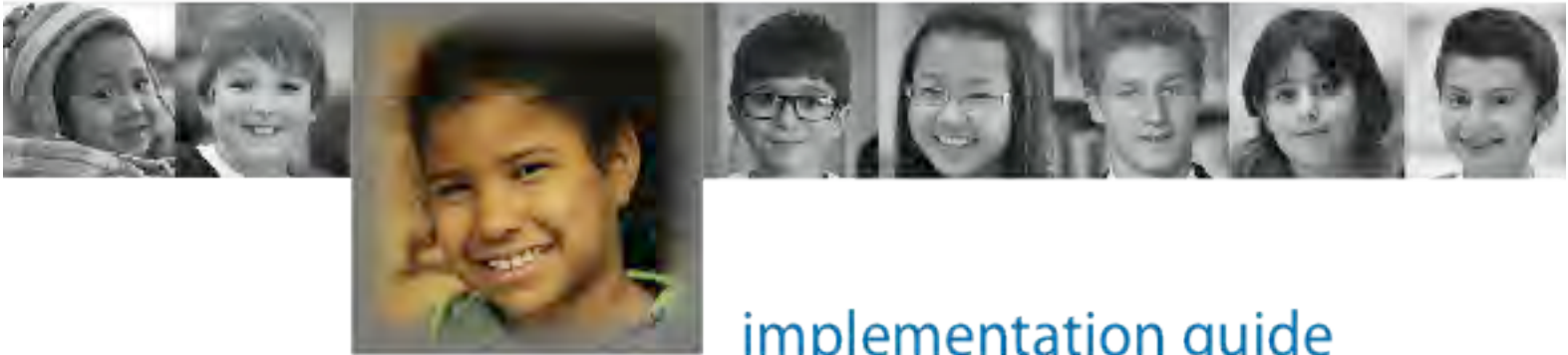


library to learning commons



implementation guide

Cathy Faber
Superintendent, Learning
Innovation and Chief
Information Officer



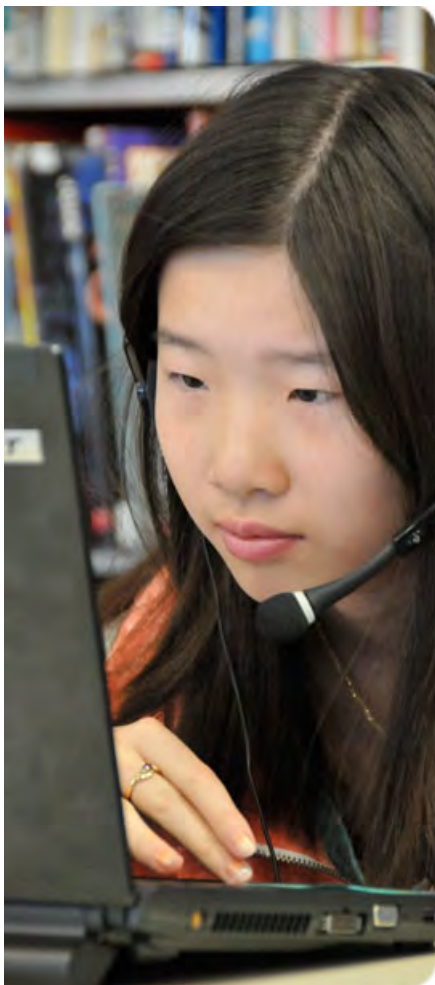
**Calgary Board
of Education**

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“What happens to learning when we move from the stable infrastructure of the twentieth century to the fluid infrastructure twenty-first century, where technology is constantly creating and responding to change?”

—John Seely Brown

Why are Schools Shifting from a School Library to a School Learning Commons?

There is a new culture of learning. Today’s learners cannot imagine life without the Internet and supporting technology. They are accustomed to the immediate and social nature of information and communication.

Education has become far more complex as learning extends into the broader global community, beyond the classroom, school, and textbooks. Learning can be intensely collaborative, directly and indirectly supported by rapidly evolving technologies.

Libraries are evolving to meet these new realities. The Learning Commons philosophy is about the transformation of the school library and is driven by this shift in learning. The Learning Commons model supports a learner-centered approach with a focus on active and collaborative engagement. The Learning Commons supports the intersection of teacher, student, content and technology.

The Learning Commons philosophy complements the Alberta Education “[Framework for Student Learning](#)” 2011 that “...describes a future in education that acknowledges the need for competencies to be more central in the education of Alberta’s young people in the 21st century.” The [School Library Services Initiative](#) acknowledges the evolving nature of a Learning Commons as “...a concept that helps schools innovate and collaborate within a design that adapts to student and teacher needs.”

Alberta Education has further clarified the importance of the Learning Commons in its 2014-2015 [Guide to Education](#). In this guide, Alberta Education explains its Learning Commons Policy: “school authorities must ensure that students have access to a learning commons. A learning commons is an inclusive, flexible, learner-centred, physical and/or virtual space for collaboration, inquiry, imagination and play to expand and deepen learning.”

Changing Roles in The Learning Commons

In this new educational reality, the roles of teachers and students have shifted and changed. So too have the roles of teacher-librarians, library assistants, and library technicians. The success of a learning commons depends on having a strong, cohesive team of teachers, administrators, teacher-librarians, library assistants, library technicians, school technology experts, and other stakeholders. The

learning commons team now works together to ensure students can learn and create, using resources to support them.

Less	More
Teacher transmits knowledge to students.	Students and teachers co-create knowledge together and share that knowledge.
Learning subjects (math, science, language arts, social studies, etc.) in isolation of each other.	Learning is interdisciplinary and connected, relevant, visible, and connected to the community and world outside of school.
Students learn content.	Students learn content, skills, and competencies needed for 21 st Century learners.
Students depend on teachers for knowledge.	Knowledge is everywhere; students can access knowledge from multiple sources, including in-school and community experts.
Teachers are experts in their subject discipline.	Teachers are learning experts who work as “guides on the side” to help students use technology effectively, manage knowledge, and problem-solve. Subject expertise is still important, but takes its place within a broader picture.
Teacher-librarians and library assistants work in the domain of print literacy.	The learning commons team works together in the domain of multiple literacies and resources: print, digital, maker, visual, auditory, social, people, experts, learning processes, etc.
Teacher-librarians, library assistants, teachers, and technology specialists' work takes different forms.	The learning commons team, consisting of teachers, administrators, Teacher-librarians, library assistants, and technology specialists, collaborate, share, and co-create together.
One role of the teacher-librarian and library assistant is management of resources.	The learning commons team's main role is to support learners as they engage with all types of resources.

Learning Commons within the CBE

As a result of current pedagogical understanding and in response to initiatives within Alberta Education, the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) has embraced the Learning Commons philosophy as a way to access high quality learning and teaching opportunities.

Through support from EducationMatters and Learning Innovation, schools in the CBE are developing and living the Learning Commons philosophy within their own buildings. Through a grant from EducationMatters, two cohorts of schools have undergone a physical, pedagogical, and philosophical shift. In addition to the schools that are a part of these cohorts, other schools have embarked on this shift independently.

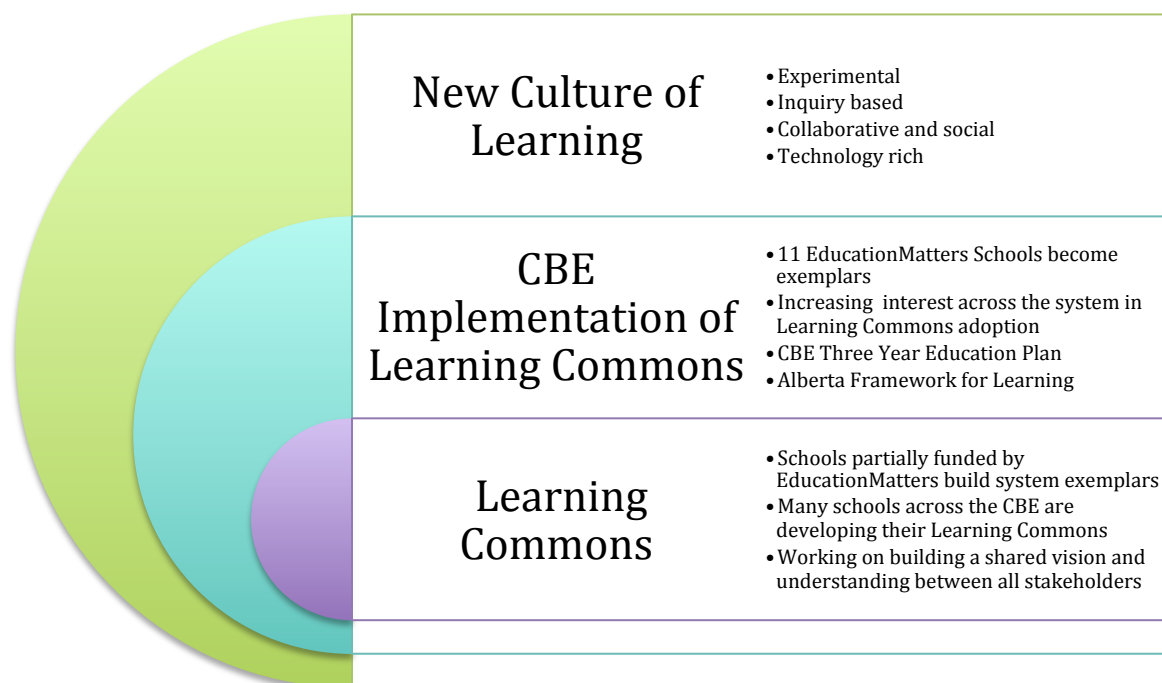


Figure 1: Learning Commons and the New Culture of Learning

"A Learning Commons is.... more than a room. It calls for the creation of new environments that improve learning. It is about changing school culture and about transforming the way learning and teaching occurs. It is a transformation that calls for physical, virtual and pedagogical changes as well as a shift in mindset for all players."

Retrieved from <http://jo-online.vsb.bc.ca/bondi/?p=818>

"A Learning Commons is a vibrant, whole-school approach, presenting exciting opportunities for collaboration among teachers, teacher-librarians and students. Within a Learning Commons, new relationships are formed between learners, new technologies are realized and utilized, and both students and educators prepare for the future as they learn new ways to learn."

—Together For Learning-
Ontario School Library
Association

Calgary Board of Education and EducationMatters Library to Learning Commons Project

In support of Learning Commons' development throughout the CBE, EducationMatters, working with private donors, has provided funding for eleven schools in the years of 2010 – 2013 and ten schools in 2013 – 2015 in transforming their libraries into learning commons. Recognizing that this is a means by which schools can support the personalization of learning, a number of additional schools beyond the cohort groups have also agreed to participate and share their journeys and data with the system. The Learning Innovation team will co-construct a shared understanding of the learning commons philosophy with the participating schools with the goal of informing the ongoing work within all CBE schools.

Major focus areas for schools as identified by EducationMatters are as follows:

- Ensuring student success in school
- Ensuring that youth are ready for adult life

What is a Learning Commons?

The learning commons philosophy is a means of increasing student engagement and improving student achievement. The learning commons promotes personalization, inquiry, and the integration of technology through the implementation of innovative curricular design and assessment. This space, which is a blend of physical and virtual environments, transforms teaching and learning by allowing both staff and students to co-create knowledge. Within the learning commons, technology supports the construction of new understandings by the learner rather than the learner passively consuming information.

The shifting needs of today's global economy require increased commitment between education and the community. Together education and community stakeholders can work together to ensure that students have a deep understanding of curricula and a diverse, dynamic and current skill set.

“Properly understood, librarians and academic computing staff cannot alone create a learning commons.”

—S. Bennett

Stages of Implementation

A Continuum of Learning

As with any implementation of a new framework or methodology, schools will progress through stages of growth as they learn and grow together. Guidelines developed by the Canadian Library Association in their publication [Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada 2014](#) provide good check in points for learning commons teams to assess growth and next steps.



Figure 2: from *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada 2014*.

Phases of Implementation

As a key component of the new culture of learning, the learning commons philosophy is contextual, iterative and evolving. There are four cyclical implementation stages.

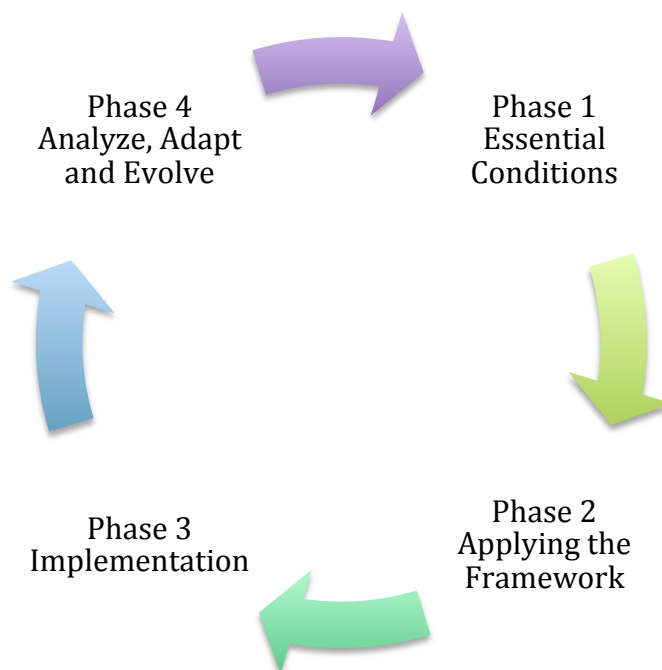


Figure 3: Library to Learning Commons Implementation Phases

As learners, teachers and members of the extended community “live” in the learning commons, they will be part of this cycle of continually improving learning opportunities as they journey through the four phases.

Phase 1: Essential Conditions

Building a shared vision with staff, students and the larger school community is one of the first and most important steps in transforming a library into a learning commons. The diagram below identifies key components of phase 1.

Essential Question: What is our shared vision of a learning commons: What are the opportunities, successes and challenges we face as a school community in creating a learning commons?

“A learning space that can be reconfigured on a dime will engage different kinds of learners and teachers.”

—The Third Teacher

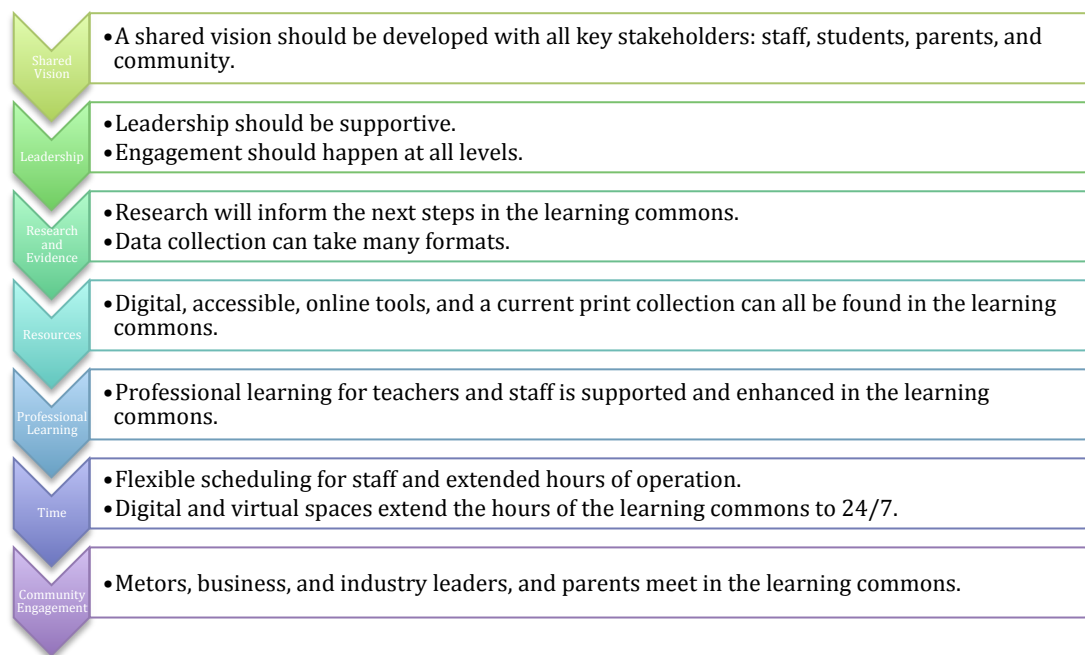


Figure 4: Essential Conditions for Implementation of Learning Commons, adapted from www.essentialconditions.ca

Suggested Implementation Plan

Shared Vision

- Have you created a shared vision, understanding and team with your school community?
- Are you able to connect the school development plan to this vision?

Leadership

- How will administration facilitate and support the shift from library to learning commons?
- How can individuals with pedagogical, content and technological expertise (internal and external) be accessed and utilized to move the learning commons forward? Who will champion the pedagogical shift?
- Is digital citizenship part of the learning commons plan?

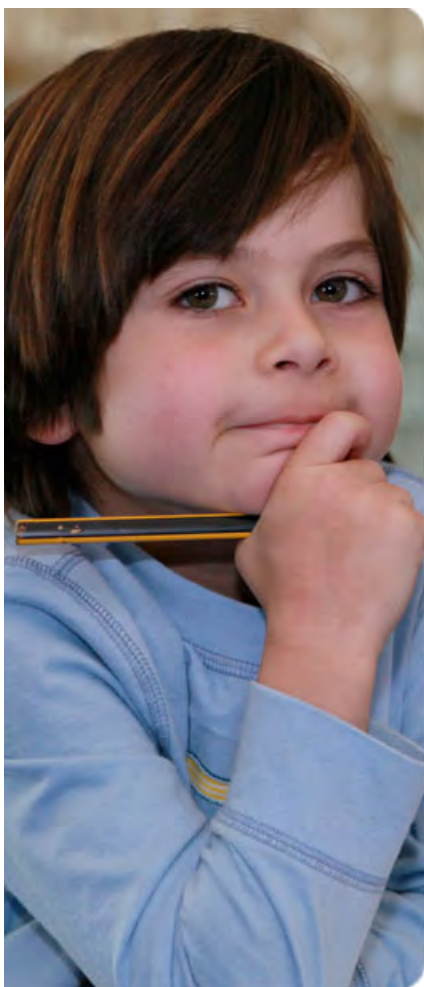
Research and Evidence

- How can current research, evidence and lessons learned inform implementation decisions? (i.e. site visits to other learning commons, reading of professional articles and books, participation in webinars, cohort, professional reading)



“Research shows that when students are enthusiastic learners, they can solve problems, ask new questions and create new knowledge.”

—2012 Community Report



- What are the processes by which data is collected and gathered? How will this information be analyzed and shared?
- How will this information be gathered, analyzed and shared? How will the findings inform the learning commons plan?

Resources

- Is your collection current, balanced (print, video, audio, digital) and accessible to multiple users?
- Have you considered the idea that anything that supports learning may be considered a resource? Have you considered including resources that may not have traditionally been included in a library, such as open-source web resources, people's expertise and specialized knowledge, spaces, processes, and practices?
- Has the collection been weeded, replenished and in good repair?
- Has consideration been given to the utilization of resources using CORE, ePortfolio, Iris and Alberta Education?
- Are technologies current, readily accessible and inclusive? Has consideration been given to sustainability?
- Has consideration been given to the creation of knowledge building centres (maker stations)? What opportunities exist that allow students to inquire, tinker, analyze, synthesize, communicate and create information in new and meaningful ways?

Teacher Professional Growth

- How are staff (certificated and non-certificated) becoming informed of the learning commons philosophy?
- How can opportunities be provided to support pedagogical and technological interests?
- What opportunities exist for embedded professional learning through the learning commons? (i.e. expert bar)
- How can connections be made between professional learning and the learning commons philosophy?

Time

- How can teachers be given time to support the implementation of the learning commons philosophy?

- How will timetabling, scheduling of staff etc. be adapted to support the learning commons philosophy?
- Do the hours of the learning commons support multiple users?
- Can digital resources be accessed 24/7? Does a virtual learning commons support access to resources anytime, anywhere?
- Is there an appreciation of the circular nature of the shift toward a learning commons?

Community Engagement

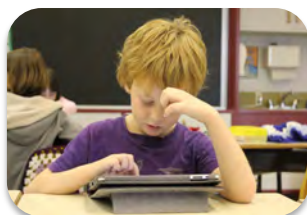
- How are all stakeholders supporting and enhancing the learning commons? (parents, school councils, students, community members, businesses, industry and post-secondary institutions partners)
- How are you engaging mentors and experts from the community? (parents, grandparents, community businesses including other libraries, industry, post-secondary, etc)
- Have you developed a communication plan for the learning commons that provides information through a variety of formats to a variety of audiences?

“Free teachers from the traditional desk at the front of the classroom and encourage new settings for teaching and learning.”

—The Third Teacher

Phase 2: Applying the Framework | Elements of a Learning Commons

Once there is a common understanding of the conceptual framework of the learning commons there are a number of elements to consider. How you will design your learning commons given the resources available within your learning community? What resources are available to support the desired elements of the learning commons? Some of the desired learning elements of a learning commons are identified on the next page:



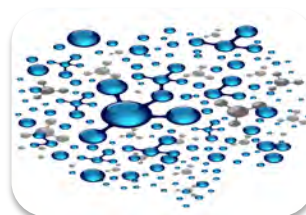
Student Centred

students have a voice



Flexible Spaces

adapts to support
individuals, small
groups, large groups



Connectivity

virtual access, connects
with experts and ideas
from around the world



Higher Order Thinking

activities, assessment
and feedback support
the development of
these skills



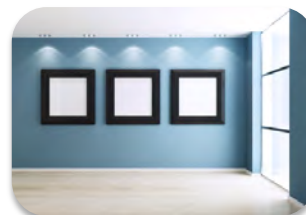
Participatory Learning

collaboration and the
co-creation of
knowledge



Collaboration

establishing networks to
support new ways of
learning



Showcased Learning

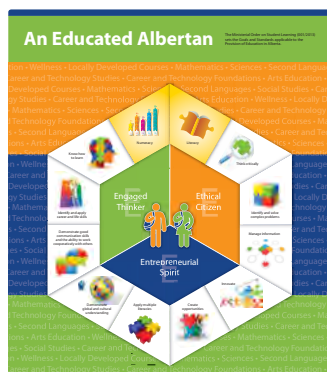
physical and virtual
displays demonstrating
learning



Engagement

social, intellectual and
academic

Figure 5: Elements of a Learning Commons



[An Educated Albertan](#), Alberta
Regional Consortia

“Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things.”

—Steve Jobs

Student Centred

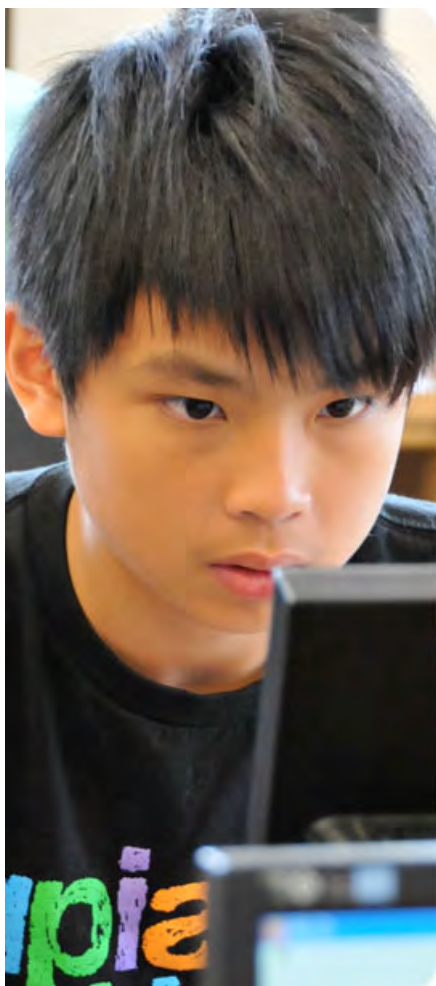
- How can the learning commons support the competencies of engaged thinkers, ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit?
- How will students be given a voice in the learning commons? For example, will they be included in digital citizenship discussions and development of learning common policies?
- How will the learning commons support student engagement and achievement? Creativity and innovation? Collaboration? Student leadership? Critical thinking and problem solving?
- How will students be encouraged to use/book the learning commons for their own showcases?
- How will students be able to create their own personal learning network (PLN) through the learning commons?

Flexible Spaces

- Can all users of the space reposition the furniture and shelving?
- Does your technology plan support a variety of devices, such as portable and student-owned devices?
- Have the number of fixed shelves been limited? Are they located on perimeter walls?
- Are there alternative spaces within the school that can be used to support the learning commons?
- Are individuals, small and large groups able to use the facility at the same time in a variety of arrangements?
- Are there “zones” within the space to support different learner needs? For example, do you have spaces for quiet, independent learning, group learning, experimental learning, and large-group gatherings?

Connectivity

- In what ways does your school connect to other schools, experts and ideas around the globe?
- Are your school's digital citizenship plans ready for this increased level of connectivity?



“Build a nest. Children need comfort just as much at school as they do at home. Give them a soft, quiet, and cozy area to play in by themselves or with a few friends.”

—The Third Teacher

- Is there a virtual booking system in place (accessible from home and school) for the spaces and resources?

Higher Order Thinking

- Are learning activities designed to teach, apply and demonstrate critical and creative thinking skills and processes?
- Is assessment and feedback at the core of task design? Does formative assessment inform next steps in learning?
- Are students able to effectively evaluate and select print and digital resources for themselves and the school community?

Participatory Learning

- How can the Learning Commons support collaboration and the co-creation of knowledge? How can technology support this? (i.e. online and offline environments)
- Do students collect, question and *synthesize* information and ideas with others?
- Are students actively involved in making decisions about their learning?

Collaboration

- How can teachers, students and others establish networks to explore and experiment with new ways of learning?
- How can students collaborate with others to build learning and solve problems?
- How can teachers collaborate in designing innovative or experimental learning tasks and assessments?

Showcased Learning

- Are there active, dynamic and virtual displays showcasing completed and in-process learning?
- Do activities showcase and demonstrate excellence in teaching and learning?

Engagement

- Are there authentic learning experiences that emulate real-world processes?
- How can the learning commons support social, intellectual and academic engagement in learning through the use of its physical and virtual spaces?

Koechlin, C., Rosenfeld, E., & Loertscher, D. V. (2010). Building the learning commons: A guide for school administrators and learning leadership teams. Salt Lake City, UT: Hi Willow Research & Publishing.

Phase 3: Implementation

Essential Question: How can our school adopt/adapt the four elements of a Learning Commons?

The Learning Commons conceptual framework identifies four learning spaces: the open commons, the virtual commons, the physical commons and the investigative commons.

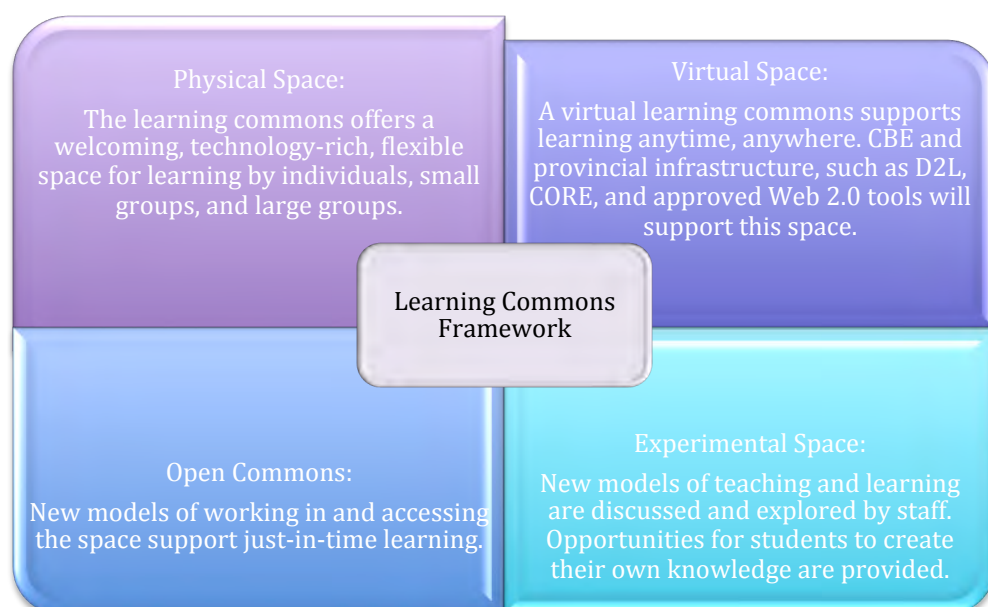


Figure 6: Framework of a Learning Commons

Essential Questions: How can these learning spaces be adapted to the context of your school? What role might the learning commons play in informing school culture? How might it transform the way that teaching and learning occur?

"It seems obvious but is often forgotten: Teaching and learning should shape the building, not vice versa."

—Dieter Rams

Physical

- Is the furniture flexible enough to provide a variety of learning configurations? Does it move?
- Are you storing unused furniture and/or resources?
- Does it look like a knowledge warehouse or a knowledge creation centre?
- Have you considered the long-term sustainability of your purchases?
- Is the space a technology rich environment?



“Look at your learning space with 21st-century eyes: Does it work for what we know about learning today, or just for what we knew about learning in the past?”

—Sir Ken Robinson

- Is there sufficient access to power and data for all technology mechanisms? i.e. school-owned and personally-owned devices

Virtual

- How is the learning commons taking advantage of existing technical infrastructure? i.e. D2L, CORE, IRIS, and the LAWN
- How does this space support 24/7 access to learning resources?
- Are approved Web 2.0 tools used to enhance learning?
- Are there opportunities for 2-way communication, collaboration and construction of knowledge, both locally and globally?
- Is there a virtual space that captures and showcases student learning?

Open Commons

- How has shared ownership of the learning commons been established? Do teachers and students have equal voice in the development of policies and guidelines? Is the leadership of the learning commons distributed amongst many stakeholders?
- Is the Learning Commons a place where knowledge can be socially constructed? Is there an inviting and collaborative atmosphere?
- Does the space run on its own calendar to avoid chaos and overcrowding? Is the calendar flexible and does it support individual drop-in and group use?
- Has an equitable and flexible means of sharing space and resources by individuals and groups been established?
- Do users understand that booking a space is not owning a space? Do staff understand that the open commons will have a buzz and be a rich and active learning environment?
- How have the various specialists in the school been organized to have a presence in the learning commons?

Experimental (Knowledge Building)

- How can this become a centre for staff to discuss, explore and share innovative methodologies such as cross-curricular/cross-grade level initiatives and emerging technologies?
- How can the learning commons create opportunities for all students to engage in or create “maker stations” where engagement, new technologies and pedagogy meet?

- How does the learning commons capitalize on student expertise in support of experimental learning for all?

Koechlin, C., Rosenfeld, E., & Loertscher, D. V. (2010). Building the learning commons: A guide for school administrators and learning leadership teams. Salt Lake City, UT: Hi Willow Research & Publishing.



"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow."

—John Dewey

Phase 4: Analyze, Adapt and Evolve

The Learning Commons is an ongoing process. As the learners' needs change and grow the Learning Commons must grow with them.

Essential Question: What are the next steps your Learning Commons must take? How well is it supporting the learners' needs within the school? What feedback are you receiving from students, staff and community members?

Analyze

- How has the learning commons been supporting teaching and learning in the school in new and meaningful ways?
- What does the data suggest?
- What feedback have you received from those using the learning commons?
- Where has the learning commons been successful?
- What elements of the learning commons could be further developed?

Adapt

- Is the learning commons supporting the changes that teachers are attempting to implement and students are asking for?
- Are the spaces within the learning commons functioning as was hoped? Can simple changes improve functionality?

Evolve

- Remember that the learning commons will change as student needs, pedagogical understandings, curriculum, parental input, and community evolve
- The learning commons will always be a dynamic environment, evolving to support the needs of the learner and school community

“Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important.”

—Bill Gates

Resources

Calgary Board of Education

[Calgary Board of Education Innovation & Learning Commons](#)

The CBE’s virtual learning commons.

[Calgary Board of Education Learning Commons Resources](#) (for CBE staff only)

Resources related to learning commons.

[Forest Lawn High School Virtual Learning Commons](#)

An example of an excellent virtual learning commons in the CBE.

Alberta Education

[Framework for Student Learning: Competencies for Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens with an Entrepreneurial Spirit.](#)

This document outlines Alberta Education’s current priorities in student learning.

[Alberta Education Guide to Education: 2014-2015](#)

The guide includes a section on the learning commons policy on page 21 and guidelines for the learning commons on page 69.

[A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions](#)

A guide prepared by Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia, Alberta Teachers’ Association, Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta School Councils’ Association, Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, College of Alberta School Superintendents, Faculties of Education, Alberta Universities, Alberta Association Consortium, Alberta Education

[Alberta Education Learning Commons/School Libraries page](#)

This page includes Alberta Education resources to support the learning commons.

[Alberta Education Learning Commons Guidelines](#)

Guidelines from Alberta Education to clarify the purpose and function of a learning commons.

[LearnAlberta.ca](#)

Alberta Education has made this resource available to all school authorities, which provides teaching and learning resources and a virtual library through the Online Reference Centre at no cost to authorities.

[Alberta CORE](#)

A Collaborative Online Resource Environment with quality digital learning resources. This site is accessible to CBE staff and students and participating school boards only.

“Creativity is a great motivator because it makes people interested in what they are doing. Creativity gives hope that there can be a worthwhile idea. Creativity gives the possibility of some sort of achievement for everyone. Creativity makes life more fun and more interesting.”

—Edward De Bono

Canada/U.S. Learning Commons and Library Resources

[The Learning Commons in BC](#)

A series of videos about learning commons in British Columbia.

[Ontario School Library Association *Together for Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons*](#)

A useful document to support the shift to the learning commons.

[Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada: 2014](#)

A guide by the Canadian Library Association outlining best practices in learning commons in Canada.

[New Media Consortium Horizon Report: 2014 Libraries Edition](#)

A report outlining current and future trends and issues in libraries and learning commons.

[New Media Consortium Horizon Report: 2014 K-12 Edition](#)

A report outlining current and future trends and issues in K-12 education. There are many implications on the learning commons.

[Achieving Information Literacy](#)

A guide for school learning commons in Canada.

[American School Library Standards for the 21st Century Learner](#)

The skills and standards for the 21st Century Learner.

[American School Library Standards for the 21st Century Learner in Action](#)

A guide that includes the standards in the above document and examples and benchmarks for different grade levels. Please note that a hardcopy of this document is the only available format and that there is a cost associated.

[Learning4Life](#)

Includes plans and lessons with the aims of thinking critically, creating new knowledge, sharing knowledge in an ethical way, and pursuing personal growth.

Loertscher, D. V., & Marcoux, E. (2010). *Learning commons treasury*. Bowie, MD: Teacher Librarian Press.

Loertscher, D. V. (2011). *New learning commons: where learners win!*. Salt Lake City, UT: Hi Willow Research & Publishing.

In Support of the Physical Space

Thornburg, D. D. (2014). *From the campfire to the holodeck: creating engaging and powerful 21st century learning environments*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Doorley, S. & Witthoft, S. (2012). *Make space: how to set the stage for creative collaboration*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Cannon Design, VS Furniture, and Bruce Mau Design (2010). *The third teacher*. New York, New York: Abrams.

[Classroom of the Future: Lab Learning Zones](#)

This document by European Schoolnet presents a possible physical arrangement of a space to promote creativity.

[Library Spaces for 21st-Century Learners](#)

This guide is a walkthrough of the process of creating resource-rich environments in the learning commons. Please note there is a cost associated with this document.

Maker Education

[Maker Education Initiative](#)

This document contains resources for teachers interested in becoming involved in maker education.

[Maker Education Resources at Edutopia](#)

A collection of articles and resources from Edutopia about maker education.

[Make Magazine](#)

Make Magazine is focused on the maker movement in general, with many applications to educational settings.

[Instructables](#)

Instructables is a collection of how-to guides contributed by makers and DIY aficionados around the world. A great place to go for project ideas.

[DIY.org](#)

DIY is a safe social networking site designed for kids who love to make. Like boy scouts or girl scouts, makers can earn badges to show how they're progressing in a certain skillset. If using the social networking aspect, please be sure to consult [Web 2.0](#) guidelines. The site is also a great place to go for project ideas or inspiration.

[Makerspace Playbook](#)

The Makerspace playbook is a practical guide to set up a makerspace in your Learning Commons or school.