



CREATING COMMUNITIES OF BELONGING



Edmonton Catholic Schools | Embracing Diversity Report 2026

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Introduction

Edmonton Catholic Schools is committed to ensuring that its mission to provide a Catholic education in a faith filled, Christ centered learning environment is inclusive of every child of God. Rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, the *Creating Communities of Belonging: Advancing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti Racism Strategic Plan (2025–2028)* reflects our call to uphold the inherent dignity of every human person and to build communities grounded in justice, compassion, and right relationship.

Shaped by engagement with students, families, and staff across the Division, the *Creating Communities of Belonging: Advancing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti Racism Strategic Plan (2025–2028)* recognizes that belonging is formed through intentional practice over time. Implementation follows a site based stewardship model, honouring the unique contexts of schools and departments while advancing shared priorities across the system.

This Embracing Diversity Report highlights Division-level actions undertaken during the implementation year of the *Creating Communities of Belonging Strategic Plan*. The three priorities on the following pages outline the shared focus and key strategies guiding this work.

Priority 1: Belonging and Inclusion

Belonging and Inclusion is grounded in the Gospel call to love one another as Christ loves us, recognizing belonging as a faith imperative rather than a social aspiration. By fostering cultures of respect, acceptance, and care rooted in Catholic values, Edmonton Catholic Schools seeks to create optimal learning environments that enhance student engagement and well being. This includes intentionally centering the voices and experiences of students with specialized learning, communication, and accessibility needs, ensuring that belonging is experienced through authentic participation, representation, and relationship—not merely accommodation.

This priority focuses on helping students and staff understand and celebrate their uniqueness as children of God, building interpersonal and intercultural skills guided by charity, respect, and mercy, and ensuring that learning resources reflect the diversity of our students, families, and staff through consistent use of established provincial and Division tools.

Priority 2: Building Competence in Diversity

Building competence in diversity reflects the Catholic understanding that the Body of Christ is made up of many unique and valued members, each called to contribute to a just and compassionate community. This priority focuses on developing the awareness, knowledge, and self reflection needed for students and staff to recognize how their actions shape learning environments that are free from discrimination and bias. Developing this competence includes learning to recognize and honour diverse ways students express voice, identity, and belonging, particularly for students with disabilities or specialized learning needs, immigrant students, and racialized students, whose voices, identities, and contributions may be expressed or communicated in diverse ways.

Educating students and staff about the diverse cultural and spiritual dimensions of our community builds awareness and appreciation for the richness of our shared experiences. Through curated resources, meaningful learning opportunities, and intentional dialogue, this work supports deeper understanding while aligning inclusion, equity and anti racism efforts with the Catholic commitment to human dignity, justice, and mercy.



Priority 3: Education and Awareness

Education and Awareness focuses on intentionally integrating Catholic Social Teaching and principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti racism into teaching, learning, and formation across the Division.

Catholic education is called to nurture the mind, heart, and soul by weaving faith principles such as solidarity, justice, and care for the vulnerable into all areas of learning.

Learning experiences, curriculum resources, and faith formation are intentionally shaped to reflect diverse abilities, identities, and ways of being to support representation, dignity, and belonging.

This work is advanced through:

- explicit connections within Religious Education
- authentic permeation of faith across subject areas
- collaborative learning through Communities of Practice
- ongoing professional learning that deepens understanding of Catholic Social Teaching, human rights, and responsive approaches to racism and discrimination



Creating Communities of Belonging

Cross-Priority Support: Relational Stewardship and Accompaniment

Across all three priorities, the Creating Communities of Belonging department supports schools and departments through ongoing relational stewardship and accompaniment. This work includes supporting conversations and collaborative problem solving with students, parents, staff, and administrators to strengthen relationships and build trust within school communities. Creating Communities of Belonging supports schools in their strategic work by working alongside school leaders and staff to support their school growth plan goals related to the division Embracing Diversity goal. Rather than prescriptive solutions, the team emphasizes listening, dialogue, and restorative approaches that honour the dignity of all involved. Through this cross priority support, Creating Communities of Belonging reinforces that sustainable change is built through relationship, reflection, and shared responsibility grounded in Catholic Social Teaching and the call to walk together as a faith community.

The table below illustrates the key areas of support through which Creating Communities of Belonging works alongside schools, including associated staff professional learning and student learning experiences.

Areas of Support	Staff Professional Learning Offered	Student Classroom Presentations / Learning Experiences Offered (classroom, grade level, and large group)
Culturally Responsive Teaching & Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)- School and Classroom Practices • Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Social Identity • Integration of CRT into instructional planning • CRT and proactive circles combined learning sessions 	
Belonging & Community-Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restorative Practices-Proactive Circles (introductory and advanced) • Proactive circle structures for curricular classroom instruction • Proactive Circles for building relational classroom culture • Wellness-focused circle strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive circles focused on belonging and community • Classroom-based community-building activities
Addressing Harmful Language & Bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to harmful and derogatory language • Restorative and faith-aligned responses to bias and harm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Words That Hurt” presentations • Proactive circles addressing harmful language and exclusion • Supporting small-group restorative circles following incidents
Restorative & Relational Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for Restorative Practices for Educators • Modelling of restorative and proactive circles for teachers • Follow-up coaching and observation to support implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restorative circles to repair harm • Relationship-focused follow up sessions with students • Circles supporting reintegration and reconciliation
Student Voice, Leadership & Social Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for facilitating equity-focused student groups • Ongoing coaching and Communities of Practice for staff leads • Guidance on purpose, structure, and Catholic context for groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an Upstander (BAU) program presentations • Project-based learning connected to social justice • Student gallery walks and sharing of learning • Black Student Alliance (BSA) sessions and gatherings

To support this relational, cross priority work at a system level, Creating Communities of Belonging is guided by two complementary structures: the Strategic Plan Implementation Committee and the Advisory Group. Together, these committees ensure that the Strategic Plan is informed by lived experience while also translated into coordinated Division level action. While the Advisory Group creates space to listen deeply to the voices of staff across the Division, the Implementation Committee uses these insights to guide planning, decision making, and communication. This intentional structure reflects a commitment to accompaniment—honouring voice, fostering shared responsibility, and supporting meaningful, sustainable change grounded in Catholic Social Teaching.

Creating Communities of Belonging		
	Implementation Committee	Advisory Group
Primary Role	Guides Division-level implementation of the Strategic Plan	Provides staff voice and lived experience
Focus	Action, implementation, alignment with Catholic worldview	Listening, learning, informing decisions
Membership	Managers, Directors, Principals, Assistant Principals	Staff from across the Division
Meetings	4 meetings per school year	4 meetings per school year
Primary Output	Division-level actions, supports, and communication	Insights and perspectives to inform planning



The Creating Communities of Belonging department supports education and awareness across the Division through ongoing, intentional communication and resourcing. One key mechanism for this work is the Division’s Staff Week at a Glance (SWAG), which is used to regularly share timely information, learning opportunities, resources, and reminders connected to equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, and belonging. This includes highlighting and supporting ECSD-recognized dates of recognition and dates of awareness throughout the school year to help staff plan, learn, and engage in meaningful, age-appropriate learning and community-building activities.

Through SWAG postings, staff are informed about professional learning opportunities, community-of-practice gatherings, and tools that support safe, welcoming, and faith-filled learning environments aligned with Division priorities and the Creating Communities of Belonging Strategic Plan.

In addition to system-wide awareness, the department provides targeted support to schools in the implementation and sustainability of student voice and belonging initiatives. This includes guidance, resources, and professional learning to support GSA/LIFE Groups, Black Student Alliances, equity-focused student groups, and the Be an Upstander program. Through direct communication, community-of-practice sessions, and ongoing consultation, staff are supported in understanding purpose, Church teachings, best practices, and practical considerations for facilitating these groups in ways that honour dignity, foster relationship, and promote inclusion within a Catholic context.

The department also supports schools by promoting and resourcing school-level learning and activities connected to multicultural and culture days, as well as key heritage and awareness months such as Black History Month, Asian Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and International Women's Day. Through shared resources, curated learning ideas, and awareness raised through divisional communication channels, schools are encouraged to engage students in age-appropriate, curriculum-connected learning that honours diverse identities, histories, and contributions while aligning with Catholic Social Teaching. This coordinated approach supports schools in creating opportunities that move beyond celebration alone toward learning that deepens understanding, empathy, and a sense of belonging for all members of the school community



Priority-Level Support

Priority 1: Belonging and Inclusion

Under Priority 1, Creating Communities of Belonging provided division-wide leadership and direct support focused on strengthening relationships and ensuring belonging is experienced through dignity, voice, and connection. The team delivered professional development and student learning sessions in restorative practices, proactive circles, and community-building strategies division wide. These sessions supported students and staff in developing shared norms, strengthening peer relationships, and creating emotionally safe learning environments rooted in respect and care. In addition, the team regularly supported facilitated conversations to restore relationships and address concerns impacting belonging, working alongside students, parents, staff, and administrators to navigate moments of harm, tension, or exclusion in ways that preserve dignity and promote reconciliation.

Priority 2: Building Competence in Diversity

Creating Communities of Belonging advanced Priority 2 by delivering targeted professional learning to build staff competence in culturally responsive teaching, addressing harmful language, and engaging thoughtfully with diversity and identity. These learning sessions supported educators and staff in recognizing bias, responding to harmful or exclusionary language, and fostering classrooms and workplaces where difference is respected and valued. As an example, the Creating Communities of Belonging team collaborated with Indigenous Learning Services to provide identity mapping and multicultural learning sessions for One World One Centre staff, deepening understanding of lived experience, culture, and community context. Through these and other collaborative professional learning opportunities, staff were supported to develop greater confidence and consistency in using inclusive, restorative, and faith aligned approaches when engaging with diversity across school communities.

Priority 2 was further advanced through collaboration with Learning Services to deliver curriculum based professional learning focused on culturally responsive teaching, including the use of proactive circles and inclusive, diverse classroom texts. These sessions supported staff in connecting equity and inclusion to daily instructional practice, emphasizing the role of relationship, representation, and dialogue in supporting student engagement and learning.

In addition, the *Culturally Responsive Classrooms and Identity* professional learning delivered to Educational Assistants strengthened staff understanding of how culture, identity, and lived experience influence student learning, engagement, and behaviour. Through explicit connections to neuroscience, participants examined how safety, relevance, and belonging are prerequisites for learning and reflected on how assumptions and cultural reference points shape interactions with students. Interactive activities supported staff in mapping their own identities and recognizing how culturally responsive practices—such as predictable routines, inclusive visuals, and representative learning materials—support student belonging, engagement, and well being. As a result, staff increased their capacity to create environments where diverse identities are recognized, neurodiverse learners are supported, and students feel safe, valued, and able to engage meaningfully in learning.

Priority 3: Education and Awareness

Under Priority 3, Creating Communities of Belonging played a key role in strengthening education and awareness by supporting staff to understand equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism as integral to Catholic education. The team worked collaboratively with Religious Education Services to create resources that explicitly connect Catholic Social Teaching to equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism, reinforcing the alignment between Gospel values and inclusive practice. These resources and learning experiences supported educators in recognizing that commitments to dignity, justice, solidarity, and care for the vulnerable are central to Catholic identity and authentically expressed through teaching, learning, and relationship.

As part of advancing education and awareness at the system level, Creating Communities of Belonging also led initiatives to strengthen shared understanding and identity across the Division. This included the development of a new video to launch the department's name, Creating Communities of Belonging, supporting staff and communities in understanding the purpose, faith grounding, and vision of the work. Through collaboration with Communications and other departments, the team supported consistent and accessible messaging that reinforced belonging as a shared responsibility across curriculum, culture, leadership, and relationships.

Year One Implementation Highlights

Priority 1: Belonging and Inclusion

During the first year of implementation, Division-level actions focused on strengthening relational practices and creating inclusive conditions where belonging could be experienced in tangible and meaningful ways. Across departments, this work emphasized student voice, restorative approaches, peer connection, and culturally responsive supports that reflect the dignity of each person as a child of God. The following examples highlight how Priority 1 was advanced through intentional actions undertaken across the Division during the past year.



Learning Services

One World...One Centre

One World...One Centre plays a key role in supporting belonging and inclusion by welcoming and supporting families as they begin their journey in Edmonton Catholic Schools. Serving as more than a registration site, One World...One Centre acts as a bridge between home, school, and community, ensuring that families' first experiences with the Division are welcoming, respectful, and supportive. Through this work, inclusive environments are fostered, intercultural understanding and relationships are strengthened, and family voice and engagement are centred as essential to student success.



This commitment is evident through responsive entry and settlement supports, including year round registration and orientation sessions, on site English Language Proficiency Assessments for students, and guidance to help families navigate school systems and community services. Intercultural Liaison staff provide support in families' first languages, helping to reduce barriers, build understanding, and establish early connections. As a result, families feel confident, supported, and connected from their first point of contact with the Division.

Relational practices further support trust based partnerships between families and schools. Restorative conversations and ongoing accompaniment help families navigate cultural differences, transitions, and moments of uncertainty, contributing to stronger relationships and shared responsibility for student well being. Opportunities to celebrate identity and culture, including participation in multicultural events, student and family storytelling around faith and lived experience, and classroom connections to global perspectives, support students in seeing themselves reflected and valued in their learning environments.

Family engagement was further strengthened through initiatives such as the September Parent Information Evening, which brought together over 250 families. The evening provided opportunities for families to learn about school expectations and supports, explore topics such as parenting in two cultures, access resources that promote student success and well being, and build connections with staff, other families, and community organizations that support settlement into Canada. Through these efforts, families are empowered as active partners in their children's education.

In addition to direct family support, One World...One Centre contributes to system capacity by delivering cultural learning for staff and students, collaborating with schools to embed inclusive and culturally responsive practices, deepening intercultural understanding across school communities, and supporting system wide initiatives such as the ECSD Networking Event. Together, this work strengthens the Division's ability to respond effectively to the diverse needs of students and families and reinforces belonging as a lived experience from the very first step into Edmonton Catholic Schools.

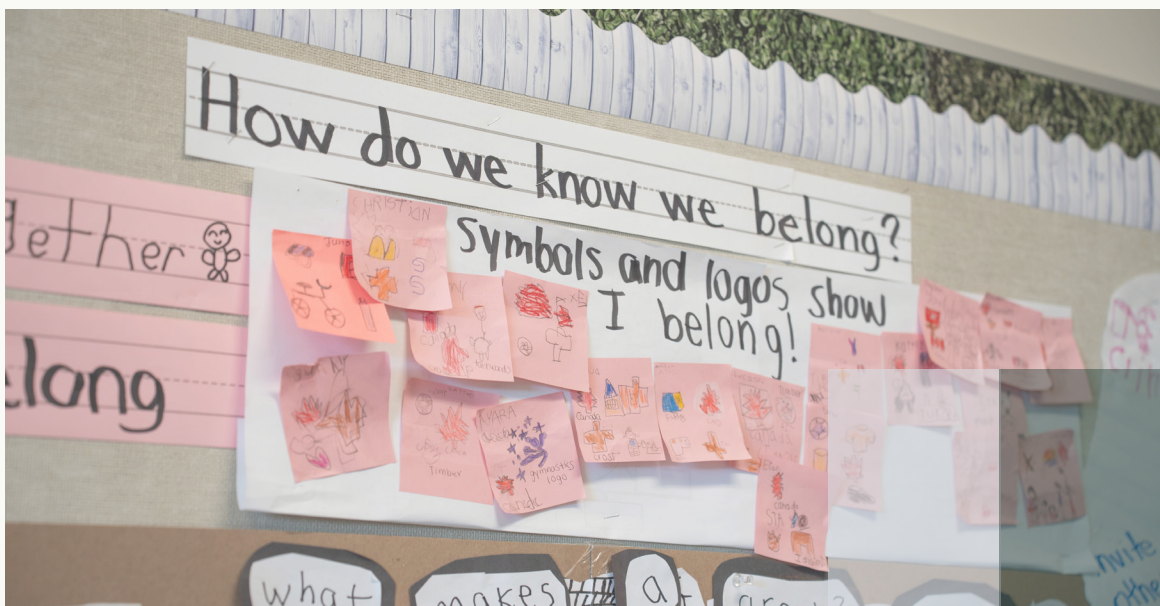


Behavioural Therapy Team

The Behavioural Therapy Team supports diversity and inclusion by intentionally creating spaces where all students feel seen, valued, and safe to be themselves. Through classroom lessons, circles, and visual displays, the team helps students understand that belonging does not require changing who they are. Activities such as community-building lessons on identity and belonging, restorative conversations around difficult topics, and strengths-based reflections reinforce that every student's voice and lived experience matters. These approaches support neurodiversity-affirming practice, emotional safety, and positive identity development for students with diverse learning needs, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences.

The team also actively supports equity and anti-racism through relational and preventative work. Examples include facilitating restorative circles around racial justice and lived experiences, supporting classroom conversations during Black History Month, and collaborating with staff and students to address harm, discomfort, or exclusion when it arises. By centering student voice, listening deeply, and guiding respectful dialogue, the team helps build understanding, empathy, and accountability. This work strengthens relationships between students and trusted adults, models restorative practice, and supports long-term changes in attitudes and behaviour.

In addition, the Behavioural Therapy Team contributes to inclusive school cultures through universal supports that are accessible to all students. Visual supports, problem-solving boards, and mental-health-affirming displays help normalize emotions, teach respectful communication, and provide consistent strategies for managing conflict and stress. School-wide activities connected to Truth and Reconciliation, kindness, faith, and community values encourage reflection and shared responsibility, while honoring diverse cultural, spiritual, and personal identities. Together, this work helps create welcoming, caring, and inclusive learning environments where every student can belong and thrive.



Speech-Language Pathology

This year, the Speech-Language Pathology team partnered with school administrators and classroom teachers at five sites to implement a Peer Support Network Project. The project creates structured peer groups where students learn about neurodiversity and are supported to communicate, play, and learn with their autistic classmates, creating a sense of belonging that is built through relationships rather than programs. By equipping peers to be responsive communication partners and valuing diverse ways of communicating, including Augmentative and Alternative Communication systems, the project reinforces ECSD's commitment to inclusive communities where every student is recognized as a capable, contributing member. Grounded in inclusive and neuro-affirming practice, the project shifts support from adult led assistance to peer to peer relationships, fostering authentic friendships and shared participation for autistic students and their classmates. This project advances the priority of *Belonging and Inclusion* by intentionally creating school environments where students experience meaningful connection, mutual respect, and full participation in community life. In doing so, the Peer Support Network Project strengthens school cultures that reflect dignity, inclusion, and belonging for all learners



Early Learning

Within early learning classrooms, the Studio is the classroom learning environment where meaningful, play based experiences are shaped by children’s curiosity, co created projects and interest based centres, community building through social emotional learning, and authentic problem solving and risk taking. Learning is constructed collaboratively with peers and adults through hands on experiences that honour each individual as a capable contributor to an inclusive and shared community.

Studio practices follow the philosophies of *Flight: The Alberta Early Learning and Care Framework*, which positions early childhood communities as “places of vitality” where children are seen as agentic learners offering diverse perspectives shaped by their families, neighbourhoods, and provincial communities (Makovichuk et al.). By nurturing self efficacy and honouring each child’s voice, educators create play rich opportunities that help children construct meaningful understandings of the world around them.

Social and emotional learning is infused throughout Studio routines and transitions. Guided by the CASEL framework, educators support the development of self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible citizenship. These competencies inform programming that encourages children to navigate their learning spaces, collaborate with peers, make connections through hands on exploration, and develop a strong sense of belonging within the Studio community.

In the Studio, nurturing a sense of belonging reflects our call to honour the dignity and gifts of every child. When children feel valued, respected, and included, they experience the kind of shared community that allows them to learn with confidence and compassion. In this way, our work fosters a learning environment rooted in love, respect, and the belief that each child contributes something essential.



Natural Connections Community of Practice

In Year 1 of our Natural Connections Community of Practice (COP), the Elementary Curriculum team partnered closely with Indigenous Learning Services to bring Indigenous Education and land-based learning to life across English Language Arts and Literature (ELAL), Science, and Physical Education and Wellness (PEW). Beginning with a Division I (K-3) cohort, this work was intentionally designed to build teacher confidence and capacity in authentically integrating First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives through cross-curricular, land-based experiences. Grounded in relationship, curiosity, and holistic learning, the COP model created space for educators to learn alongside one another, both outdoors and in collaborative dialogue, shifting from “teaching in nature” to “learning with the land.”

Impact was evident in both teacher practice and mindset. Many educators initially expressed hesitation in approaching Indigenous content, unsure of how to engage respectfully and meaningfully. Through ongoing support, co-learning, and guidance from Indigenous Learning Services, teachers began to reframe this work, not as needing to have all the answers, but as a journey rooted in humility, curiosity, and relationship. This shift has been transformative, deepening understanding of Indigenous worldviews and strengthening a sense of shared responsibility to embed these perspectives in classrooms. The success of this first year has led to strong demand for continuation, with expansion planned for Grades 4-6 in the coming year, further growing a community of educators committed to creating spaces of belonging through land-based, Indigenous-informed learning.

ECSD Reads

The ECSD Reads event provided students with opportunities to engage with diverse authors, characters and perspectives. Book selection was informed through consultation with Indigenous Learning Services.

Keynote speaker Ariel Kleber spoke to students about the development of the Edmonton Public Library’s *African and Caribbean Canadian Books in Colour* resource, further supporting representation and dialogue.



Student Services

Indigenous Learning Services

Indigenous Learning Services (ILS) continues to take proactive approaches to support the integration of equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism within our Catholic school division through an Indigenous lens.

- Informal training for leaders and staff on how to facilitate meaningful conversations with Indigenous parents and students about lived experience, sense of belonging, and connection to the school community remains essential to advancing equity and inclusion across the Division.
- Departments also collaborate in sharing resources. For example, ILS's new Four Directions Wellness Specialist professional development session, "Dismantling Antiracism," addresses systemic racism experienced by Indigenous peoples and includes a Power Mapping self reflection activity. Upon request to share, this same activity was used with the Creating Communities of Belonging Advisory Committee to help staff reflect on how their actions contribute to building a school community free from discrimination and bias, and to support dialogue that strengthens anti racism and equity efforts.

Indigenous Education Consultants

Indigenous Education Consultants advanced Priority 1 by ensuring accurate, strengths-based, and representative Indigenous resources and by strengthening relationships that support belonging.

Collaboration with Learning Services expanded into co-selected texts, co-created lessons, and shared curriculum work, with relationship identified as the most significant outcome of this partnership. Joint work with the Grade 3 Social Studies Elementary Consultant resulted in Curriculum Crates, including Treaty Flags and Medallion Posters and a Treaty Medallion 3D file.

Consultants also partnered with the Junior High Social Studies team to support the Grades 7-9 curriculum using Inquiry Quest planning, embedding Indigenous perspectives in accurate and meaningful ways. In schools, Indigenous Education Consultants facilitated Gathering Circles and supported the indigenization of physical spaces by assisting with Treaty flags, land acknowledgements, and other Indigenous symbols, ensuring visible affirmation of Indigenous presence, identity, and belonging.

"While the curriculum impact is visible, the most meaningful outcome has been the relationship itself: one built on trust, respect, and a shared commitment to honouring Indigenous ways of knowing."

- Elementary Curriculum Consultant

Braided Journeys Student Support Centres

Braided Journeys Student Support Centres are committed to assisting student success by cultivating a caring, welcoming, and positive place where Indigenous students see themselves, their contributions, and their culture represented, respected, and celebrated.

The Braided Journeys staff provide individual and group programs to increase school engagement, cultivate a sense of belonging, build mastery, share generosity, and encourage independence. Students can gather to study, pray, learn, create, and support one another in a culturally safe space. The success of the Braided Journeys program in promoting and establishing student groups, programming, and spaces that celebrate identity, and advance equity has led ILS to expand its support into non-Braided Journeys schools.



Evidence of Impact

Across the Division, Year One implementation actions of Priority 1 resulted in:

- Increased peer-based and relationship-centred supports that strengthened student belonging, voice, and participation
- Expanded use of restorative and strengths-based practices, contributing to improved emotional safety and relational trust
- Increased attention to emotional safety and inclusion for students with diverse learning, social-emotional, cultural, and communication needs
- Stronger peer relationships and reduced reliance on adult-mediated support
- Increased visibility and normalization of diverse identities across learning environments
- Greater engagement and retention of students facing barriers to traditional schooling
- Strengthened Indigenous student belonging and cultural affirmation
- Improved coordination of student and family supports through multidisciplinary collaboration
- Early entry and settlement supports that strengthened family confidence and connection
- Increased family engagement and stronger family-school partnerships
- Enhanced staff capacity to support diverse learners and families through cultural learning and collaboration
- Collaborated with schools to embed inclusive practices and perspectives
- Strengthened culturally responsive practices across school communities
- Deepened intercultural understanding across schools

Priority 2: Building Competence in Diversity

During the first year of implementation, division-level actions supporting Priority 2 focused on building knowledge, reflection, and professional capacity to engage thoughtfully with diversity, equity, and anti-racism. Across departments, this work emphasized deepening understanding of cultural and spiritual diversity, strengthening self-awareness, and creating space for dialogue that supports learning environments free from discrimination and bias. The following examples highlight how departments advanced Priority 2 through targeted professional learning, collaborative partnerships, and intentional resource development across the Division during the past year.



Learning Services

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

The English as an Additional language consultants have focused on ensuring that curriculum is accessible to EAL learners at a variety of proficiency levels while maintaining the rigour and integrity of grade level expectations. Our work with teachers is intentionally asset based, leveraging students' funds of knowledge and backgrounds to anchor instruction in what learners already know and can do. When modeling lessons, we select culturally responsive texts and embed essential UDL supports so that every student has a meaningful access point to the curriculum. Through this approach equity is at the core, ensuring learning experiences are responsive, inclusive, and aligned with the strengths students bring to the classroom. Additionally, we have strengthened our own competence in Social Emotional Learning, integrating SEL practices into lessons to cultivate belonging, connection, and community across classrooms.



French Immersion

The Intercultural Community of Practice was developed to support immigrant and internationally trained teachers, specifically in French Immersion, as they navigate the professional, cultural, and pedagogical realities of the Canadian school system. The Community of Practice provides a structured space for reflection, dialogue, and shared learning, with a strong focus on relationship building with students, families, colleagues, and school administration. Through collaborative discussion guided by a consultant and with teachers with lived experience, participants explore culturally responsive practices, differences in educational systems, and the relational competencies required for success in Alberta classrooms. This work contributes to teacher wellbeing, professional integration, and ultimately to more inclusive and supportive learning environments for students. The work further contributes to the retention of teachers within the FI setting.

Student Services

Culturally Responsive Indigenous Supports

When Indigenous-focused requests are brought forward through Creating Communities of Belonging, Indigenous Learning Services carefully reviews the scope, purpose, and desired outcomes of each request. The team assesses needs based on their collective expertise and determine how best to respond.

Support may include:

- guiding staff in navigating complex conversations with Indigenous students and families
- facilitating restorative circles or culturally grounded interventions
- designing professional learning at the school or Division-level

Because each school is at a different stage of awareness and dialogue regarding discrimination and bias connected to anti racism and equity for Indigenous students, so responses are adapted accordingly.

Indigenous Education Consultants

To advance Priority 2 at a system level, Division-wide professional learning focuses on developing shared understanding, strengthening educator capacity, and addressing systemic barriers that impact Indigenous student success. These collective learning opportunities support consistent, informed practice across roles and departments. Recent examples include:

Supporting Division Professional Learning

- Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies Book Study: Led a cohort of teachers, consultants, school leaders, and managers in a book study focused on anti-Indigenous racism and dismantling systems of oppression.
- Natural Connections K-3 Community of Practice with Science, English Language Arts and Literature, and Physical Education and Wellness.



School-Based Professional Learning Sessions

- Traditional games session with a focus on land-based learning, impacts of Residential Schools on life skills and knowledge transfer to Indigenous peoples.
- Treaty education with a focus on Treaty symbolism and meaning.
- Land acknowledgements and the importance of not just reading a script but to provide an action we could do all year.
- Medicine Wheel pedagogy and foundational Indigenous knowledge.
- Treaty education, geography, and foundational knowledge.
- Sacred medicines and cultural protocols with a focus on smudging and understanding the 4 sacred medicines.



A weekly Career and Technology Foundations (CTF) course grounded in Circle of Courage principles exemplifies the impact of responsive, school-based professional learning. Through sustained, relationship-centered instruction, the course engages both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, fostering cultural pride, allyship, and a strong sense of belonging. The program has demonstrated consistent multi-year retention and strong student demand, while families have reported positive changes extending into the home. Together, these outcomes highlight the power of culturally grounded, student-centered learning to create lasting effects beyond the classroom and support the broader goals of Priority 2.

Evidence of Impact

Across the Division, Year One implementation actions of Priority 2 resulted in:

- Increased staff confidence in creating inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments
- Greater staff confidence in engaging with complex conversations about identity and lived experience
- Increased consistency in culturally responsive and restorative practice
- Strengthened staff capacity to recognize and respond to racism, discrimination, and systemic barriers
- Improved instructional accessibility and equity for multilingual and immigrant learners
- Increased professional belonging and retention among immigrant and internationally trained teachers
- Strengthened staff understanding of Indigenous histories, Treaty responsibilities, and worldviews
- Observable shifts in educator mindset and classroom practice
- Increased shared accountability for equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism across departments
- Strengthened cross department collaboration

Priority 3: Education and Awareness

During the first year of implementation, division level actions supporting Priority 3 focused on strengthening the integration of Catholic Social Teaching and principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti racism within curriculum, learning, and formation. Across departments, this work emphasized curriculum coherence, faith permeation, and shared responsibility for ensuring learning experiences reflect justice, dignity, and care for the vulnerable. The following examples highlight how Priority 3 advanced through collaborative efforts in curriculum development, student support, professional learning, and system communication across the Division during the past year.



Religious Education Services

During the first year of implementation, Religious Education Services advanced Priority 3 by intentionally strengthening the integration of Catholic Social Teaching and principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti racism across curriculum, professional learning, and faith formation. This work emphasized doctrinal fidelity alongside responsiveness to the diverse cultural, spiritual, and lived experiences of students, staff, and families.



- In collaboration with Creating Communities of Belonging, Religious Education Services designed and facilitated professional learning that explicitly connected the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching with inclusive and anti racist practices. These sessions supported staff in recognizing the deep alignment between Catholic faith and commitments to equity, dignity, and justice, reinforcing that inclusive practices are not external to Catholic education but integral to it.
- Curriculum development efforts are underway and focused on intentionally highlighting areas within Kindergarten to Grade Twelve Religious Education programs where Catholic values and Catholic Social Teaching incorporate diverse cultural perspectives and equitable practice. This collaboration will support educator understanding that Religious Education instruction can be both doctrinally faithful and responsive to the diverse needs of school communities.
- Community engagement was further strengthened through the design and implementation of inclusive liturgies, cultural celebrations, and service projects that invited participation from students, staff, families, and community members from varied backgrounds and traditions. Religious Education Services also partnered with Creating Communities of Belonging to develop a calendar connecting secular days of recognition with Catholic Feast Days, illustrating how the lives of the Saints offer powerful witness to inclusion, solidarity, and respect for human dignity.
- Professional learning was ongoing and responsive, with continued emphasis on Catholic Social Teaching, human rights, and identifying and addressing racism and discrimination. Communities of Practice provided structured spaces for educators to collaboratively reflect on experience, deepen understanding, and share inclusive practices grounded in faith.

Learning Services

Secondary English Language Arts: Proactive Circles

The Secondary English Language Arts team has been worked on integrating diversity into the resources we recommend through our Text Suggestion Databases. This is an ongoing project to provide teachers with text choices that connect students to diverse texts and authors that will help them explore diversity in their classrooms while at the same time provide platforms for discussion about our Catholic worldview.

The Creating Communities of Belonging consultants have supported Secondary English department by helping model Proactive Circles. Together, the consultants visited a Grade 9 classroom to use the Proactive Circle technique to help introduce issues around identity and prejudice that students would be examining in an upcoming text they were reading. In another collaboration, the consultants worked together by using Proactive Circles with English teachers to discuss how they chose texts that dealt with moral issues which are important for us as Catholics to examine while at the same time providing a safe space for dialogue with students. In this session the use of Proactive Circles was done in a deliberate way that modelled how teachers could use this tool in their classroom to support student discussion.



Student Services

Information shared through Staff Week at a Glance (SWAG) highlighted a range of supports, learning opportunities, and community initiatives led by Indigenous Learning Services. Guidance was provided to support schools during Orange Shirt Day, emphasizing trauma informed, compassionate responses for both Indigenous and non Indigenous students and staff who may experience strong emotional reactions. Staff were encouraged to prioritize relationship, flexibility, self care, and to seek support when navigating complex conversations or disclosures.



Communications

Communications supports the Creating Communities of Belonging Strategic Plan by building understanding of the plan and supporting its implementation across the Division. The team works with schools and departments to tell the story of Edmonton Catholic Schools and ensure Catholic identity, belonging, and dignity are consistently reflected across Division communications.

Supporting Implementation

Communications developed a Creating Communities of Belonging Communications Plan that supports awareness, understanding, and visibility of the 2025-2028 Strategic Plan. The plan outlines a phased, Division-wide approach to communicating the purpose of Creating Communities of Belonging, grounding the work in Catholic Social Teaching, and supporting schools, staff, and families in understanding their shared role in building communities of belonging.

Actions include:

- Building understanding of Creating Communities of Belonging as a faith-driven priority rooted in Catholic identity
- Promoting the Strategic Plan in clear, accessible form for families, staff, and school communities
- Amplifying school-based examples of belonging in action across Division platforms
- Supporting respectful, pastoral communication related to belonging, inclusion, and dignity



Supporting Education in a Catholic Context

Communications supports schools, departments, and the Division in communicating education in a Catholic context through messaging that reflects Gospel values, Catholic social teaching, and a pastoral approach.

Actions include:

- Telling the story of Edmonton Catholic Schools in ways that clearly reflect Catholic identity and mission
- Reviewing sensitive communications to ensure a pastoral, respectful, and faith-rooted approach
- Ensuring Catholic identity is visible and consistent across Division platforms, including web, social media, and system messaging



Supporting Clear and Accessible Home-School Communication

Communications supports welcoming and inclusive school communities by improving how information is shared with families.

Actions include:

- Providing Division wide communication templates and standards to support clarity, consistency, and respectful tone
- Editing and advising on plain language communications for families, including families new to Canada
- Working with One World...One Centre to support newcomer families with translation and interpretation to improve access to information
- Maintaining Division digital platforms to ensure information about programs, supports, and processes is accurate and easy to understand

Making Supports and Services Clear and Accessible

Communications helps ensure families and staff know what supports are available and how to access them.

Actions include:

- Supporting departments and schools in clearly explaining available student supports and services
- Aligning terminology and descriptions across platforms to reduce confusion
- Supporting schools in sharing information about supports in respectful, non-stigmatizing ways

Amplifying Student Voice and School-Based Initiative

Communications amplifies and showcases school-based work that supports belonging and inclusion, and the priority of Embracing Diversity.

Actions include:

- Highlighting opportunities for students and student groups to share their perspectives on belonging and inclusion within their school communities
- Showcasing school activities such as cultural days, cultural months, Belonging Week, and religious celebrations and liturgies that celebrate diversity and reflect communion with people of all nations
- Supporting and promoting Division participation in initiatives such as the Be an Upstander program



Supporting Respectful Communication During Concerns or Conflict

Communications contributes to effective conflict management by supporting clear processes and respectful dialogue.

Actions include:

- Advising schools on communications during issues, concerns, or conflicts
- Reinforcing clear processes for raising and addressing concerns through public-facing materials
- Supporting issues management and media responses when matters extend beyond the school community

Evidence of Impact

Across the Division, Year One implementation actions of Priority 3 resulted in:

- Increased understanding of equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism as integral to Catholic identity
- Greater curricular coherence and representation aligned with a Catholic worldview
- Strengthened student capacity for respectful dialogue around identity, justice, and difference
- Improved clarity and accessibility of communication for families and staff
- Increased participation in faith-infused and culturally responsive learning experiences
- Increased staff readiness to respond to racism and discrimination in faith-aligned ways
- Greater system coherence and shared language around belonging
- Intentional practices—such as inviting students and staff to make the Sign of the Cross according to their own faith tradition—created meaningful spaces for identity affirmation and learning
- Improved accessibility and clarity in Division and departmental communication

Looking Forward

Year One of the *Creating Communities of Belonging Strategic Plan* focused intentionally on building the relational, professional, and cultural foundations necessary for sustained growth. Through capacity building, collaboration, and reflective practice, Edmonton Catholic Schools has established a strong base from which to deepen implementation in Years Two and Three.

This work continues to be guided by Gospel values, Catholic Social Teaching, and a shared commitment to stewardship—recognizing that creating communities of belonging is an ongoing journey that unfolds through faithful, collective action.

