What's your Education **Hall of Fame** moment?

Do our personal narratives reveal what matters to us as a learning community?

2025-07-06

"*The truth about stories is, that's all we are*." – Thomas King

Introduction

Building a clear, shared school vision is a key driver of school improvement because it powerfully influences staff motivation, commitment, and professional purpose. These factors are closely tied to student learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Lacking a vision and mission statement for Grand Forks Secondary School, school leadership set about facilitating their creation with the input of staff, students, and parents. This report shares important information about our school-based staff processes for the purpose of informing our vision and mission. Our parents' and students' input were gathered differently than this method.

Values are core driving forces in our lives. Values guide many of our actions across contexts and situations. Rooting our work in First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL), we wanted to learn if our personal narratives could reveal what matters to us as a learning community?

To answer this question, staff engaged in a **Hall of Fame** storytelling activity as described by Kevin Reimer (2021) where we shared personal stories of success, while our partners identified the core values those same stories revealed through listening. This process surfaced hundreds of distinct value terms and, considering the trends in the frequencies of their mention, it revealed what staff truly prize and live by in their professional practice.

First, we offer a brief summary about our process.

Step 1: Personal written reflection (5 minutes)

Learning requires exploration of one's identity. (FPPL)

Education Assistants and Teachers participated in the **Hall of Fame** activity together in an all-educators' meeting (approx. 40 people) on April 4, 2025. Other staff: custodians, bus drivers, noon-hour supervisors, Indigenous Elder-in-Residence, and administrative assistants were invited to participate (and did) through a paper-based version of the activity.

Educators were first asked to independently journal to the prompt, "*What do you view as a significant success or accomplishment in the work that you do with students, families, and/or staff members? What beliefs or values are you able to connect to that moment?"*

STEP 2: Affirmative Interviews (12+ minutes)

Learning is embedded in history, memory and story. Learning is relational. (FPPL)

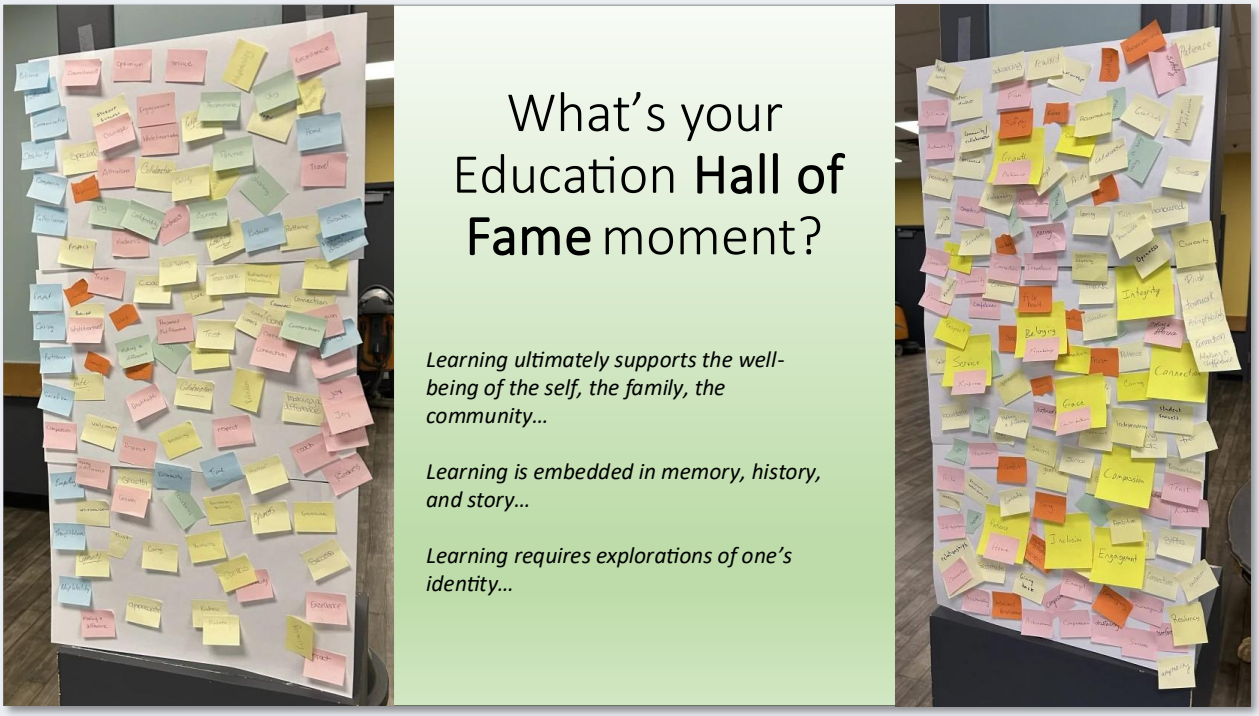
Immediately afterwards, our educators paired up to tell their **hall of fame** stories to one another. The speaker told their story uninterrupted. The listener silently recorded **value-words** they detected onto individual sticky notes thinking, "*What core values do I hear? What central beliefs are evident in the story?"* One sticky note was used per word or idea.

STEP 3: Collecting wisdom

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community...(FPPL)

To bring the Post-It Notes together and visualize the many value words mentioned, educators placed them on poster board at random.

Figure 1: Initial collection of value mentions, PPT slide



The values mentioned were later tallied for their frequency and a word cloud was shared with staff at the next all-educators' meeting. Educators were asked to reflect, discuss, and share what they noticed. What was it telling us? What else should we consider? And what they thought was missing and why?

Figure 2: Value mentions sorted by frequency (most frequent in the centre, PPT slide)



Step 4: Identifying themes

For clarity and depth, these values were then grouped by school leadership into five overarching themes that capture the essence of our educator's values:

1. Human Connection and Compassion
2. Growth and Achievement
3. Integrity and Accountability
4. Purpose and Contribution
5. Creativity and Joy

Below, each theme is described with embedded frequency data followed by reflective analysis, providing a rich portrait of our educators' shared values and their implications for our school's vision and mission.

1. Human Connection and Compassion

The most frequently cited theme is **Human Connection and Compassion**, comprising a total of 95 mentions. At the center is *connection* itself, appearing 21 times, underscoring the primacy of relationships in staff stories. Complementary values include *relationships* (6), *friendly* (4), *belonging* (2), *inclusion* (3), *being-heard* (1), and *supportive* (1). Emotional

warmth and care shine through *kindness* (10), *caring* (9), *compassion* (7), *patience* (9), and *respect* (6), with singular mentions for *empathy*, *understanding*, *reassuring*, *grace*, and *parenting*.

This cluster confirms that authentic human connection and emotional safety form the foundation of our school. Staff narratives emphasize that success is inseparable from belonging and care. These findings urge us to prioritize relational trust and cultivate environments where every individual feels valued and supported. Embedding relational practices within our school, professional development, and wellbeing initiatives is essential for sustaining a compassionate culture.

2. Growth and Achievement

Totaling 55 mentions, **Growth and Achievement** blends the pursuit of learning with resilience. *Growth* (5) and *reflection* (3) demonstrate a commitment to ongoing development. *Success* (9), *achievement* (4), *perseverance* (3), *courage* (3), *grit* (2), and *hard work* reflect the effort behind accomplishments. Additional values such as *curiosity*, *confidence*, *engagement*, and *initiative* round out this theme.

Staff stories reveal a shared growth mindset culture valuing persistence as much as outcomes. This suggests a vision for a school that embraces risk-taking, reflective practice, and celebrates perseverance. We can nurture this by recognizing effort, providing safe spaces for experimentation, and emphasizing feedback that promotes growth over perfection.

3. Integrity and Accountability

With 29 total mentions, **Integrity and Accountability** centers on trustworthiness and ethical conduct. *Trust* leads this group with 7 mentions, followed by *reliability* (5), *accountability* (3), and *authenticity* and *boundaries* (2 each). Single mentions of *vulnerability*, *dignity*, *confidentiality*, *follow-through*, and *integrity* further flesh out this theme.

This cluster highlights the school's collective expectation for professionalism grounded in honesty and dependability. The inclusion of *vulnerability* alongside *boundaries* speaks to a mature understanding that accountability is balanced with psychological safety. Our school must foster transparent communication channels and model ethical behavior, creating conditions where mistakes can be constructively owned and trust maintained.

4. Purpose and Contribution

The theme of **Purpose and Contribution** includes 26 mentions. *Making a difference* was cited 10 times, with *giving back* (3), *impact* (3), *service* (2), and *altruism* (2) also prominent. Single mentions include *contribution*, *reward*, *belief*, *purpose*, and *commitment*.

This outward focus frames our work as educators as a meaningful social mission. Staff draw motivation from serving students, families, and community, seeing their work as a force for good. We can amplify this sense of shared purpose by articulating a clear, inspiring mission and by fostering community partnerships that connect daily work to broader social impact.

5. Creativity and Joy

Though smaller in volume, **Creativity and Joy** with 18 mentions remains vital. *Fun* and *humour* each appear 3 times, while *creativity*, *innovation*, *enthusiasm*, *passionate*, *self-expression*, and *energetic* are noted once each.

This theme reveals that joyful engagement and creative freedom are essential to sustain energy and motivation. The presence of these values encourages us to foster environments rich in playfulness, innovation, and authentic self-expression, helping to combat burnout and invigorate our school culture.

Conclusion

The **Hall of Fame** activity offered a robust, nuanced map of our staff's cultural DNA. The dominant values of **human connection and compassion**, paired with **integrity and accountability**, create a solid foundation. The strong commitment to **growth and achievement** energizes our learning community, while **purpose and contribution** bind us to a mission greater than ourselves. Finally, **creativity and joy** infuse our daily work with vitality and spirit.

This detailed portrait of our values provides insight for educators that will help shape a vision and mission statement that resonates deeply with staff values, guides our culture and decision-making, and informs our professional practices toward a school future where these principles are fully lived.

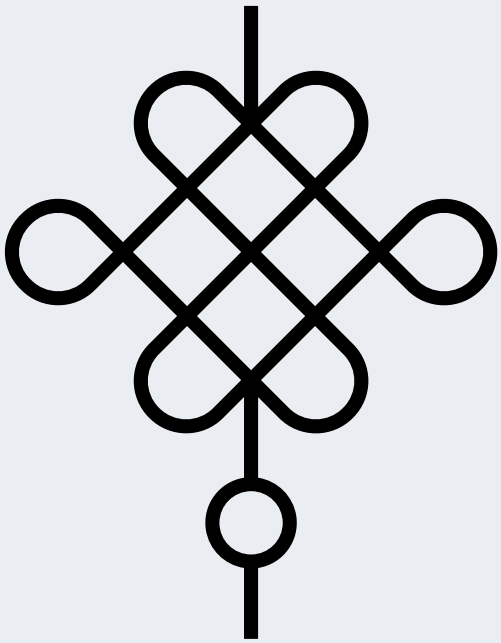
Our next steps are to merge these findings from our educators with the other activities we recently did with students (Grade 8 and 10 Forums and the 2025 Student Learning Survey) and the survey for parents (Beliefs about Education).

Please contact Tom Eccleston, GFSS Principal, for more information.

References

Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., Hopkins, D. (2006). *Seven strong claims about successful school leadership*. Department for Education and Skills. National College for School Leadership. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7df7f9e5274a2e87daeb06/seven-claims-about-successful-school-leadership.pdf

Riemer, K. (2021). Creating a school vision. *Leading Back to School*. BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association. https://bcpvpa.insite.com/files/web/19fce502-d99b-4517-a0b0-ad9401654e30/bcpvpa-leadingbacktoschool-fall2021-staffvision.pdf



Grand Forks Secondary School

British Columbia Public School District 51 (Boundary)

1331 Central Ave | Grand Forks BC | V0H 1H0 Canada