

Inspiring Everyone to Act

By Jamal ElRafih, Shakila Raja, and Lina Elchamaa, Almadina Language Charter Academy

Ask any educator in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system what is the “why” in public education, and they’ll likely agree: “To provide equal opportunity for all children to succeed.” Now, ask them “how” you make that happen, and you’ll find the answer is not that simple.

In coming together to consider assurance planning, Almadina Language Charter Academy’s leadership team recognized that improvement plans are only as good as the paper they are written on unless people are inspired to implement them. A culture of system improvement doesn’t exist because of a plan. It exists because of the people within the building. This includes educational assistants,

secretaries, teachers, parents, leaders, trustees, and most importantly, students.

With this in mind, we set the stage to design Almadina’s 2021-2024 Education Plan by committing to build the leadership and planning capacity of our school community. To ensure our stakeholders championed the plan’s design and evolution moving forward, we established this goal:

To engage the entire Almadina learning community – students, staff, parents, and board members – in the education planning process to ensure we nurture a shared responsibility for student growth and achievement that enhances public confidence and accountability in our school.

We also looked to the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)

community engagement model, deciding that our planning process would be a level four, whereby we pledged to incorporate the advice and recommendations received from our stakeholders into the plan to the maximum extent possible.

Planning for this venture began in June 2020. With the assistance and guidance of a communication consultant, we mapped out a 30-week planning process, to be led by an Innovation Planning Committee of dedicated staff, charged with guiding the planning process.

In September, the first step in our venture saw us “Beginning with Why.” Drawing on the creative strengths of our students, we asked our elementary grades to visually



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represent their response to the questions, “What makes my school good?” and “What would make it even better?” Middle school students were asked, “What does it look like when you are learning at your best?” and “What actions can students and adults take to improve learning at the school?”

As students set to work sharing their thoughts through collages, drawings, essays, word art, mobiles, and dioramas, our planning team attended a fireside chat to deep dive into the principles of Alberta’s assurance framework. Learning from a neighbouring school authority representative involved in the assurance pilot, we soon realized that while assurance begins with a collaboratively developed plan, it must permeate into all areas of operation.

Amid the pandemic, we pivoted our first engagement meeting in November 2020 from in-person to a virtual format via Zoom. The half-day session involved close to 100 participants, which included student representatives, all staff, our school council, and our Board of Directors. From two videos, which represented the 700 students who responded to our three-year planning student engagement questions, we brought attention to the diverse nature of our classrooms, students’ various learning modalities and preferences, and of course, their wish lists: “more math,” “kindness in the world,” “field trips every day,” “my own iPad at school,” “world languages,” and “group work,” to name a few. We also relished in their praise of our school: “I love Almadina, my teachers, and my friends,” summed up what many students had to say.

With our students’ voices ringing in our ears, we spent the rest of the morning and two more engagement meetings working in small and large groups, drafting, refining, critiquing, and reworking our three-year plan structure. In May 2020, we unveiled our finished plan, “I AM,” intentionally designed to instill the capacity of positive thinking and build strength and self-confidence from the inside out. Over the next three years, our school community will focus on I AM Strong, I AM Successful, and I AM Self-Directed – a framework with endless possibilities!

Fast forward to September 2021, our staff signed up to sit on one of six steering committees charged with developing and implementing action plans to address strategies in our plan focused on wellness, inclusion, English Language Learning,

curriculum, assessment, and technology. Working under the mnemonic, T.E.A.M: Together Everyone Achieves More, we’ve ensured the necessary conditions are in place to support their work – a clear vision, the skills, appropriate incentives, required resources, action plans, and a cadence of accountability. With each committee’s roles, responsibilities, and reporting requirements clearly defined, our education plan is coming to life, with greater community assurance imminent!

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Academy’s students, staff, and families, we know we will emerge strong, successful, and self-directed. And as we reflect on how our education plan has begun to weave into the fabric of our school life, we now have a simple answer on “how” we provide equal opportunities for all students to succeed – we inspire everyone to act. ■

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