflection, planning, and professional dialogue across all levels of the system. It outlines each learning condition through clear indicators and descriptions of what success looks like in practice, using observable and student-centered language .

Rather than functioning as an evaluative rubric, the Success Matrix serves as a conversation guide. It supports superintendent–principal discussions, principal–teacher conversations, instructional coaching, and teacher self-reflection. The accompanying workbook provides prompts that help teams identify strengths, co-construct evidence of practice, and determine next steps for growth . This approach builds shared understanding and collective ownership, allowing each school to define what Optimal Learning looks like within its unique context while remaining aligned to Division priorities.





## Condition 2: Joy & Rigour

Students feel known, challenged, and supported. Learning is joyful and meaningful, with varied approaches that honour different needs and spark curiosity. Classrooms are places of belonging, where students are engaged, curious, and stretched to achieve their best. Rigour is not about more work—it is about deeper thinking, problem-solving, and pride in learning.

**System Indicators of Success:**

- Students are motivated, curious, and actively engaged in meaningful learning experiences.
- Classroom culture is welcoming, inclusive, and fosters a strong sense of belonging and identity.
- Learning goals are clear and tasks challenge students to think deeply and persevere through productive struggle.
- Efforts and achievements are celebrated in authentic, joyful ways that highlight growth and learning.

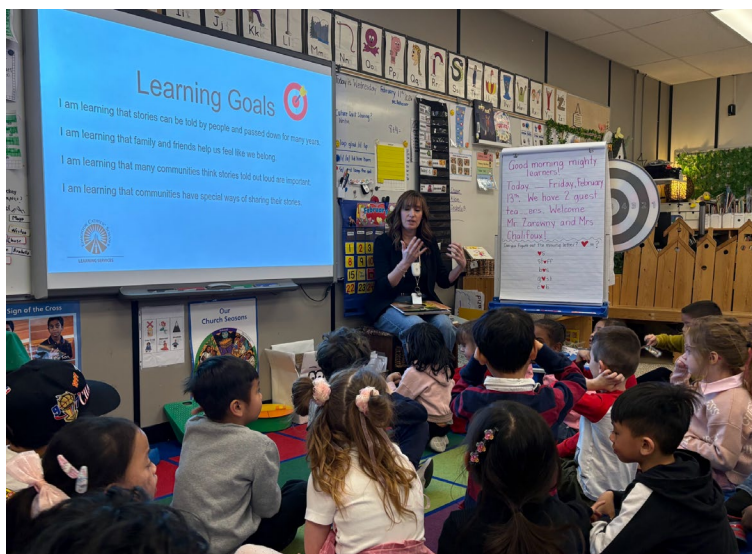
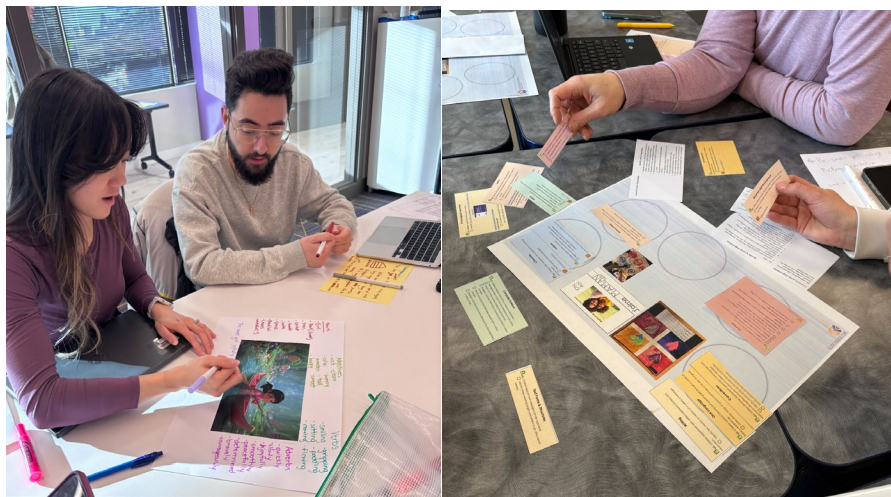
Indicator	ECSD Entry Point (Minimum Standard)	Growing Practice	Stretch Practice	Evidence of Practice (Co-Constructed)
<b>Engaged Learners</b>	Students are actively involved in learning tasks that spark curiosity, joy, and invite participation.	Students demonstrate enthusiasm and sustained attention; they ask questions and share ideas during lessons.	Students drive learning through inquiry, collaboration, and self-direction; classroom energy is joyful and productive.	
<b>Belonging &amp; Identity</b>	Classroom culture is welcoming, safe, and inclusive for all students.	Students see their cultures, languages, and identities represented in classroom materials and routines.	Students co-create classroom norms and learning spaces, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging for every learner.	
<b>Clarity &amp; Challenge</b>	Learning goals and success criteria are shared with students; tasks are appropriately challenging.	Students articulate what they are learning and why; scaffolds and supports enable productive struggle.	Students set personal goals, track progress, and reflect on growth; learning tasks demand higher-order thinking and creativity.	
<b>Celebration of Learning</b>	Teachers acknowledge student effort and achievement in meaningful ways.	Celebrations are connected to learning goals and involve peers and families when appropriate.	Students take the lead in showcasing and celebrating their learning through portfolios, presentations, or public exhibitions.	

### 3. High Impact Strategy Suite

To support implementation, Learning Services is developing a High Impact Strategy Suite that makes effective instructional practices visible in real classroom contexts. These strategies are

grounded in research and aligned directly to the learning conditions and student competencies, ensuring coherence with curriculum and daily teaching practice. The strategies will be tailored to the needs of diverse student groups. Embedded within the hub will be specific actions that schools can undertake to improve achievement for our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and to advance the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Actions for all students.

The focus is on modeling rather than prescribing. By showing what high-impact strategies look like in action, educators are able to see how conditions for learning are created through intentional instructional design. This approach reinforces that Optimal Learning is not an add-on, but a way of delivering curriculum effectively. It also supports consistent professional learning across the Division, where all sessions are explicitly connected to the shared language of conditions and competencies.

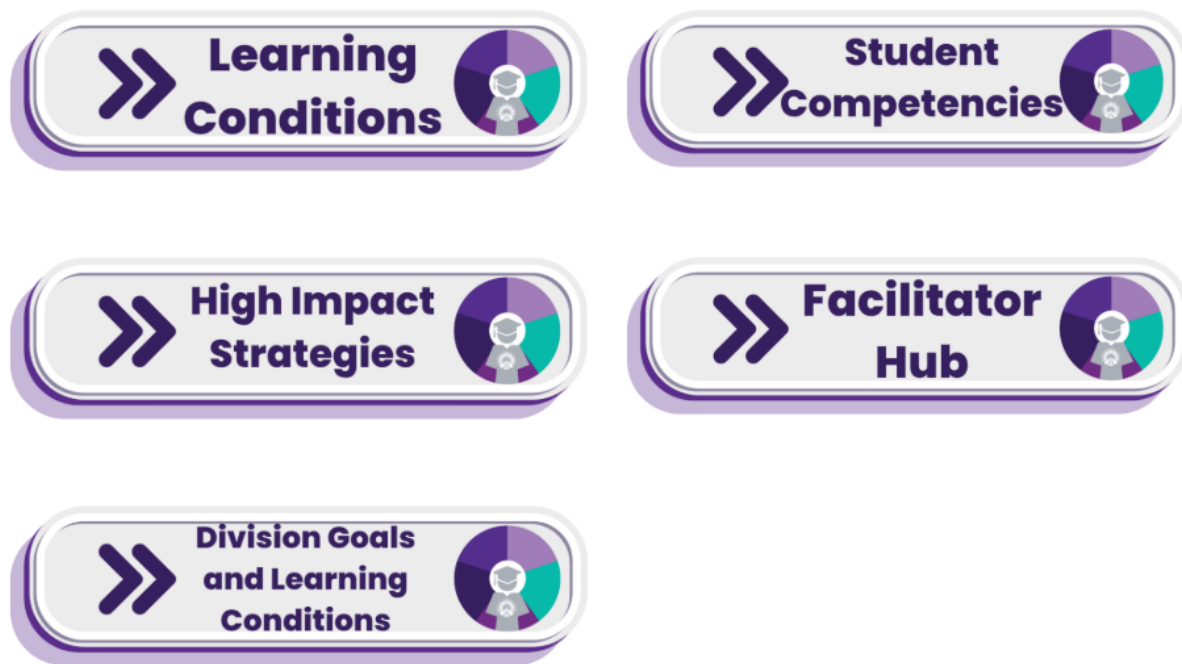




# OPTIMAL LEARNING

## What is Optimal Learning?

Optimal Learning is the outcome of aligning curriculum, instruction, and environment to nurture the full potential of every student. It happens when teachers, leaders, and school staff create the right conditions for learning. Where faith, academic rigor, inclusive practice, and meaningful relationships are interwoven. Optimal Learning is not a fixed destination, but a living commitment to growth, grounded in professional standards and inspired by the belief that every child can flourish. It is both the science of teaching and the art of cultivating hope.



## 4. Facilitator Hub

The Facilitator Hub was created to provide school leaders with accessible, ready-to-use resources to support staff learning. Located within the Optimal Learning SharePoint site, it serves as a central hub for professional learning, including facilitator guides, slide decks, and structured activities.

The first three modules, *What is Optimal Learning?*, *What are Learning Conditions?*, and *What are Student Competencies?*, offer a common entry point for all schools. These modules are designed to build shared understanding and spark professional dialogue, rather than deliver one-time training. They emphasize reflection, connection to practice, and adaptability to local contexts .

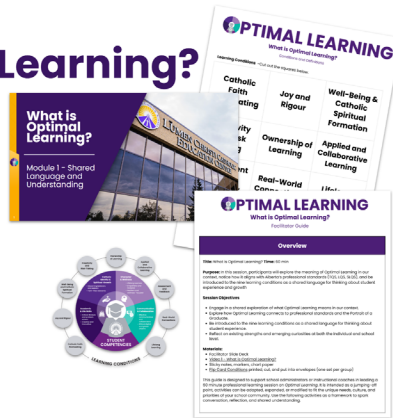
By providing consistent, high-quality resources, the Facilitator Hub enables principals, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders to guide meaningful learning within their schools, supporting coherence while allowing flexibility in implementation.

## What is Optimal Learning?

Faith, curriculum, learning conditions, and competencies are not separate streams.

Optimal Learning integrates them.

It shifts us from “initiative stacking” to aligned design.



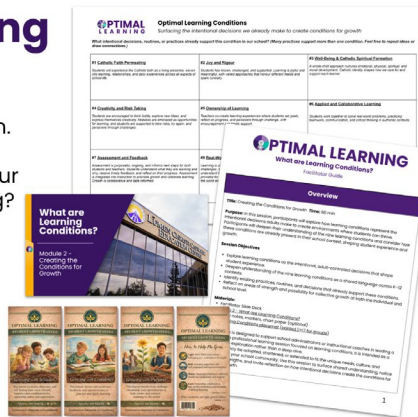
## What are Learning Conditions?

Asking Why. Then asking why again.

Conditions are intentional and in our control. What are we already doing?

They determine whether the competencies can grow.

They influence daily student experience more than any single strategy.



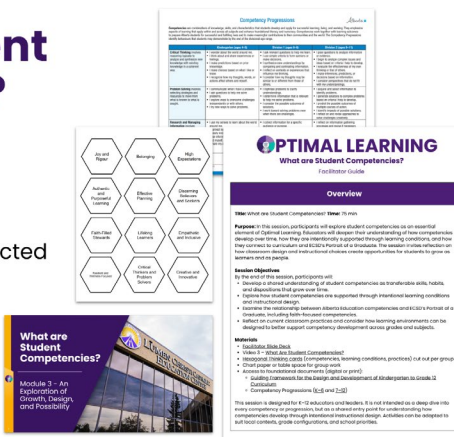
## What are Student Competencies?

They grow over time.

They require opportunity.

They must be intentionally connected to curriculum.

They are not add-ons.



## 5. Optimal Learning Working Group (OLWG)

The Optimal Learning Working Group (OLWG) is a Division-wide implementation model designed to move the framework from shared understanding into sustained classroom practice. Selected schools will participate as “living laboratories,” where educators, leaders, and students work together to co-construct, test, and refine what Optimal Learning looks like in action .

Participation will include 10–15 schools, each represented by a small team of leaders and teachers. The work is structured through iterative learning cycles that emphasize application, reflection, and refinement. A key feature of the OLWG is the integration of student voice, ensuring that the impact of learning conditions is understood through the experiences of learners themselves.

The purpose of the OLWG is to build system coherence through shared practice rather than top-down implementation. By creating opportunities for schools to learn with and from each other, the model supports the development of practical examples, strengthens professional capacity, and enables knowledge to be shared across the Division.

# Optimal Learning Working Group



## A System Model for Deep, Co-Constructed Implementation

The Optimal Learning Working Group (OLWG) is a strategic, division-wide implementation model designed to move Optimal Learning from shared understanding into **deep, observable, and sustainable practice** across Edmonton Catholic Schools.

This model positions select schools as “**living laboratories of learning**” where system leaders, educators, and students work together to co-construct, test, refine, and mobilize what Optimal Learning looks like in practice.

### The Central Commitment

Rather than implementing to schools, this model builds implementation **with** schools, creating coherence, shared language, and system-wide capacity over time.

## Creating Coherence Across the System

Optimal Learning brings coherence to teaching and learning across the Division. Over time, schools engage with multiple initiatives and priorities. Without a unifying structure, this can feel fragmented.

Optimal Learning provides that structure.

It connects curriculum, instructional practices, assessment, and student supports through a shared set of learning conditions. This allows educators to see how their work fits together, rather than experiencing it as separate expectations.

As a result:

- duplication is reduced,
- priorities are clearer,
- and professional learning is more focused.

At the leadership level, this shared language strengthens instructional leadership conversations across schools and departments.

Most importantly, it ensures that students experience consistent, high-quality learning, without requiring identical approaches in every classroom.

## Evidence of Early Impact and Uptake

Early evidence shows strong engagement and growing clarity across the system.

- High participation in Leadership Academy and follow-up learning
- Positive principal feedback on clarity and shared language
- Increased confidence in leading instructional conversations
- Use of the Success Matrix to support reflection and planning
- Alignment of professional learning to Learning Conditions

Principals consistently described Optimal Learning as helping to:

- “bring existing work together”
- “clarify expectations”
- “support meaningful conversations about practice”

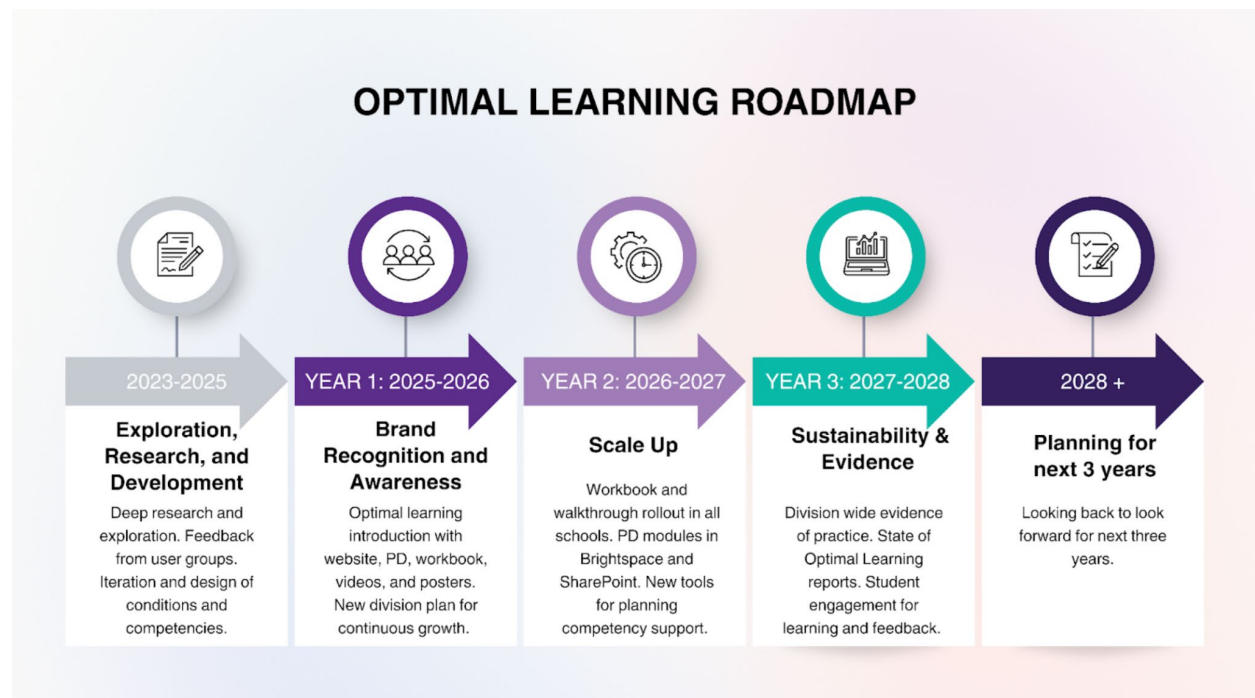
These early indicators demonstrate that the framework is establishing a strong foundation for long-term impact.

## The Three-Year Arc: Where We Are Going

Optimal Learning is a multi-year approach designed to support meaningful and sustained change.

- **Year 1:** Build shared understanding and align leadership and professional learning
- **Year 2:** Deepen practice and expand application across schools
- **Year 3:** Strengthen consistency and gather evidence of impact

This phased approach ensures that change is intentional, supported, and sustainable.



## Conclusion: Assurance and Stewardship

Optimal Learning is how Edmonton Catholic Schools will bring its new Three-Year Education Plan to life.

It provides:

- a shared language,
- a collective purpose,
- and a clear framework for action.

By focusing on the conditions for learning, the Division is moving from managing initiatives to strengthening practice. This work is grounded in our Catholic faith, aligned with Division goals, and designed to support every student in reaching their God-given potential.