

The Enhanced Learning Model:

Creating high quality, personalized learning experiences in Wolf Creek Public Schools

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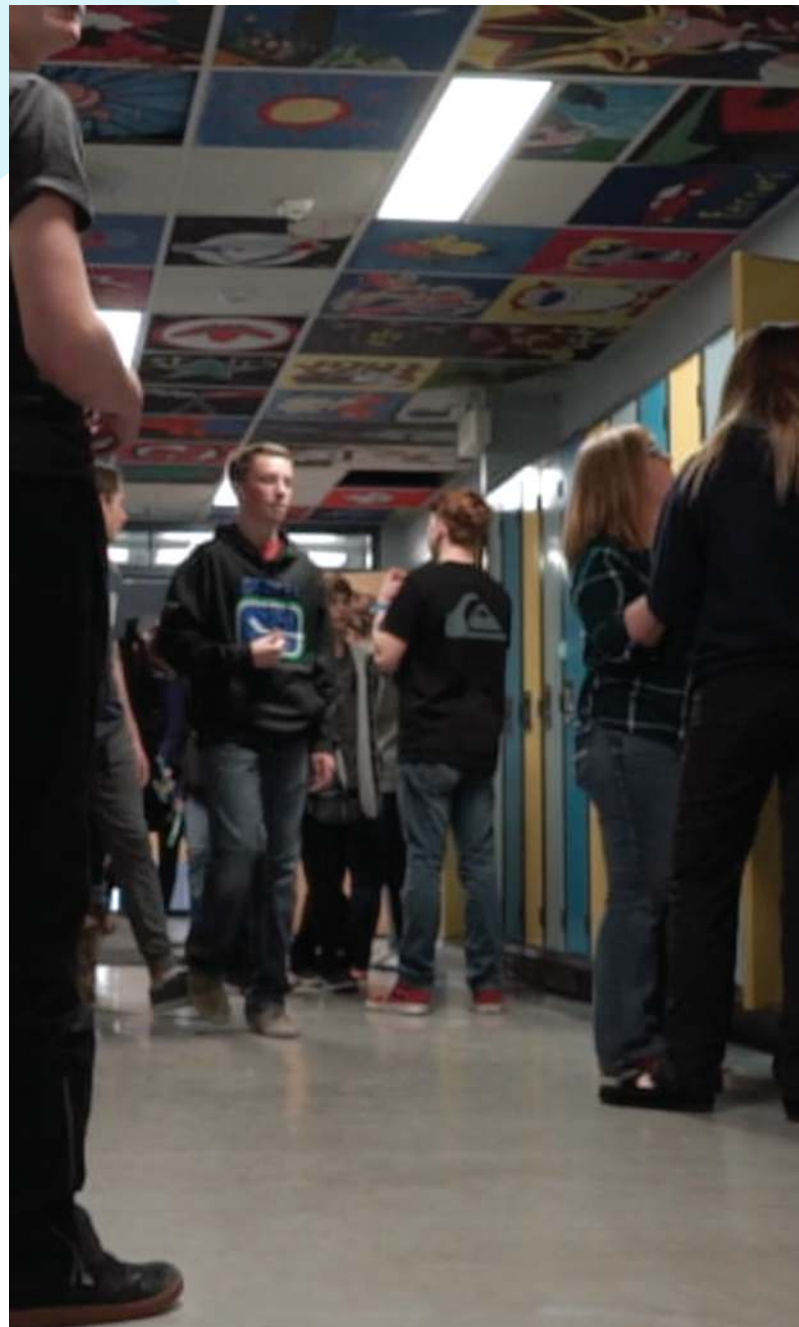
Context

Bentley School is a small, rural school in central Alberta, Canada and is part of the Wolf Creek Public School District. Bentley currently serves about 370 learners from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Learners at Bentley come from a diverse mix of backgrounds. The community's economy is largely supported by resource based industries such as farming and energy. This diversity of family background and experience presents unique challenges for learners as they engage with learning at the school.

The Challenge

Bentley's High School, like many small rural high schools in Alberta, has been challenged with declining enrollment. Learners were choosing to go to some of the larger schools in the area, where they believed that they had more options academically and greater access to academic resources. Every learner Bentley High School lost equated to lost educational resources for the school and as such the community faced the possibility of losing their high school.





Lane Moore, the principal at Bentley wanted to find a way to provide learners in his community with not just the same high quality academic opportunities they would receive at a larger school, but also with a more learner centered approach that would reflect the lives of students in the community in which they served.

As he considered the best ways to revamp Bentley's approach to teaching and learning, Moore had some additional challenges to consider beyond the lack of resources. One of these challenges was the location of the school itself. In rural, central Alberta, weather can prevent kids from making it into school in the winter. On days of extreme cold, the buses don't run and the schools are closed. Moore also had to think about his learners' lives outside of school. Many Bentley learners are competitive athletes. The school also serves a large farming community. Because of this, Bentley's learners needed a more flexible learning environment - one in which they could miss a few days of school due to inclement weather, a tournament or harvest time, without falling behind.



The Solution

The traditional school structure was not working at Bentley. Moore wanted to make sure that whatever changes were made at Bentley they created best possible opportunities for his learners. To start, Moore and the staff at Bentley looked at the research behind a variety of teaching and learning programs including online, self-directed, traditional and outreach. They also traveled to schools around Alberta to see how these types of programs worked for other learners.

Teachers, learners, parents, central office leaders and school council members were all invited on these trips, involving all of the stakeholders in the decision process.

In the first stage of the transformation of teaching and learning at Bentley School, Moore and his staff implemented a program that took elements from a variety of different teaching and learning models and combined them to make sense for Bentley's learners. Bentley went from the traditional five, 80-minute blocks a day to a totally revamped approach to school. Under Moore's new model, learners spend their mornings in more traditional class settings, receiving direct instruction and participating in class discussions. However, the afternoons became available for a flexible tutorial time. During these blocks of time, learners can work independently, study with peers, or meet with teachers one-on-one -- focusing in on whatever they need that day.

As part of the new format at Bentley, Moore asked his teachers to move their teaching materials online, so learners could work at their own pace during class and tutorial time. Making materials accessible at any time and from any place helped to solve some of the major challenges Bentley learners faced. They could now work at their own pace, and if a learner couldn't get to school -- due to weather, sports, or family obligations -- they could keep up with their work on their own time.

To get everything learners needed online, Bentley teachers created class websites and relied on a mix of apps and digital tools.



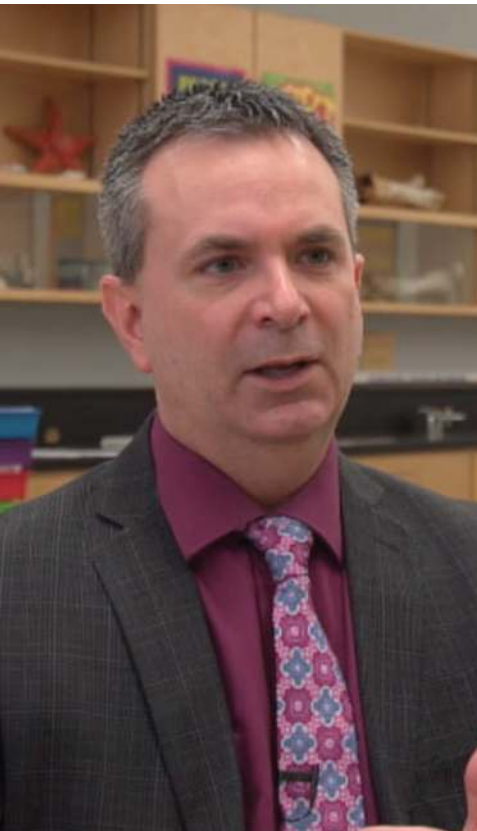


The Enhanced Learning Model

Moore's new model helped to solve some of Bentley's problems by making the curriculum more flexible and personalized. However, learners still needed more options in terms of class choice, and access to high quality academic content, if Bentley was going to compete with the bigger schools in the area to retain its students.

Late in the 2015-2016 school year, district level administrators at Wolf Creek approached the Bentley admin team to explore the development of an "Enhanced Learning Model". Bentley would serve as one of two pilot schools in this development process. Working as a pilot cohort, these schools' admin teams would work with district office leaders to take Bentley High School's approach of flexible, personalized learning to the next level. Instead of individual teachers at Bentley uploading materials to different websites and apps for learners to access, in the Enhanced Learning Model, entire courses could be hosted online in their selected digital learning tool, [Hapara Workspace](https://www.hapara.com/).

Greg Esteves, the Tech Services Director in Wolf Creek, and Sean Lougheed, the Learning Services Director, worked with this pilot cohort to get everything in place before the Enhanced Learning Model was implemented.



For Esteves, that meant making sure that the courses would be hosted on a platform that was reliable, and wouldn't require a huge learning curve for the teachers and learners using it. Wolf Creek had already been using [Hapara products](#) for some time, and when Workspace was introduced, it seemed like the perfect fit. Esteves said that already knowing Hapara would be a partner in the project by listening to Wolf Creek staff and responding to product feedback was a driving factor in choosing Workspace.

Esteves also needed to make sure that the school had the infrastructure in place to support learners working online. This included improving the wireless internet in the building, ensuring that the school had adequate access to mobile devices, and making sure that the school had access to a high standard of tech and training support.



The goal of the Enhanced Learning Model was to ensure that learners at Bentley would have access to the same great content as learners at other schools in the Wolf Creek district. According to Lougheed, "over a period of time we looked at how our small rural high schools, or really all of our high schools, have access to high expert content, very strong great programming, even in rural settings." Lougheed and Esteves needed to assemble a team of content experts to build the courses. Educators from around the district applied to help build the content over one summer break. Of a pool of forty educators, ten were selected including Bentley's math teacher, Kyle Brown.



To create the Enhanced Learning Model courses, content experts first worked with learning coaches in the district to make sure they had the technical skills needed to understand how to create content and organize learning in this new model. Then, because this is a facilitated blended model, Lougheed says, “we had to talk about what learning looks like and one of the big pieces we had to do was, literally, an intensive course-mapping process. What that is, is start to finish - what are the key critical outcomes that need to be covered? What does mastery of that content look like? And then working backwards to chunk that content to put it into an online space that is going to be manageable for the students.”

Teacher collaboration has been key in building out the Enhanced Learning Model. As teachers at Bentley continue to implement the courses that were built, they’re able to reach out to the educators who wrote the content to ask questions and discuss ways to improve the courses and adjust them for their learners. Teachers at Bentley also need to collaborate with each other on scheduling courses to make sure learners have the time they need to complete all of their work.

Wolf Creek has also made sure educators at Bentley have access to learning coaches to support their transition to this new model. The learning coaches help with everything from understanding the actual technology of Hapara Workspace to helping to differentiate and tweak lessons and courses to better meet learner needs.





The Results

Less than a year into implementing Hapara Workspace for the Enhanced Learning Model, Bentley is already seeing results - the most exciting of them being that learners are taking and finding success in more academic courses. As one learner named Austin told us, “I really like the Hapara system because it’s enabled me to take a lot more classes. For example, this semester I’m taking grade eleven Social Studies and grade ten Sciences and they’re at the same time. So normally, I wouldn’t be able to take those two courses, or I’d have to have hours of homework. But because of my tutorial time and because of the way Hapara works, I have access to my Science online so I can go to Social Studies when I need to and get my lectures from Mr. Hazlett, but I can also access my Hapara from home and get my work done then.

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**Lane Moore,
Bentley Principal**

Learners at Bentley are no longer held back by limited resources and available teachers. In fact, Austin is one of several learners working on material a whole grade level ahead. And according to Moore, that doesn’t mean these learners have to finish high school early. He tells them, “you don’t have to be done. You can stay here and we can look at dual credit with some of our colleges and universities. You can really focus on more problems. Maybe you want to expand that project and it becomes a full time thing in your last year. It allows us the flexibility to have kids tell us what they want to learn and where they want to go with it.”

Bentley is also seeing increased enrollment since moving away from the traditional school day and structure.

Learners from neighbouring communities who want more flexible schedules, due to sports and other commitments, are choosing Bentley over their home schools so they can still have a challenging, rewarding school experience without missing out on those additional opportunities.

One unplanned but exciting benefit of the new model has been a shift in learner-educator relationships. As educators' roles have shifted from standing in front of the room and lecturing, to guiding, mentoring and supporting learners as they work independently, learners have said they now feel like their teachers trust them more. According to Kelsey, a tenth grader, "We have kind of a respect and a trust that they can trust us to go and get our work done. Our teachers respect us enough that they treat us like adults where we can be independent and we can do this on our own. But, it also helps us knowing that our teachers have resources, information and knowledge when we do need help."

Overall, the pilot program for using Hapara and the Enhanced Learning Model is going well at Bentley and throughout Wolf Creek Public Schools. Wolf Creek district administrators have already assisted other schools to expand the implementation of the Enhanced Learning Model by building additional courses in Hapara and by meeting with them around conditions of readiness and success before bringing their schools into the program.





The Enhanced Learning Model courses now support students in Wolf Creek's summer school program and will continue to expand across the school district with all of the district's 9 high schools having access to the course materials. It is still early to determine the overall impact of this model on performance on standardized exams, but the pilot schools are already seeing evidence of increased performance on these measures by students who complete the Enhanced Learning Model courses.

As Principal Lane Moore said, "We had to build that culture that we could do what everybody else could. We needed to do it differently, but we could do it."