

Chinook's Edge EA Collaborative Support Model inspires visiting administrators



A group of school administrators and an Associate Superintendent from Westwind School Division, in Southern Alberta, visited Chinook's Edge last week to learn more about the division's approach to supporting students with complex needs. In specific, the educators were interested in observing the Chinook's Edge EA (Educational Assistant) Collaborative Support Model at work in Carstairs Elementary School.

"We were happy to welcome our colleagues and talk together about supporting students," says Marcie Perdue, Associate Superintendent, Chinook's Edge School Division. "Discussions and observations like this help us all grow in our understanding and commitment to meeting the needs of our students."

"We have had a long-standing relationship with Chinook's Edge for a few years now," says Austin Nunn, Assistant Superintendent, Westwind School Division. "We heard about some of the work the team is doing with the EA Collaborative Model and we wanted to learn more." Nunn says he and his colleagues left feeling "excited about the EA Collaborative Support Model."

The EA Collaborative Support Model involves two Educational Assistants - Krista Clague and Theresa Kaczmariski - who are experienced and confident as they work with students who have complex behavioral needs. These individuals initially served as Educational Assistants at Horizon School, and are now being deployed across Chinook's Edge School Division.

The two EAs spend time at schools with staff who benefit from their modeling and support. The visiting EAs work elbow to elbow with the EAs at the school level, as well as with teachers and administrators to find practical solutions in a wide variety of contexts.

"What is working about this model is it is just-in-time support, focusing on developing skills that are required in specific situations. Also, it allows EAs to work beside a colleague who understands their work and their role," says Perdue. "We are finding this support to be incredibly powerful."



The model developed after a successful experience in the fall of 2023 involving two schools where there was a need. Perdue and her team wondered if it might be helpful to bring the Horizon EAs to those schools to share their skills and practical experience. One of the schools involved in the pilot was Carstairs Elementary School.

“Our school has benefited greatly from the EA Collaboration Model,” says Traci Upshaw, Carstairs Elementary School Principal. “The intensive observation and support in the classroom to build skills and confidence with staff in their own environment has been invaluable. Teachers and EAs feel prepared with the right tools and planned responses to challenging behaviours.”

“The flexibility and responsiveness of the model is a key component of its success. Having the support when and where it is needed and seeing immediate improvements helps our staff feel supported and builds their capacity as they work with all students. We appreciate that this support is available and that we can continue to access it when needed throughout the year,” says Upshaw.

“Traci’s belief and trust in this model made a significant difference to the outcome,” says Perdue. “She took Krista’s recommendations and made them happen. Also, the teacher we were working with was solution focused and open to Krista’s ideas as well, so it was a whole team approach.”



In the case of Carstairs Elementary, the recommendations involved rearranging the EA schedule so that multiple EAs took turns supporting various students. Also, the support plan for a particular student was shared with all of the staff so that there was a consistent approach.





After success with both schools in the fall of 2023, leaders in the division decided to formalize the program as a support that could be offered to all schools.

Between February and June 2024, 11 more schools participated in the EA Collaborative Support Model. Between September 2024 until now, another 11 schools have received support.

For the visitors from Westwind, the fact that the EA Collaborative Support Model came about the way it did was impressive.

“I really liked how a solution that came about naturally to solve a problem in one school was then systematized to help across the division. It is always impressive when solutions can be modeled instead of just sharing the theory,” says Jerry Salmon, Principal of Raymond Elementary School.

The EA Collaborative Support Model is one of the three key ways Chinook’s Edge supports staff working with students who have complex needs. Another focus is the Collaborative Problem Solving Model, where school based staff take time to discuss specific challenges and work together to find solutions.

Also, the division established the role of Student Support Lead (SSL) teacher in September 2024, in every school with more than 200 students. The role of the SSL is to support staff in their work with students who have complex needs.

“All of these efforts are based on the belief that students do well when they can,” says Perdue.

“When students have social emotional challenges it can be because they lack skill rather than will. Our support is centered on helping students develop the skills they need to be successful,” she says.



École Olds High School students explore Medical Laboratory Science with U of A alumni

École Olds High School (EOHS) students in Biology 20 and 30, and in Biochemistry 30, had the opportunity to combine academic learning with career exploration last week.

The University of Alberta's Medical Laboratory Science (MLS) program sent an alumni to the school, on November 12, to share more information about the MLS program, as well as give students a hands-on learning experience showing them what it might be like to be a medical lab technologist.

“The day was amazing,” says Karla Pohl, EOHS teacher. “The students learned a great deal about the MLS program at the U of A. In our school’s lab they worked on a couple of case studies. These included diagnosing patients with thyroid cancer, meningitis, foodborne illnesses, strep throat, and more. It was such a valuable experience for them. Students were very engaged throughout the entire day.”

The alumni visit program was developed by U of A MLS students - past and present - with the intention of reaching out to students in rural Alberta.

“We want to show high school students what a degree in MLS can offer,” says Richen Basig, a U of A MLS alumni.



Basig says that when U of A representatives attend career fairs at high schools throughout the province they might not know the specific details of every program.

He says, “As a part of our advocacy efforts, We want high school students to know that there are other careers in healthcare, such as becoming medical laboratory technologists.”

“It was really cool how their presentation fit so well into what we are learning,” says one EOHS student. “I used my knowledge of blood typing and the endocrine system to help me work through the case studies.”





Yetzer, an EOHS student says, ***“It was fascinating to learn how diseases can be diagnosed just by observation, which opened my eyes to the depth and complexity of the medical field. I learned a lot and it’s clear now that this is the area I want to focus on after I graduate.”***

“After the presentation, I just might look more in the Medical Laboratory Sciences program,” says Kamsi, an EOHS student.

“This was a very interesting experience. It has sparked a deeper interest in pursuing a career in healthcare. I’ve always known I wanted to work in this field, but this has given me the direction and motivation to consider Medical Laboratory Sciences,” says Margaret, an EOHS student.

