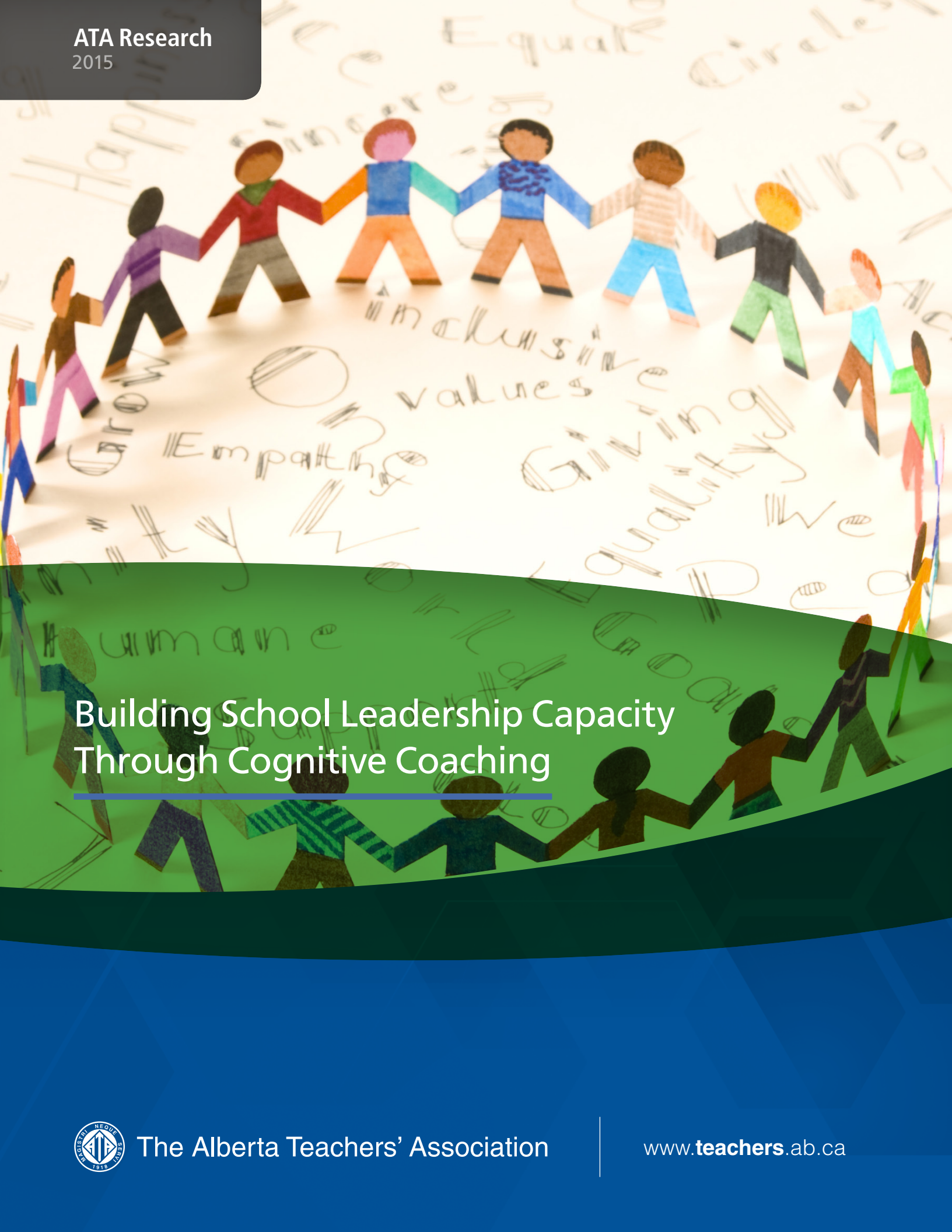




Building School Leadership Capacity Through Cognitive Coaching





The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Foreword

School principals play a key role in the Alberta education system. Among many other things, they are responsible for ensuring that a positive learning culture, one that features quality teaching practices, exists to foster engaged student learning. As school leaders, principals are guided by the seven professional practice competencies, which are set in place to help ensure the province-wide consistency of the preparation, induction, supervision, evaluation, and professional learning of school principals. The Association is committed to providing school leaders with quality professional development programs that are consistent with the provincial competencies. This research report is a program evaluation of the Leader2Leader Program designed by the Association for newly-appointed school principals and funded through a conditional grant from Alberta Education.

The L2L Program was delivered over a two-year timeframe and featured Cognitive Coaching as the framework for peer mentoring. The program was envisioned to develop a network of reflective, self-reliant school leaders whose high-quality leadership optimizes student learning and supports school improvement. The results of this report show that all of the participants of the study placed high value on the L2L Program's ongoing professional learning design. Participants were, in other words, unanimous about the effectiveness of the face-to-face workshops that bridged together both opportunities for ongoing peer coaching and a professional inquiry specific to their school context. The following is just a handful of comments, taken at the end of the study, from participants about the positive value of the L2L Program:

- The L2L Program was valuable for providing connections to administrators across our province especially for those of us in small rural schools where you can feel so isolated.
- There is great value in the L2L Program. I have improved in many areas and as a result of the coaching have the ability to remain in this challenging role.
- L2L was among the very best professional growth opportunities for school principals.
- The L2L Program creates great school leaders in a two-year span.
- L2L provided ongoing PD that was intentional and just in-time.
- L2L Program helps new administrators focus on individual professional growth and school improvement.

In January 2015, the L2L Program received an award for Outstanding Independent Research from the founders of Cognitive Coaching at Thinking Collaborative, Highlands Ranch, Colorado. As with most successful programs this one represents a collaborative effort. Jacqueline Skytt and Jeff Johnson, ATA executive staff officers, provided the leadership for the program and were supported by Dr Cal Hauserman, project manager, Dr W Todd Rogers, project evaluator, and John Clarke, Cognitive Coaching Training Associate. I also wish to express my appreciation to the following education partners who supported this project through their representation on the Advisory Committee: Alberta Education, Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta School Councils' Association, Association of Alberta Deans of Education, Association of Independent School and Colleges of Alberta, College of Alberta School Superintendents and the ATA Council for School Leadership. Finally, I want to acknowledge the dedicated school principals who participated in the L2L Program; I wish them continued success in their leadership roles.

Gordon R Thomas
Executive Secretary

Background

School principals occupy an important and challenging position in the education system. A recent national study on the principalship demonstrated the multiplicity of demands placed upon Canadian school leaders (Alberta Teachers' Association [ATA] 2014a). At the same time, this study underlined principals' commitment to and hopes for the profession. Yet, as many Albertan principals reach retirement or transition into positions in central office, others will be encountering the challenges of school leadership for the first time. Given the increasing complexity and diversity in Alberta's classrooms and schools (ATA 2015a), how can new principals effectively foster a positive learning culture? Further, is there a way to capitalize on the experience of current principals to better develop beginning principals' leadership capacity?

COGNITIVE COACHING

Cognitive CoachingSM is a professional development process that focuses on "the learning and self-directedness of the person being coached" (ATA 2014b, 2).¹ The process was first delineated by Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston (1993, 1), who describe the concept as a "consistent, positive disturbance that can bring profound changes to the classroom, school, district, and community." For Costa and Garmston, Cognitive Coaching is focused on a teacher's growth, with the coach—who can be "anyone in the educational setting" (p 2)—encouraging the teacher's inner thought processes and reflection on instructional behaviours. Although Costa and Garmston speak of the protégé as a teacher, Cognitive Coaching can also afford school leaders opportunities to enhance their capacity for self-reflection.

The Cognitive Coaching process, which is nonjudgmental, consists of three phases: a planning conference, observation of the protégé's practice by the coach and a reflecting conference. While the immediate aim of Cognitive Coaching is to enable protégés "to explore the thinking behind their practices" (Garmston, Linder and Whitaker 1993, 57), autonomy is its end goal. Ideally, protégés should gain the capacity to reflect upon and evaluate their own practice.

Several studies indicate the effectiveness of Cognitive Coaching (Batt 2010; Ellison 2003; Garmston, Linder and Whitaker 1993). Ellison's study, in particular, demonstrates how the process can positively affect principals' leadership capacity. Growing recognition of the benefits of the process for teachers and school leaders has resulted in the emergence of Cognitive Coaching training programs in Alberta.

The ATA has hosted Cognitive Coaching training sessions. Moreover, to promote beginning school principals' self-reflection and sense of efficacy in their leadership roles, the ATA undertook a 16-month pilot project that employed the Cognitive Coaching model, among other tools.

THE LEADER2LEADER PROGRAM

In 2012, the ATA began a Cognitive Coaching pilot project, the Leader2Leader (L2L) program. Though Cognitive Coaching is at the core of the program, several aspects of the L2L program were based on a multifaceted professional development program developed by Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997). In addition to Cognitive Coaching with a peer coach, the L2L program included professional learning workshops and a personal project related to professional growth or school improvement.

The pilot L2L program was conducted during the 2012/13 and 2013/14 school years, and had as participants 28 beginning principals, as well as 15 experienced principals who assumed roles as certified peer coaches. Funded through a conditional grant from Alberta Education, the program aimed to foster “a network of reflective, self-reliant school leaders whose high-quality leadership optimizes student learning and supports improvement initiatives that take into account the unique context of each school” (ATA 2012, 1). Further, the beginning principals participating in the project were to enhance their professional practice competencies for school leaders in Alberta, as outlined by Alberta Education (2013).

To support improvement in these competencies, beginning principals attended professional development workshops over eight and a half days, as well as a two-day conference. The coaches also attended those sessions, as well as four days of training sessions on coaching skills, which were not attended by the beginning principals (indicated below by an asterisk). The sessions and the topics covered were as follows:

- Orientation workshop (January 2013)
 - Overview of L2L program, research on mentorship and Cognitive Coaching, professional practice competencies for school leaders needs assessment, team building and coach–protégé matching
- Cognitive Coaching refresher*
- Professional development workshop (May 2013)
 - Leading a learning community, collaborative practices and partnerships, and online resources
 - Cognitive Coaching skills training*
- Professional development workshop (September 2013)
 - Identification of professional growth plan goals or projects, as well as reflective practice and data collection techniques
 - Coaching to standards*
- Leadership Essentials for Administrators conference (November 2013)
 - Cognitive Coaching skills training*
- Professional development workshop (January 2014)
 - Instructional leadership, working with school councils and conflict management
- Celebration of learning and program closure (May 2014)

The beginning principals were each assigned a coach, with whom they met face to face at the above events. Not all participants were able to attend all meetings. Further, because of some changes in the number of beginning principals participating, some coaches were reassigned. Aside from the organized meetings, the coaches and their protégés were in contact in person, through Skype or a similar platform, by e-mail and by telephone. The method and frequency of communication varied,

as did the issues discussed. Overall, the coaches and their protégés established a strong sense of rapport and trust. The L2L program design was based on a model of cross-jurisdiction coaching where beginning principals and their coaches were not in the same school jurisdiction and therefore interacted as professional peers rather than workplace colleagues. (For further detail on the coach–protégé relationship, see the full project report [ATA 2014b, 111–24].)

While the Association managed the L2L program, its direction was informed by a stakeholder advisory committee consisting of representatives from Alberta Education, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta School Councils' Association, the Association of Alberta Deans of Education, the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta, the College of Alberta School Superintendents and the ATA's Council for School Leadership.

The pilot project was independently evaluated to discern how well the L2L program supports the development of professional practice competencies and enhances personal efficacy. The questions that guided the evaluation process demonstrate the centrality of Cognitive Coaching, and its emphasis on self-reflection, to the program:

1. How did the blended program of professional learning workshops and Cognitive Coaching support the implementation of the School Leadership Framework?
2. How did Cognitive Coaching support the professional growth of coaches and protégés paired in different school jurisdictions in this project?
3. What was the level of reflection that emerged from project participants? How did this impact leadership practices? Specifically, were there shifts or greater levels of awareness about attitudes and actions related to collaboration? How did the project impact instructional practices? Did the project enhance effective working relationships with all members of the school community, thereby enhancing student learning?
4. What were the shifts in principal efficacy or possibly the level of collective efficacy in the schools the principals led?
5. As a multi-jurisdictional pilot project of peer coaching and professional inquiry, what were the positive attributes for future implementation?
6. What were the details in the program development and implementation that were effective and which areas need attention and adjustment?
7. Were there any recommendations specific to the School Leadership Framework that need to be addressed provincially or regionally?
8. What was the impact of the individual professional growth plan focused on leadership and skill development within the context of Cognitive Coaching? (ATA 2014b, 7)

Bearing these questions in mind, this report addresses the effectiveness of the pilot program, providing an overview of the evaluation and data collection process and outlining the key findings that emerged from this process. In particular, the report considers the extent to which the L2L program can influence beginning principals' sense of efficacy and capacity for school leadership.

Measuring the Effectiveness of the L2L Program

METHODOLOGY

To determine the effectiveness of the program, three survey instruments were employed. These instruments were designed to gather data on the coaches' and beginning principals' self-efficacy, their sense of the climate in their schools and the degree to which they possessed the indicator behaviours of the seven competencies identified in *Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders in Alberta* (Alberta Education 2013). Participants completed these three surveys twice: once to gather baseline data, and once to obtain a measure of change resulting from participation in the program. Data from the baseline (or pre-test) surveys were reviewed by the project director, the project coordinator and the project manager, as well as by the stakeholder advisory committee and participants, and used as a needs assessment to guide the program's professional development workshops.

In addition to these three instruments, surveys on participants' school contexts and impressions of the L2L program were conducted beginning in January 2014, with follow-up telephone interviews in March and April 2014. The surveys and interviews inquired into the coaching process; the coach–protégé relationship; forms of communication employed and frequency of contact; progress related to the professional practice competencies; progress on professional growth plans for projects; and relationships between the principal and teachers, staff, students and parents.

SAMPLE

All of the participants voluntarily applied to the L2L program through an online registration site. The beginning principals had to obtain their superintendents' permission to participate. Initially, 28 beginning principals and 15 coaches participated, but five of the beginning principals withdrew from the pilot at the end of June 2013 for various personal reasons.

Between the coaches and the protégés, 23 Alberta school districts were represented in the pilot program. Some of the data suggest that similar numbers of the beginning principals were employed in small rural communities and in urban areas, while slightly more coaches were employed in urban areas than in rural areas. The configurations of the principals' schools varied greatly, though participants were most frequently from K–6 schools. (For further detail on participants' schools, see the full program report [ATA 2014b, 103–9].)

Twenty-five of the 28 beginning principals in the pilot were in their first year as principals, while two were in their second year and one was in his or her third year. The coaches were all practising principals who either had completed or were in the process of completing a professional coaching program; all 15 had completed the Cognitive Coaching training by the spring of the project's first year.

The education level of the coaches and beginning principals varied. While all had earned at least one bachelor's degree, 13 coaches and 12 beginning principals held a master's degree. Further, one coach had completed a doctorate and one beginning principal was enrolled in a doctoral program. During the program, eight beginning principals—and none of the coaches—were receiving other education or training, such as university graduate leadership programs. None of the beginning principals were receiving any training from their school districts specific to the professional practice competencies or any district mentorship/coaching during the term of the L2L program.

LIMITATIONS

First, the data collection methods employed to evaluate the program relied on self-reporting; therefore, the results may reflect participants' individual biases and socially desirable responses. However, this was minimized through varied approaches that triangulated the data. For instance, follow-up interviews suggested that the responses were quite accurate.

Second, some terms, such as *school community*, were not defined in the survey instruments. Consequently, participants may have interpreted certain questions differently, affecting their responses.

Third, because no control group was used in this project, researchers cannot account for other factors that may have influenced participants' leadership competencies, school climate or self-efficacy.

These limitations are worth noting and should be taken into consideration for any future iterations of the program. Nonetheless, the results provide useful insight into participants' perceptions of the L2L pilot and allow for productive consideration of the overall effectiveness of the program.

FINDINGS

This report focuses on the L2L program's effectiveness in building principals' leadership capacity and sense of efficacy, particularly in relation to the *Professional Practice Competencies for School Leaders in Alberta* (Alberta Education 2013). Therefore, while this report includes a variety of data collected, the findings foreground the competencies.

Measuring the Seven Professional Practice Competencies

The seven professional practice competencies for school leaders in Alberta were, in many ways, the central focus of the L2L program, as participating beginning principals were to acquire or enhance their competency as school leaders. Therefore, a self-assessment of the competencies constituted one of the data collection tools.² The competency measure was administered in May 2013 and again in May 2014 to determine changes with respect to participants' competency in the following seven areas.

Professional Practice Competency 1: Fostering Effective Relationships

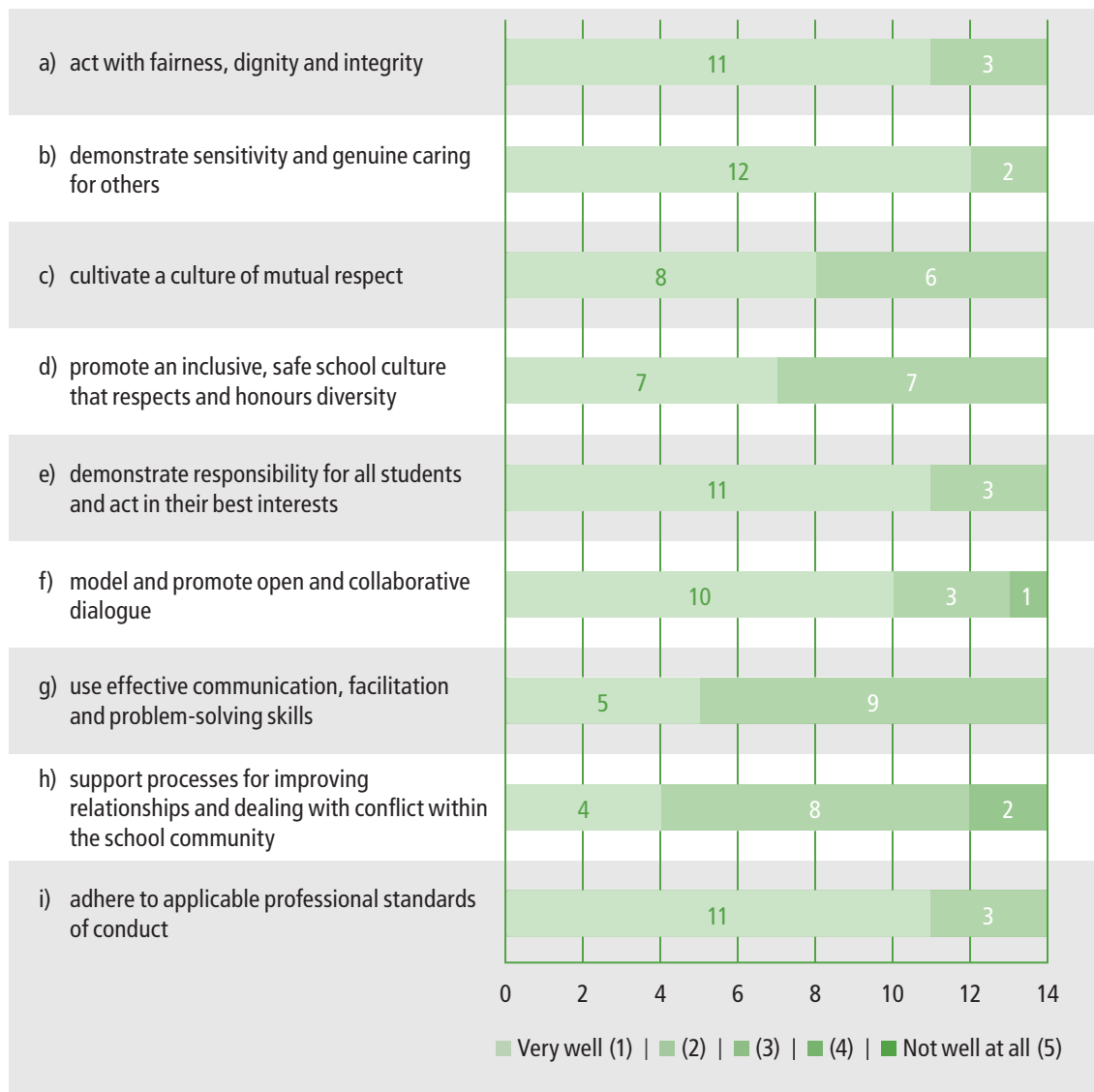
The first professional practice competency, fostering effective relationships, reflects a school leader's ability to both communicate well and facilitate communication, while managing conflict and promoting collaboration, inclusion and respect.

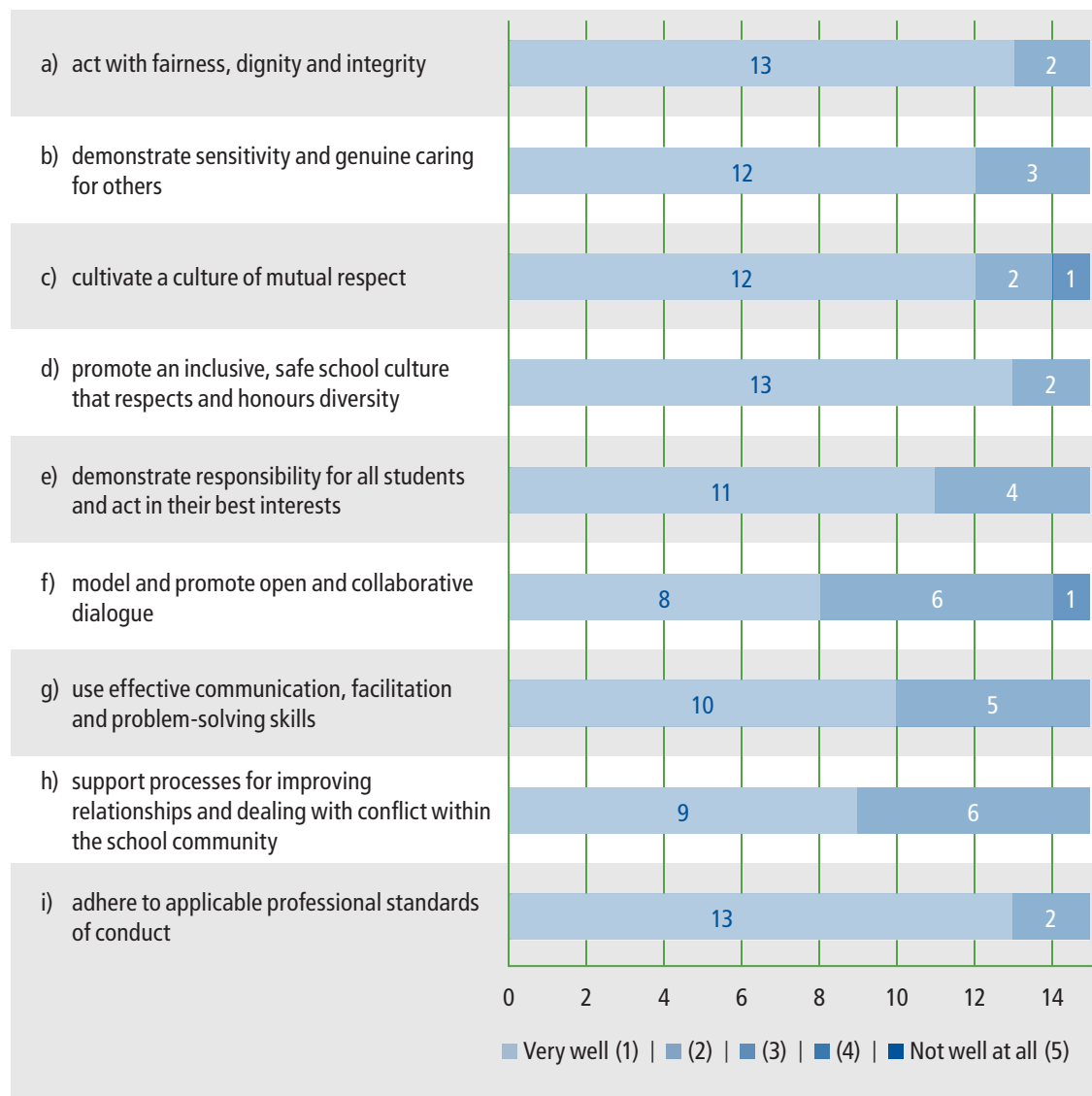
Overall, the experienced principals indicated little change from before to after the program, with nearly all of the coaches reporting that they performed the behavioural indicators of the competency “well” or “very well.” Following participation in the pilot, the coaches’ scores improved slightly, with small movement toward fostering effective relationships “very well.” See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Coaches on Professional Practice Competency 1: Fostering Effective Relationships.

Pre-Test Coaches

1. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Post-Test Coaches**1. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

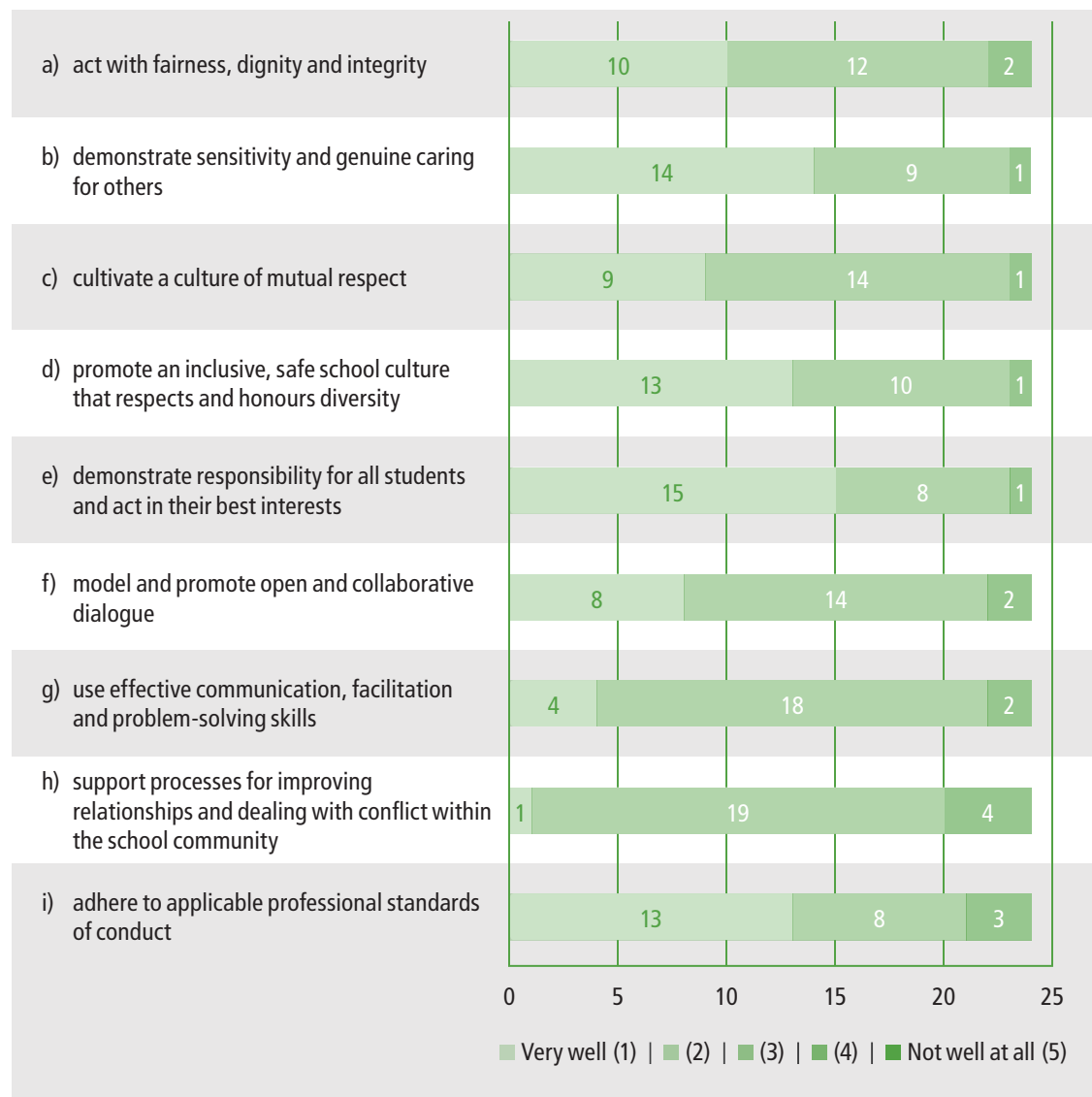
Baseline data indicate that the beginning principals had likewise fostered effective relationships, though not to the extent that the coaches had. As shown in Figure 2, the pre-test revealed some uncertainty, particularly with indicator (h), the respondents' ability to "support processes for improving relationships and dealing with conflict within the school community." Yet some of this uncertainty diminished following the program: while four beginning principals had initially replied "not sure" and only one reported achieving the behaviour "very well" for indicator (h), only two conveyed uncertainty and eight reported achieving the behaviour "very well" in the post-test (with a mean score increase from 3.88 to 4.26).

Being notably higher than the baseline results overall, the post-test results indicate that the program better enabled the beginning principals to foster effective relationships. In fact, the results indicate that the beginning principals improved to the extent that they and the coaches differed little in their competence in this area.

Figure 2. Beginning Principals on Professional Practice Competency 1: Fostering Effective Relationships.

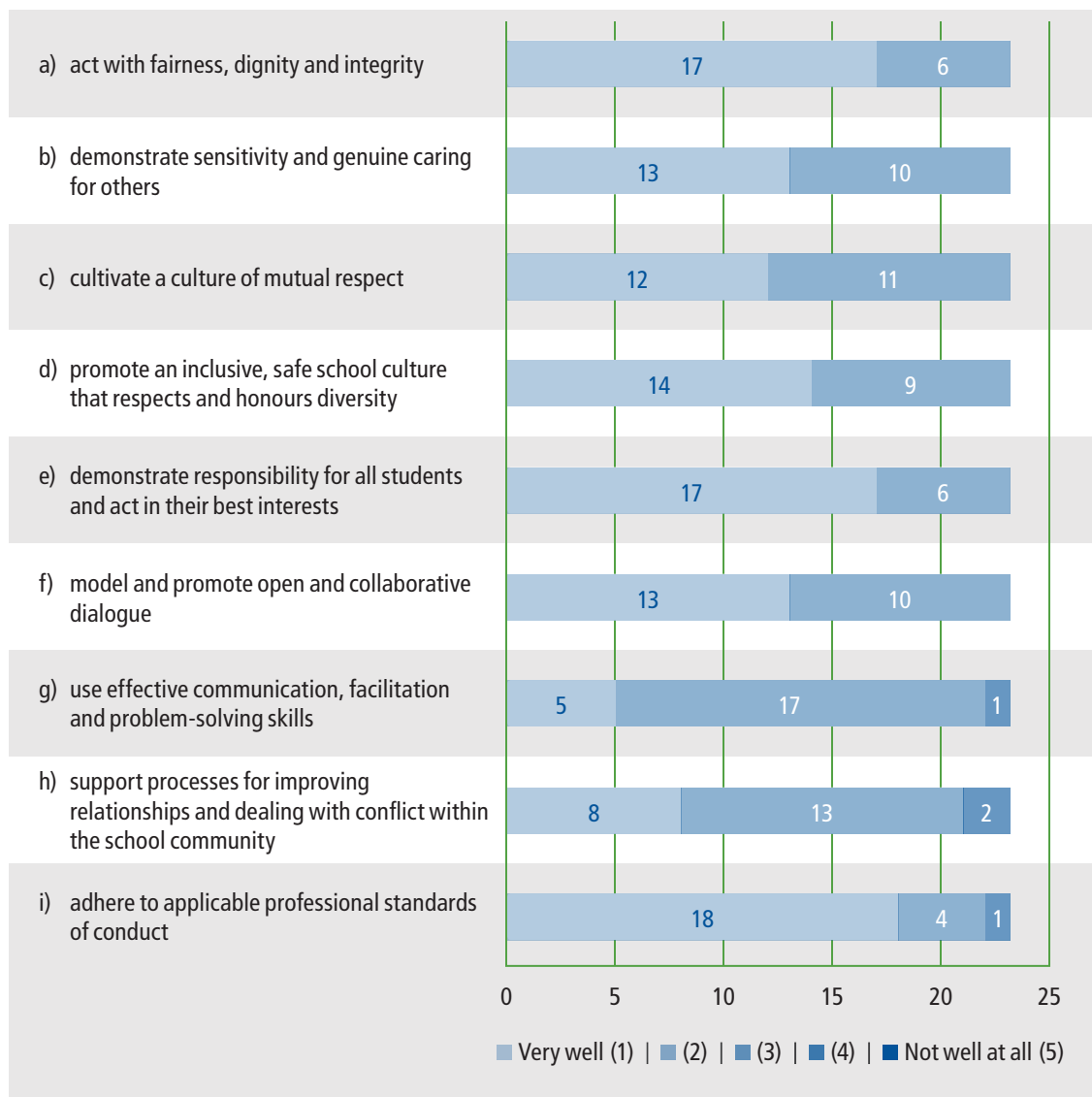
Pre-Test Beginning Principals

1. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Post-Test Beginning Principals

1. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Professional Practice Competency 2: Embodying Visionary Leadership

The second competency for school leaders is tied to the appropriateness, thoughtfulness and adaptability of a principal's vision for his or her school. Further, it reflects the principal's ability to effectively enact that vision. The results for this competency suggest that experience might count but embodying visionary leadership can continue to challenge experienced principals.

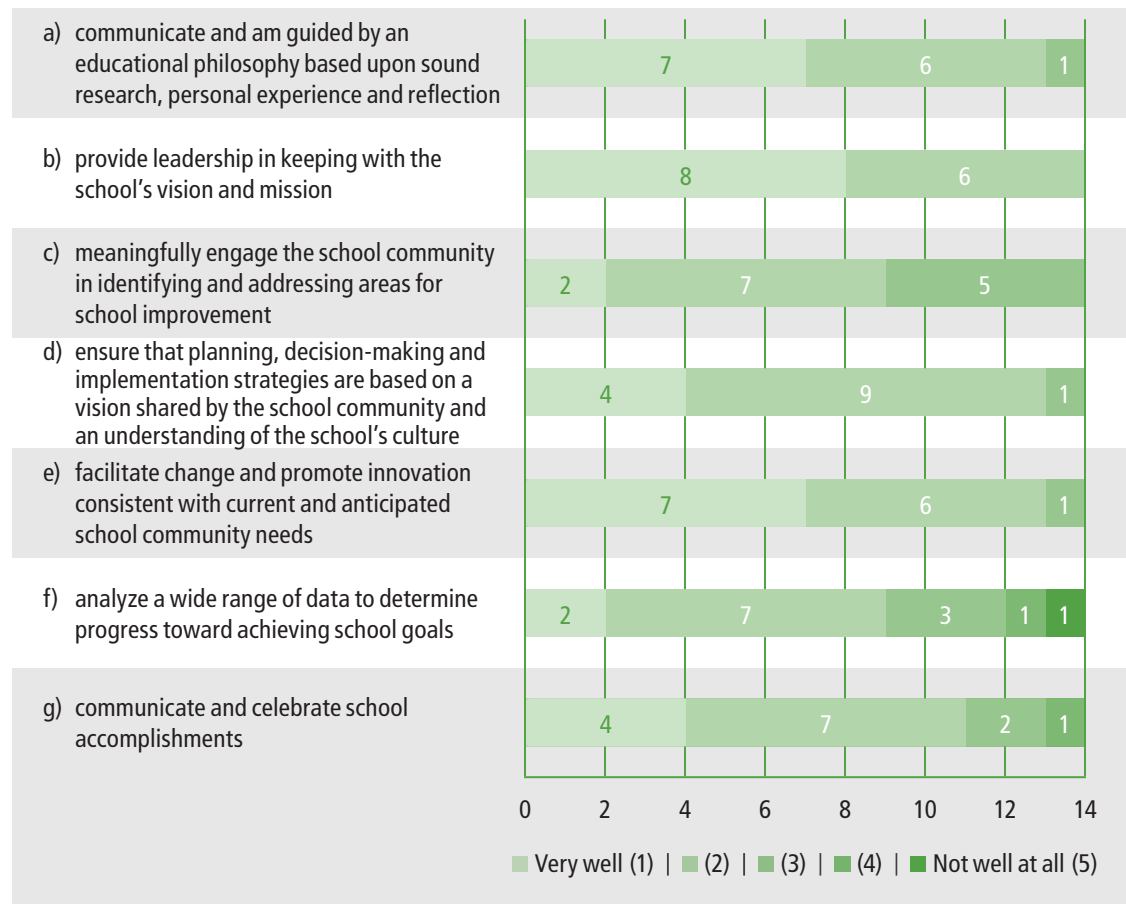
The baseline survey pointed to a significant difference in the ability of beginning and experienced principals to embody visionary leadership. In particular, the coaches' mean scores were notably higher than those of the protégés for indicators (a), (b), (d) and (e) (see Figures 3 and 4). Coaches demonstrated confidence in their abilities in these four areas, which had mean scores ranging from 4.21 to 4.57 in the pre-test.

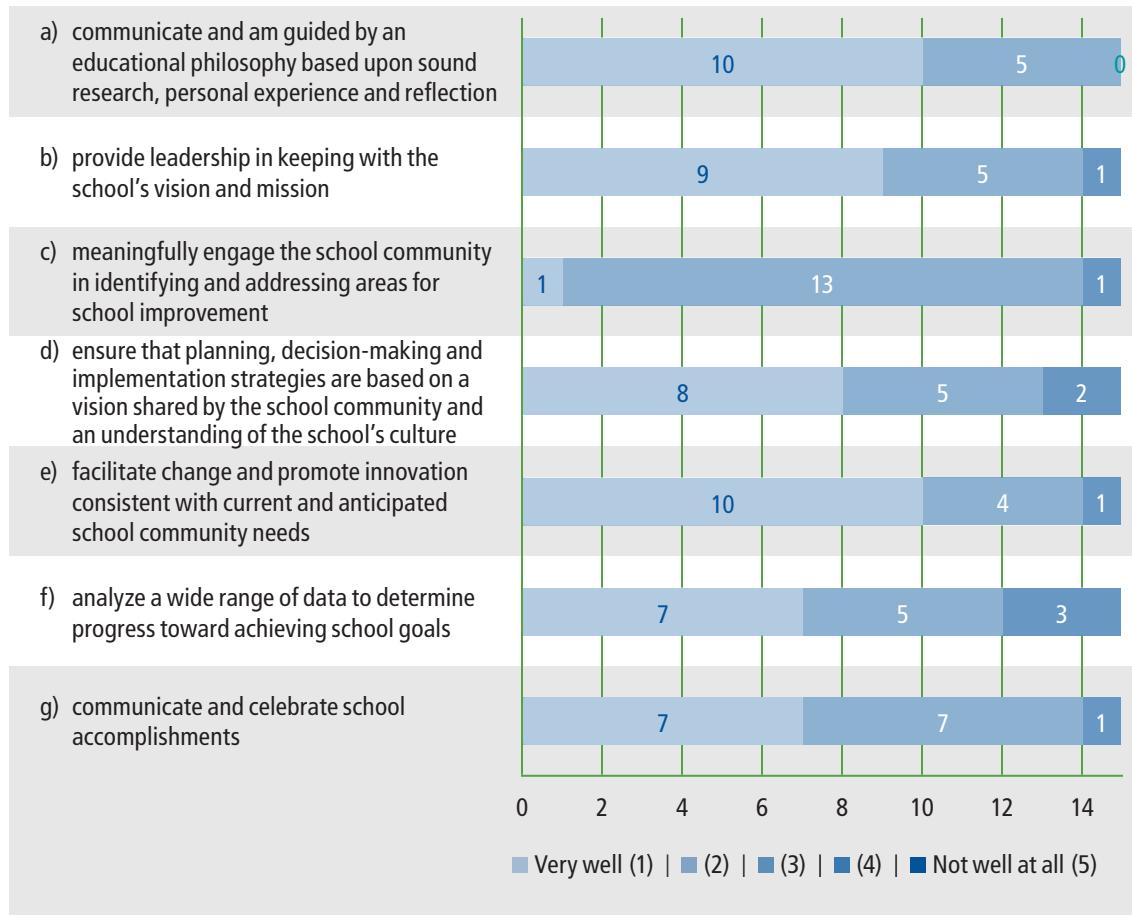
Beginning principals' and coaches' baseline responses were most similar for indicators in which the coaches appeared less confident. For instance, the protégés and coaches scored means of 3.71 and 3.79, respectively, for indicator (c), their ability to engage the school community. The post-test results for this indicator suggest that the two groups experienced similar levels of improvement (with each group's mean increasing by about 0.2).

Figure 3. Coaches on Professional Practice Competency 2: Embodying Visionary Leadership.

Pre-Test Coaches

2. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



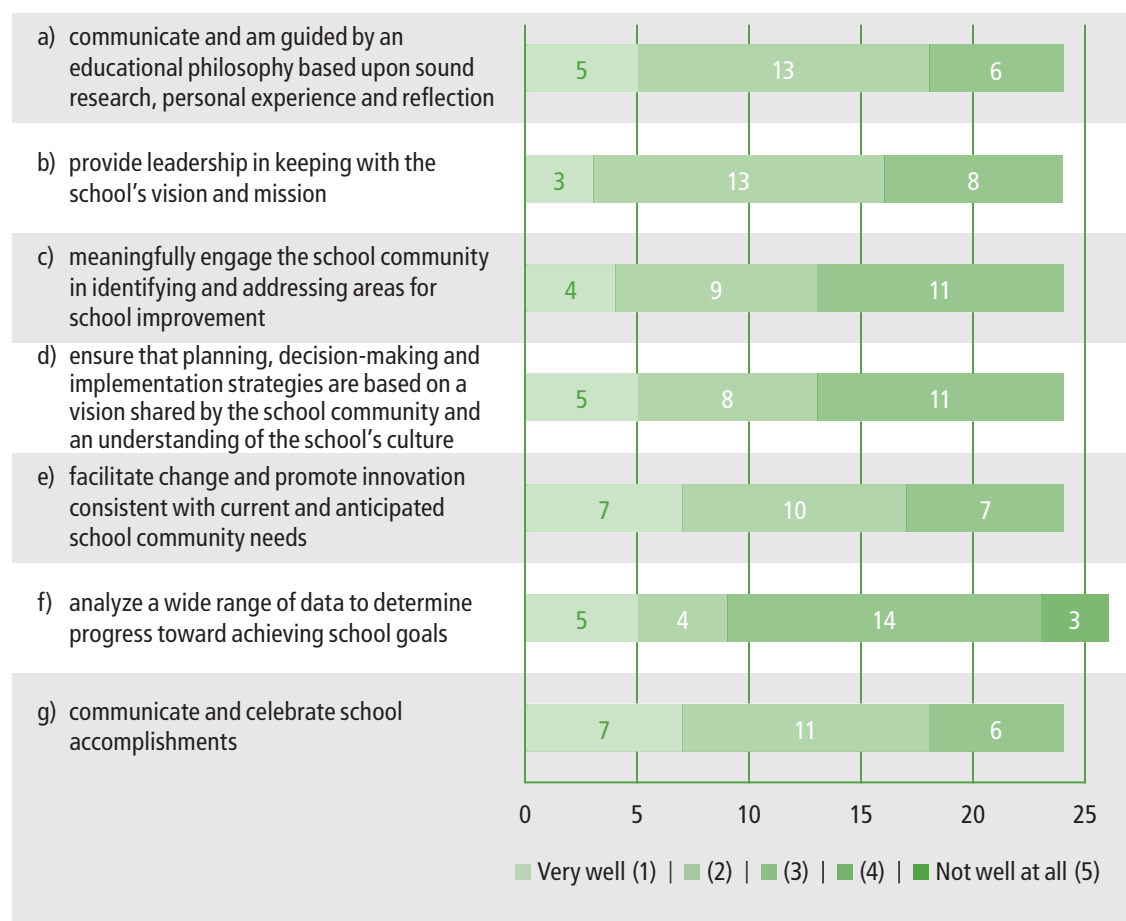
Post-Test Coaches**2. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

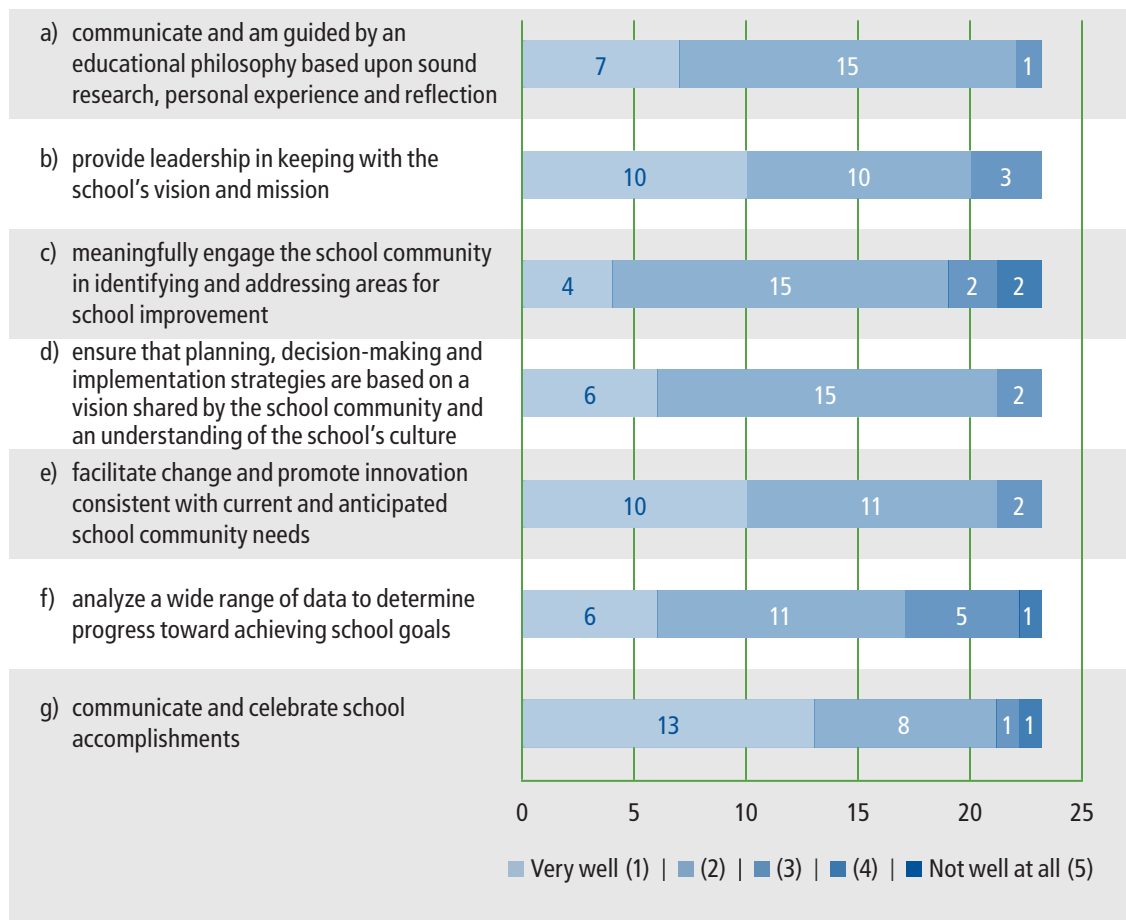
While some similarities already emerged in the pre-test, the differences between beginning and experienced principals' self-reported competency in embodying visionary leadership diminished from the pre-test to the post-test, especially in relation to indicator (b). For this indicator, which reflects the ability to "provide leadership in keeping with the school's vision and mission," the coaches' mean score remained consistent (from 4.57 to 4.53) and the beginning principals' mean score moderately increased (from 3.79 to 4.30).

Figure 4. Beginning Principals on Professional Practice Competency 2: Embodying Visionary Leadership.

Pre-Test Beginning Principals

2. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Post-Test Beginning Principals**2. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

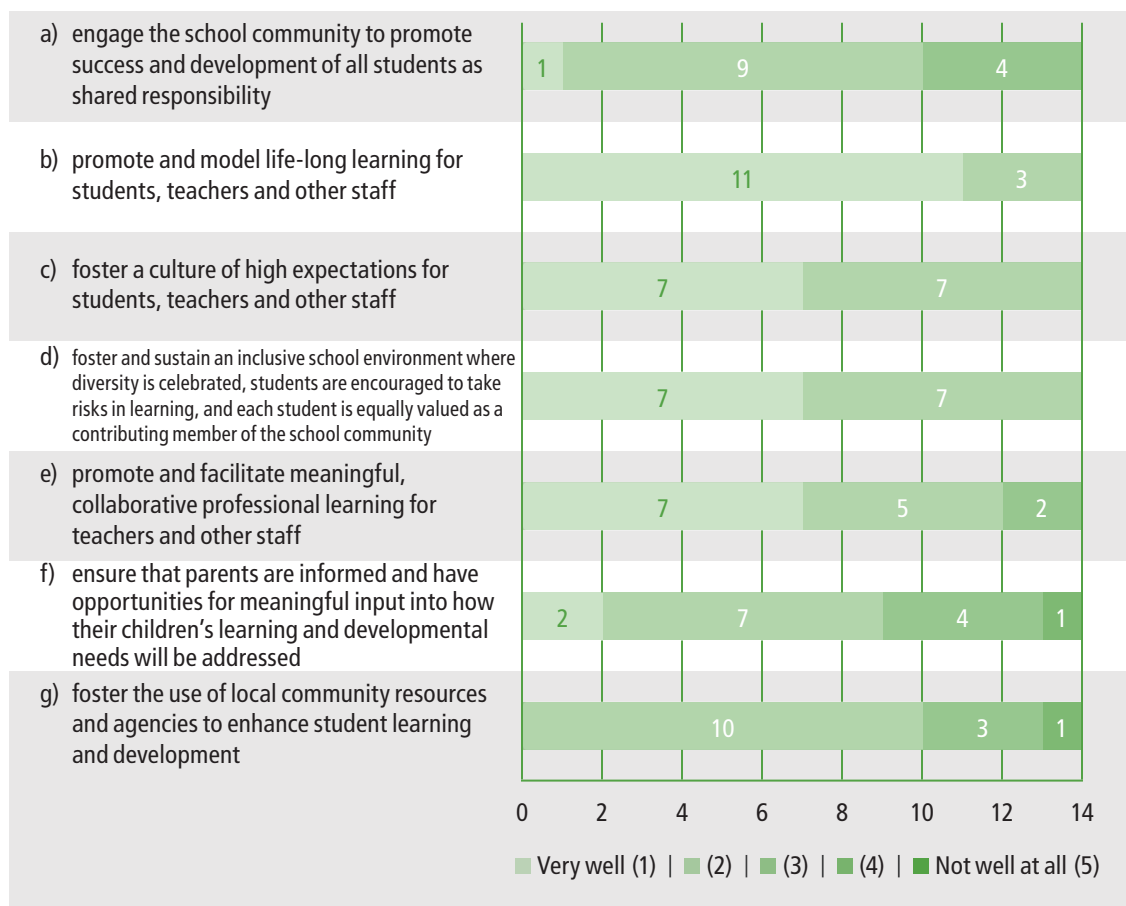
The data suggest that the beginning principals improved in all behavioural indicators for embodying visionary leadership. For instance, for indicator (d), the number of beginning principals who felt able to effectively “ensure that planning, decision-making and implementation strategies are based on a vision shared by the school community and an understanding of the school’s culture” increased from 13 to 21. Indicator (f), the ability to “analyze a wide range of data to determine progress toward achieving school goals,” also saw a notable increase, both for the protégés and the coaches.

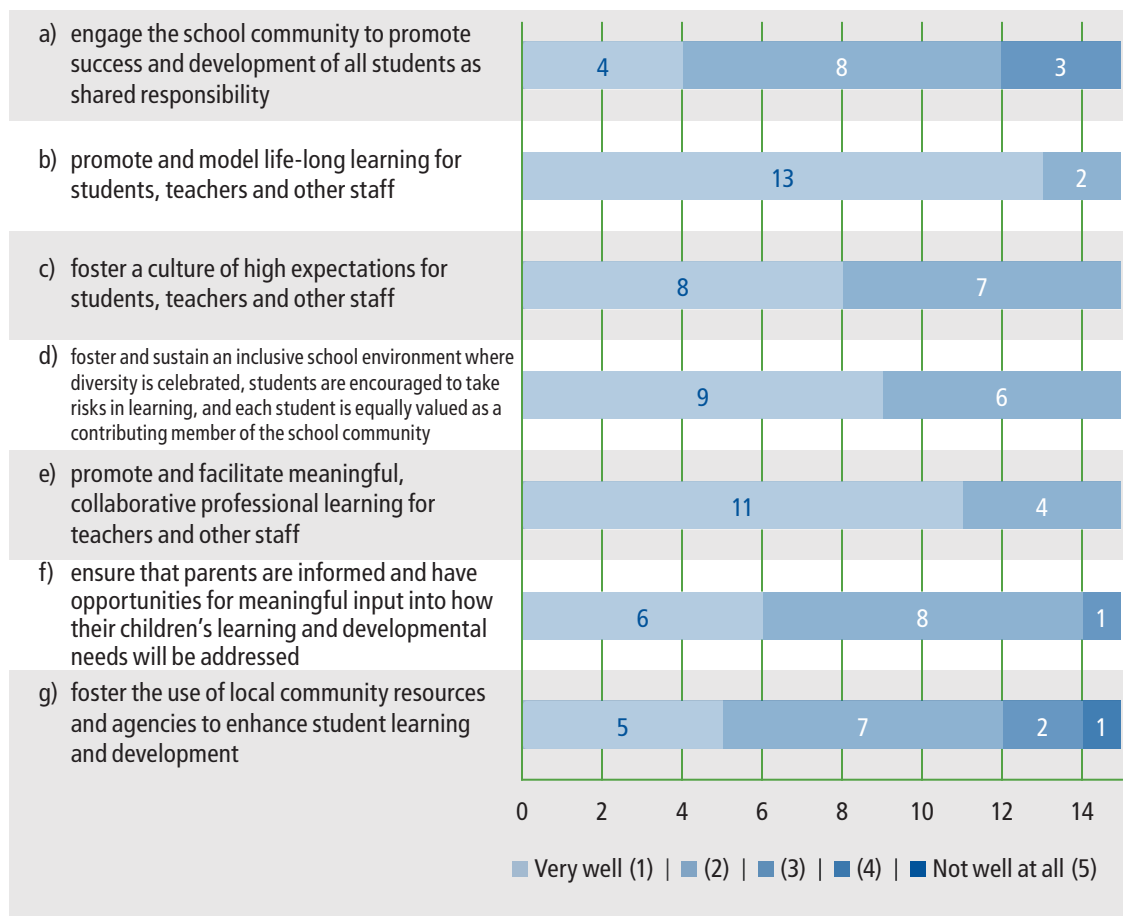
While improvement was evident, the results for indicators (c), (d) and (f) remained lower than desired following the program, which demonstrates the need to continue to develop capacity in relation to working with the school community. Behavioural indicators (c) and (d), in particular, relate to a principal’s ability to understand the school community, its needs and its vision and to connect those to the school’s culture. Supporting principals’ development in this area is key in addressing the increasing complexity and diversity of Alberta’s communities and classrooms.

Professional Practice Competency 3: Leading a Learning Community

The third competency—leading a learning community—relates to the school culture, environment and community that the principal fosters. Behavioural indicators for this competency intersect with some from the first two competencies in terms of a principal’s ability to understand and communicate with the school community.

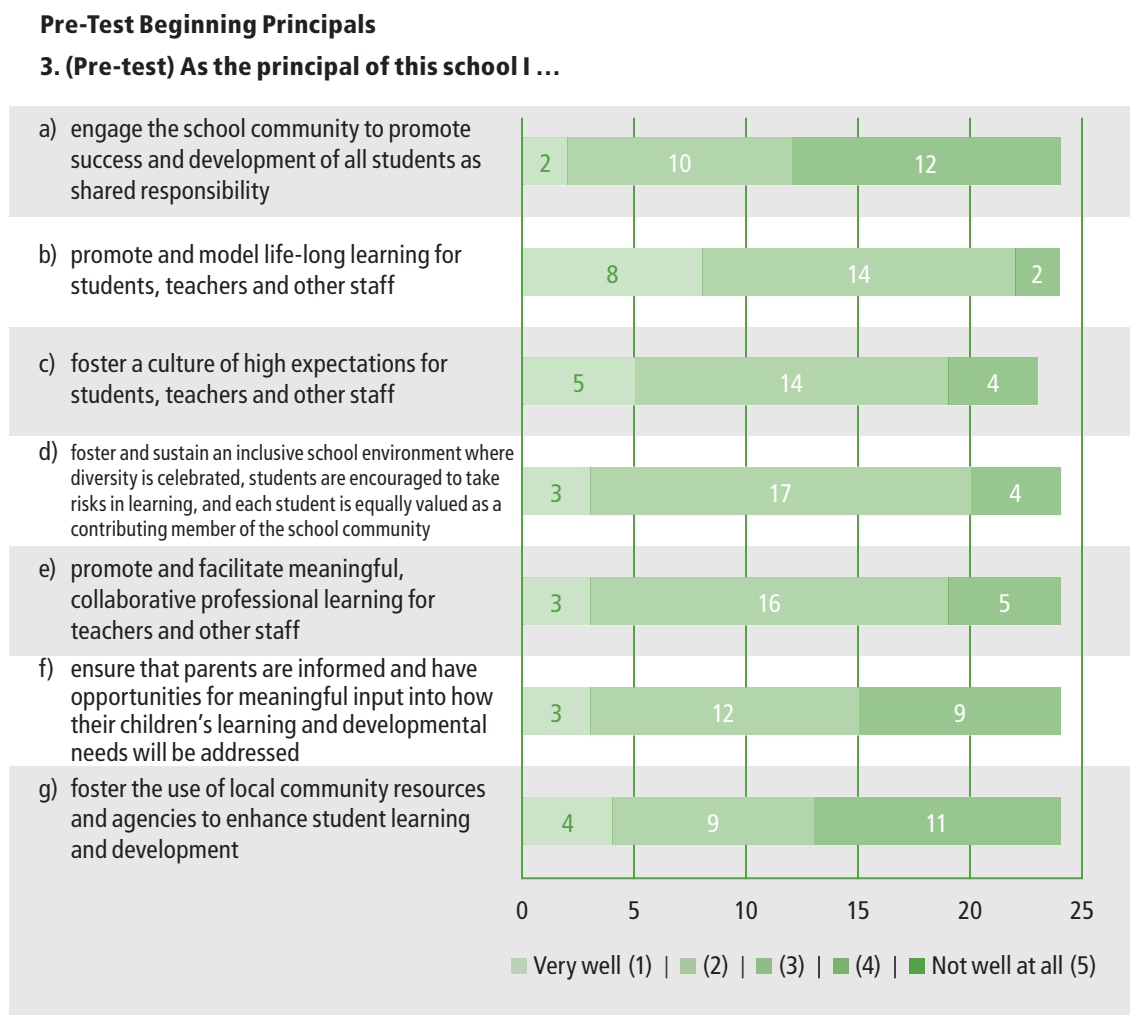
Baseline data suggest that the coaches were more confident in leading a learning community, with significant differences between the scores of the coaches and those of the beginning principals for indicators (b), (c), (d) and (e) (see Figures 5 and 6). However, in the post-test, a significant difference remained only for indicator (e), the ability to encourage collaborative professional learning for staff. For this behavioural indicator, the coaches showed notable improvement, with 11 of the 15 respondents reporting in the post-test that they performed this behaviour “very well.”

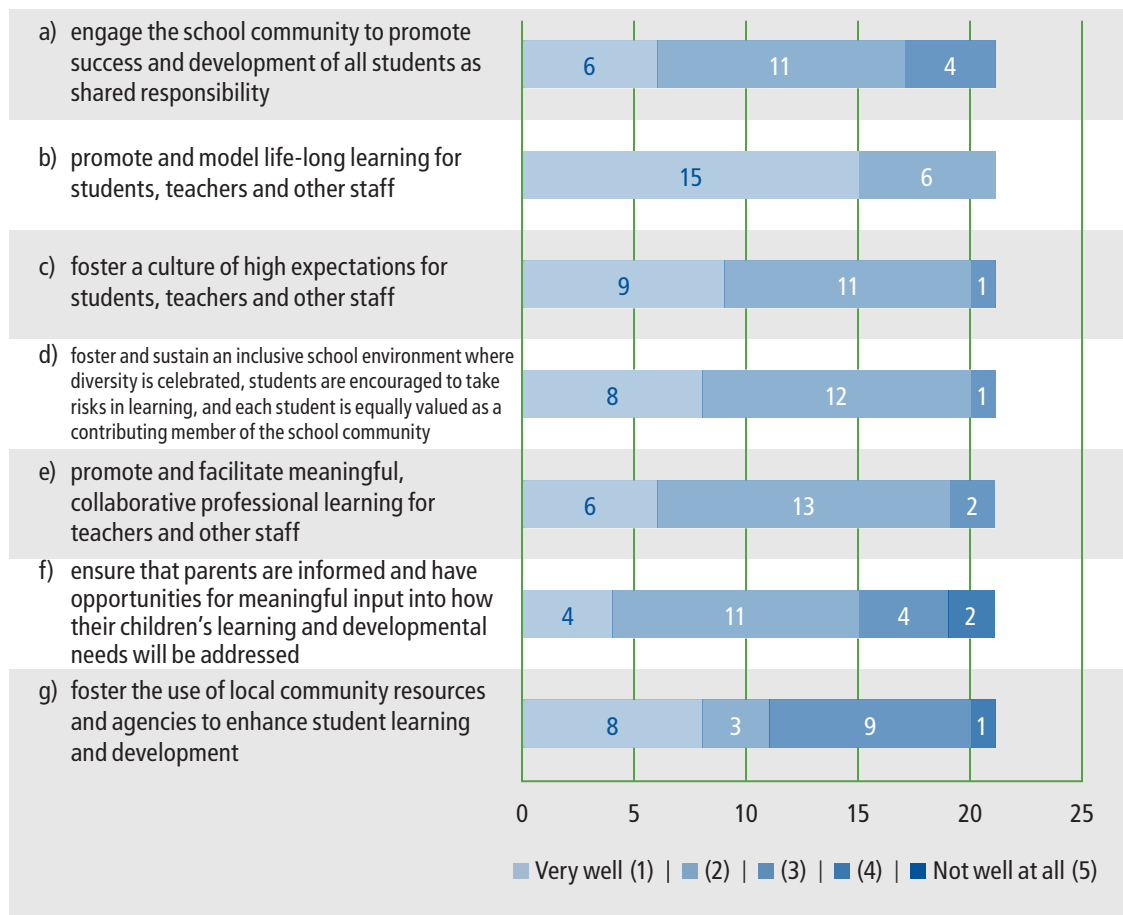
Figure 5. Coaches on Professional Practice Competency 3: Leading a Learning Community.**Pre-Test Coaches****3. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

Post-Test Coaches**3. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

The mean scores for indicators related to beginning principals' capacity to connect with school, local and parent communities—indicators (a), (f) and (g)—were relatively low in the pre-test. These indicators call upon the principal to “engage the school community,” “ensure that parents are informed and have opportunities for meaningful input” and “foster the use of local community resources and agencies.” While the post-test signalled that the beginning principals improved in these areas, the improvements for indicators (f) and (g) were more marked for the coaches. For instance, the mean score for coaches for indicator (f) (parental involvement) increased from 3.71 to 4.33, whereas the mean score for beginning principals increased only from 3.75 to 3.81.

Figure 6. Beginning Principals on Professional Practice Competency 3: Leading a Learning Community.



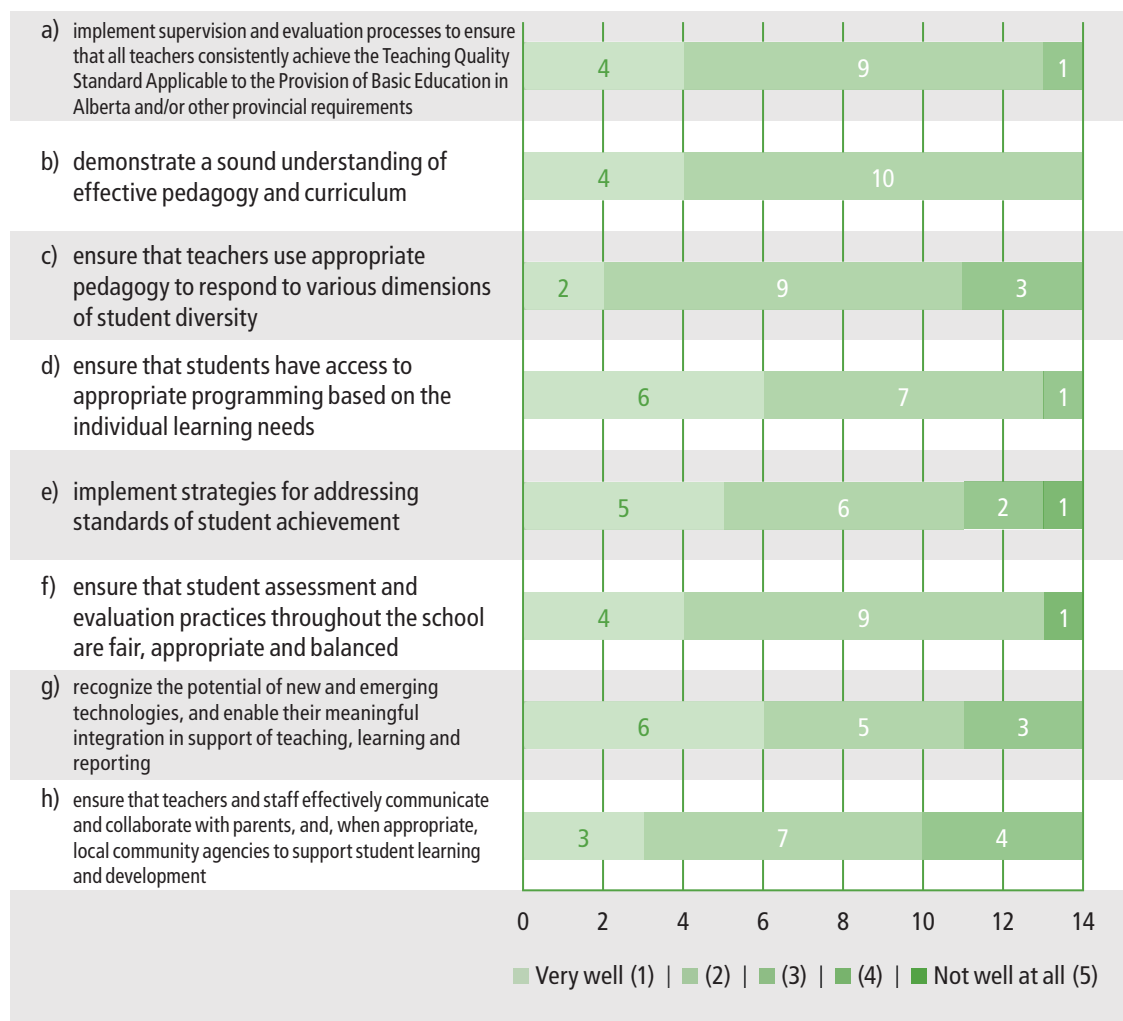
Post-Test Beginning Principals³**3. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

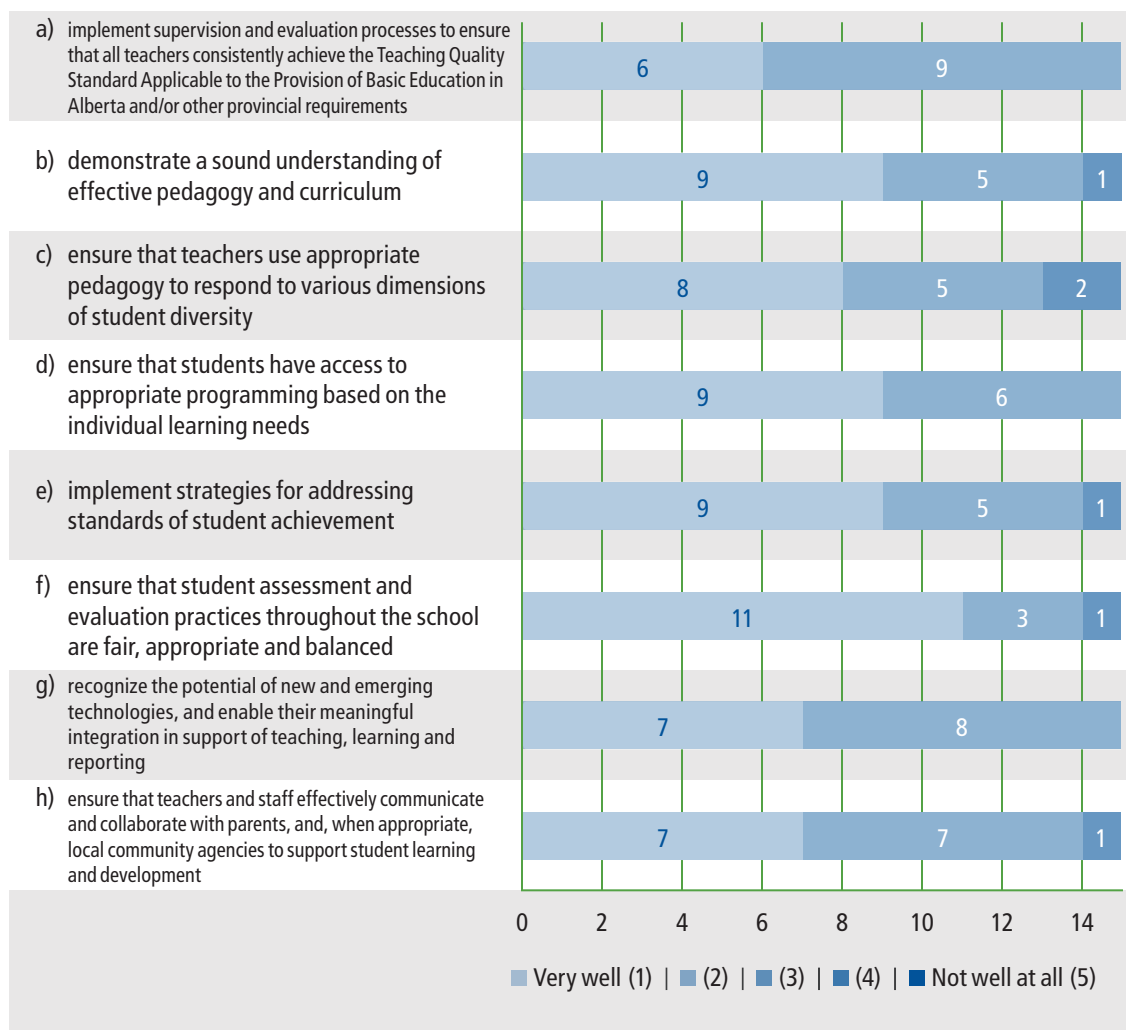
Overall, both coaches and beginning principals indicated improvement in all of the behavioural indicators for leading a learning community. However, the results here, coupled with the results for the second competency, strongly suggest the need for continued professional development in fostering productive relationships to support student learning.

Professional Practice Competency 4: Providing Instructional Leadership

Behavioural indicators for the fourth competency, providing instructional leadership, speak to principals' ability to support their teachers in multiple ways to facilitate and assess student learning and development.

The L2L program's benefits to the coaches manifested strongly here, as the experienced principals signalled improvement in all of the competency's behavioural indicators in the post-test. Baseline data show that, not surprisingly, the coaches were more confident than the beginning principals in their overall ability to provide instructional leadership (see Figures 7 and 8). In particular, coaches rated markedly higher for indicators (a), (c), (d), (e) and (f). While the coaches' mean scores continued to be higher than those of the beginning principals in the post-test, the increase in the latter group's scores is notable.

Figure 7. Coaches on Professional Practice Competency 4: Providing Instructional Leadership.**Pre-Test Coaches****4. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

Post-Test Coaches**4. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

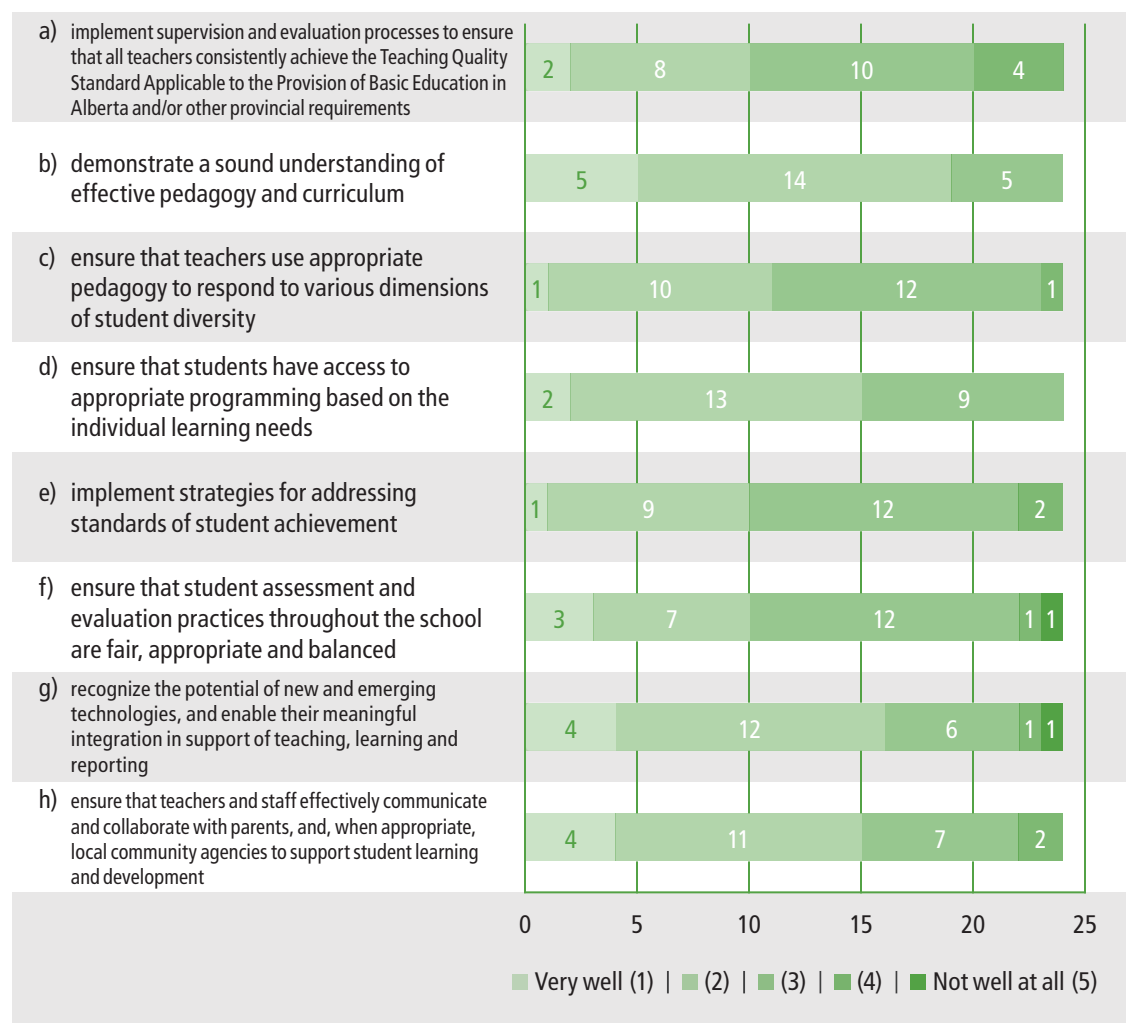
Beginning principals' responses showed the largest shift in indicator (a), the ability to "implement supervision and evaluation processes to ensure that all teachers consistently achieve the Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta and/or other provincial requirements," with the mean score increasing from 3.33 to 4.05.

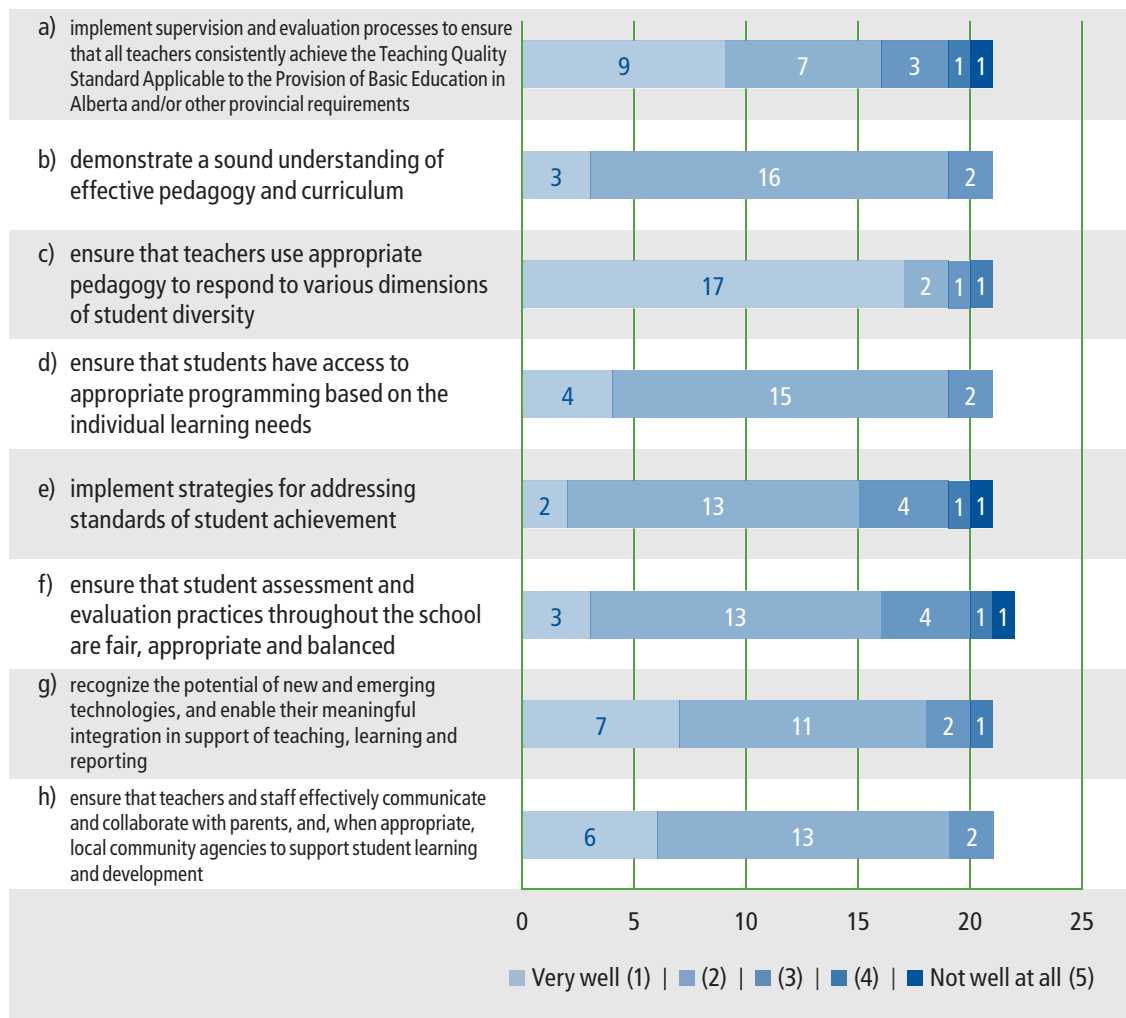
Despite increases in each area of this competency, indicators (c), (e) and (f) remained relatively low for the protégés following the program. The first of these indicators addresses student diversity and the other two relate to student assessment, evaluation and achievement. Given these results, professional development that attends to effectively supporting and evaluating Alberta's diverse student population would be appropriate for beginning principals.

Figure 8. Beginning Principals on Professional Practice Competency 4: Providing Instructional Leadership.

Pre-Test Beginning Principals

4. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Post-Test Beginning Principals**4. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

Generally, the scores for the coaches and the beginning principals for providing instructional leadership were lower than those for the other competencies. While this suggests that principals need to be better equipped to be instructional leaders, it also underscores the importance of fostering professional learning communities focused on student learning.

Professional Practice Competency 5: Developing and Facilitating Leadership

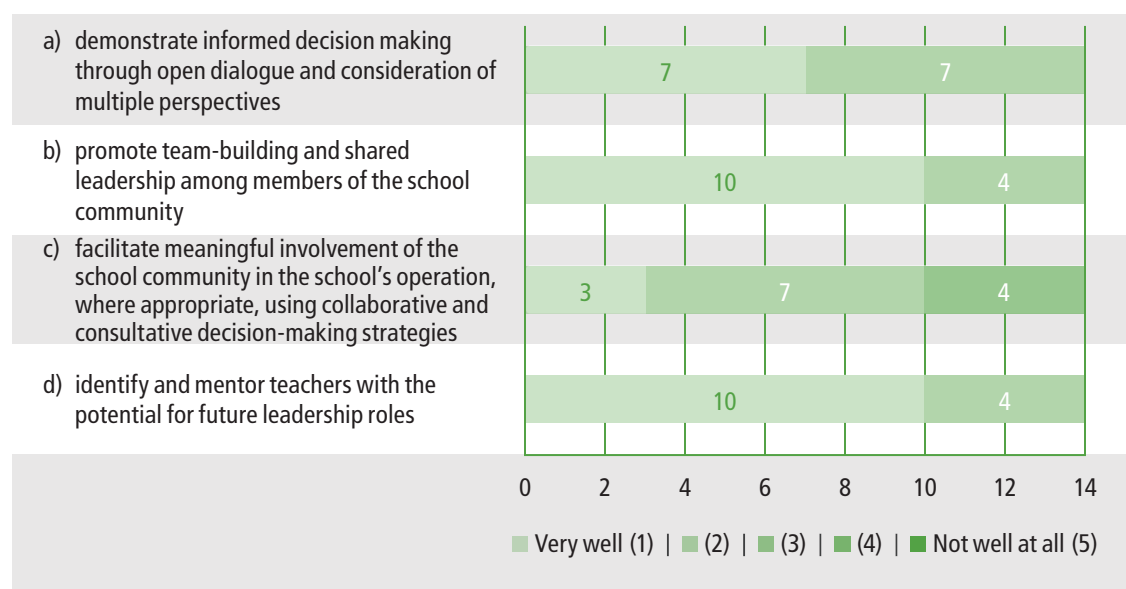
The fifth competency reflects a principal's ability to work with teachers and other members of the school community to develop and facilitate their leadership capacity. Along with providing mentorship to teachers, promoting shared leadership, collaboration and team building are key to this competency.

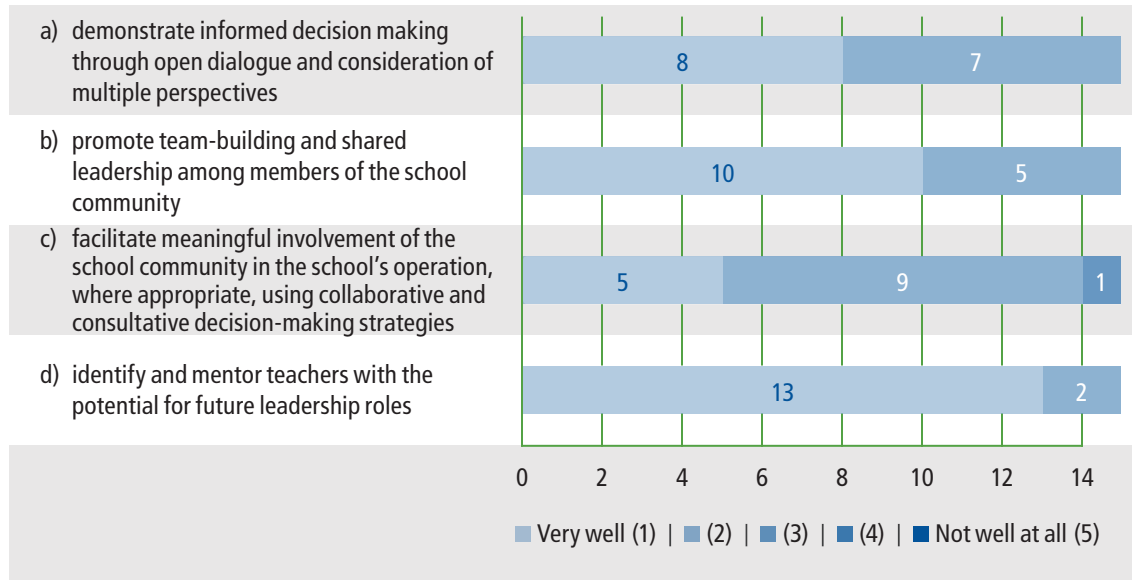
In the baseline survey, coaches' and beginning principals' responses differed for indicators (b) and (d), both of which relate to fostering the leadership capacity of teachers and other members of the school community (see Figures 9 and 10). While the coaches signalled that they were competent in these indicators, as well as in indicator (a), they demonstrated some uncertainty regarding indicator (c), their ability to "facilitate meaningful involvement of the school community in the school's operation." For this indicator, however, the coaches showed improvement, with only one respondent remaining "unsure" in the post-test and the mean score increasing from 3.93 to 4.27. The coaches' pre- and post-test mean scores for indicator (c) were markedly similar to those of the beginning principals (3.88 and 4.33, respectively).

Figure 9. Coaches on Professional Practice Competency 5: Developing and Facilitating Leadership.

Pre-Test Coaches

5. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



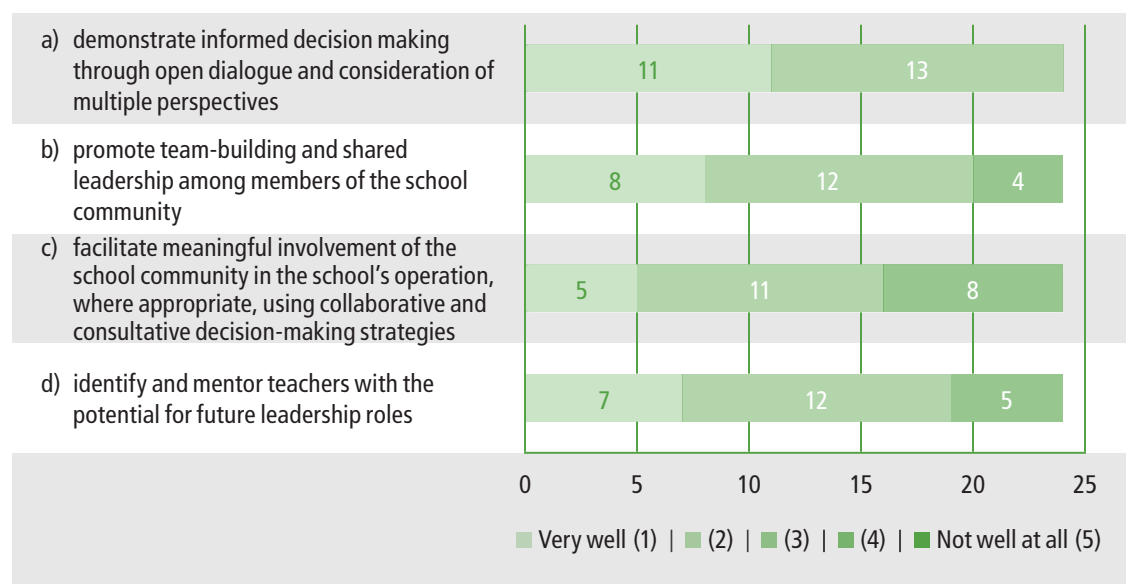
Post-Test Coaches**5. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

The beginning principals showed improvement in each indicator for this competency, with their post-test mean scores nearing or surpassing those of the coaches for the first three indicators. After the program, the only remaining difference between the responses was in relation to indicator (d), the ability to “identify and mentor teachers with the potential for future leadership roles.” Even for this indicator, though, the beginning principals suggested that their capacity for developing and facilitating leadership had improved.

Figure 10. *Beginning Principals on Professional Practice Competency 5: Developing and Facilitating Leadership.*

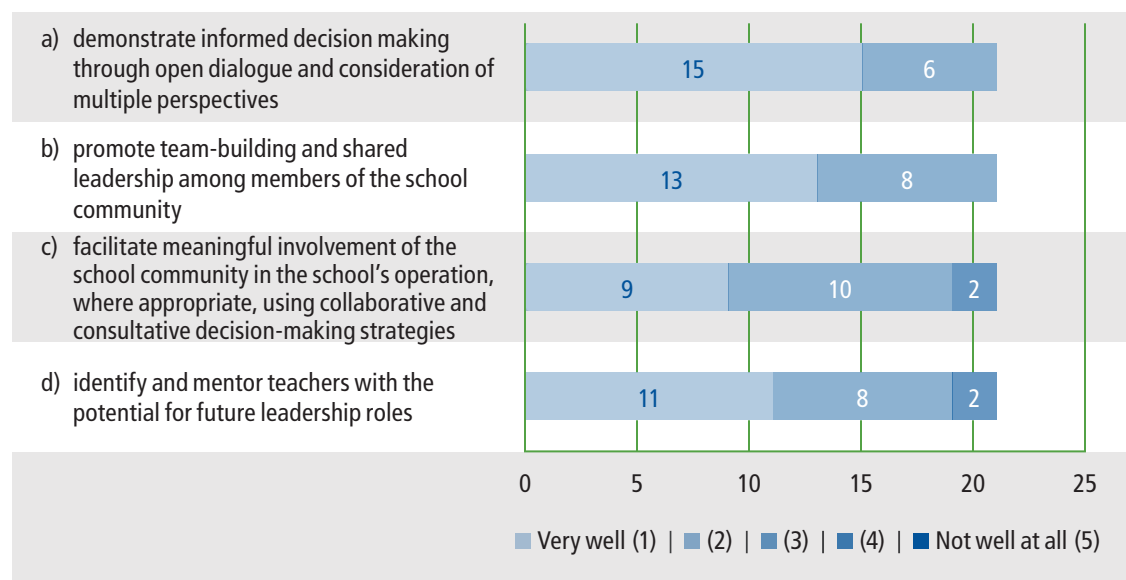
Pre-Test Beginning Principals

5. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Post-Test Beginning Principals

5. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Professional Practice Competency 6: Managing School Operations and Resources

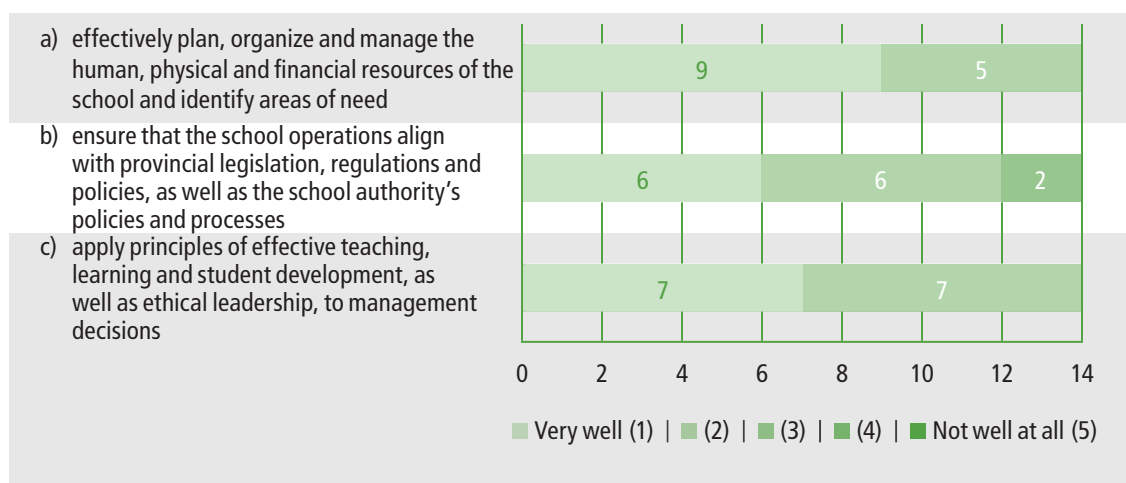
The sixth competency addresses the school leader's managerial skills. Overall, the coaches and beginning principals indicated that they were capable of managing school operations and resources, and that the L2L program supported their growth in this area (see Figures 11 and 12).

The distribution of responses for both the coaches and their protégés shifted following the program, with many more participants indicating that they met the behavioural indicator "very well." Both the baseline and the post-test results suggest that the coaches were stronger in each of the behavioural indicators here; however, the strong mean scores for both groups are encouraging.

Figure 11. Coaches on Professional Practice Competency 6: Managing School Operations and Resources.

Pre-Test Coaches

6. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Post-Test Coaches

6. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...

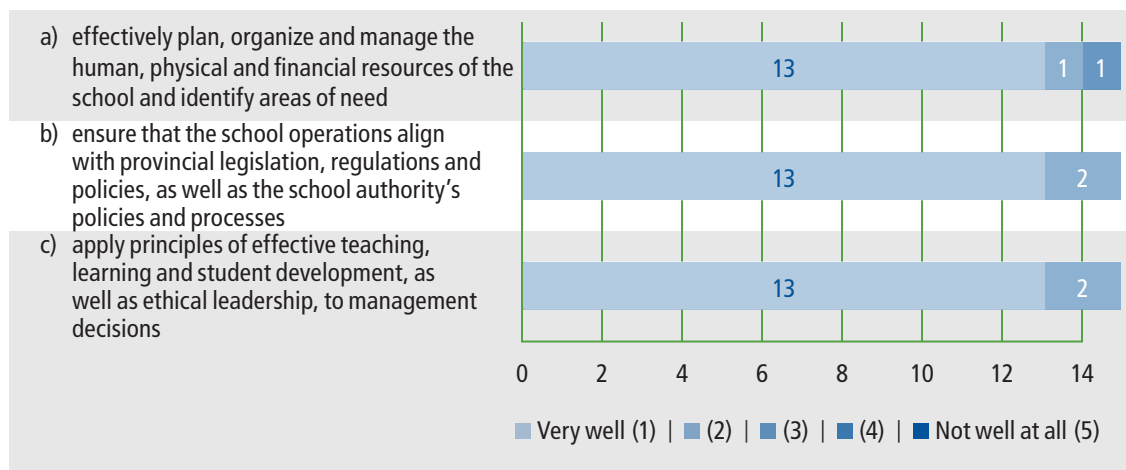
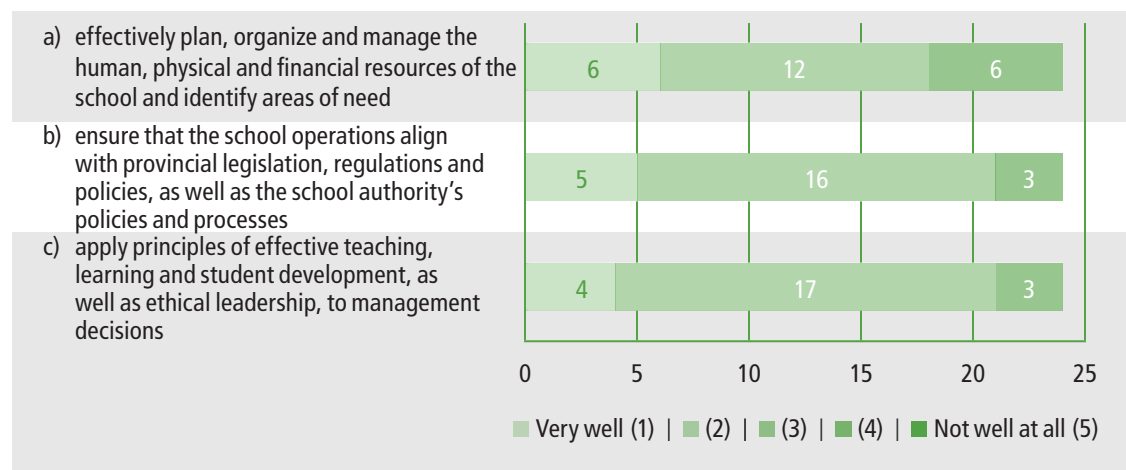


Figure 12. *Beginning Principals on Professional Practice Competency 6: Managing School Operations and Resources.*

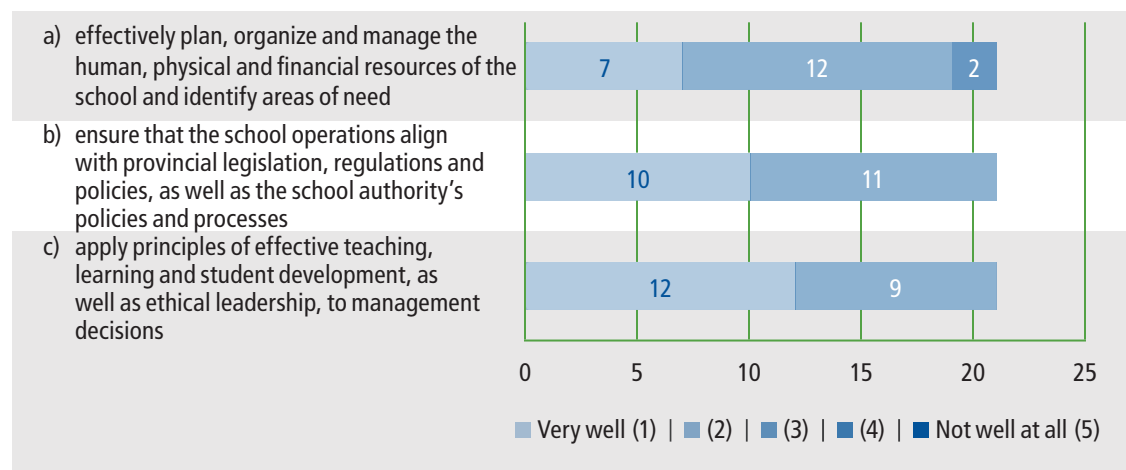
Pre-Test Beginning Principals

6. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Post-Test Beginning Principals

6. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...

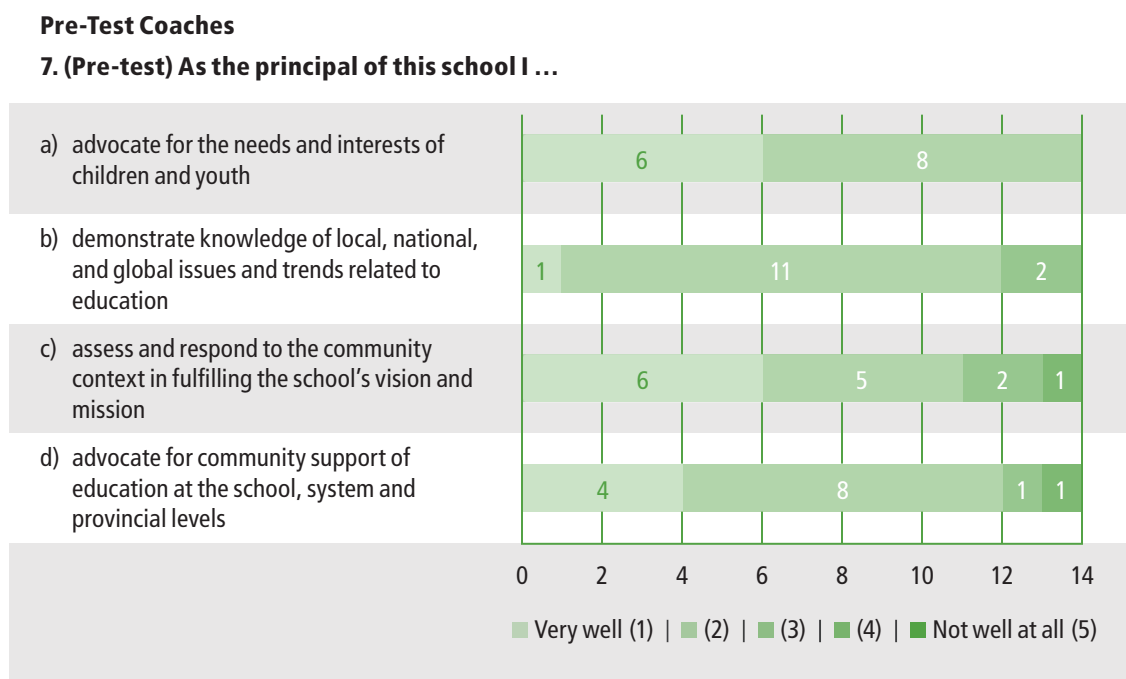


Professional Practice Competency 7: Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context

The final competency, understanding and responding to the larger societal context, expands the purview of the principal's work: the principal is to look beyond the school community not only to understand broader societal and educational trends but also to advocate for education and for children and youth in that context.

The beginning principals' baseline responses were similar to those of the coaches for the first three indicators for this competency (see Figures 13 and 14). The two groups differed primarily in their responses to the final indicator, "advocate for community support of education at the school, system and provincial levels." Even following the L2L program, coaches and beginning principals both expressed lower levels of confidence in relation to this indicator—which most explicitly extends the principal's work into the political realm. In fact, of the four, it was the only indicator for which the coaches' scores remained nearly identical pre- and post-test (with mean scores of 4.00 and 4.07, respectively).

Figure 13. Coaches on Professional Practice Competency 7: Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context.



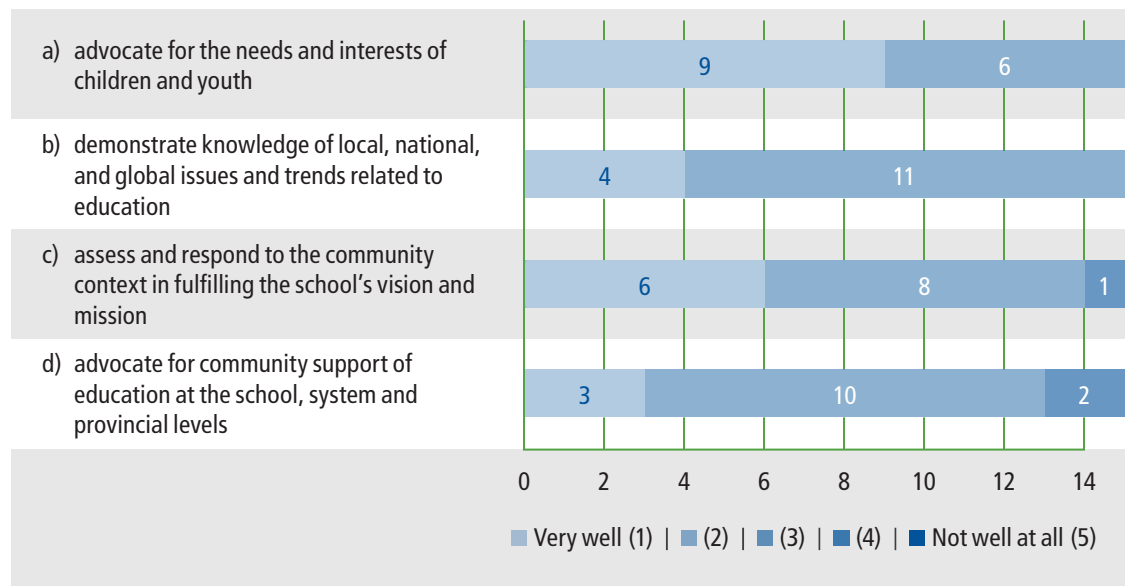
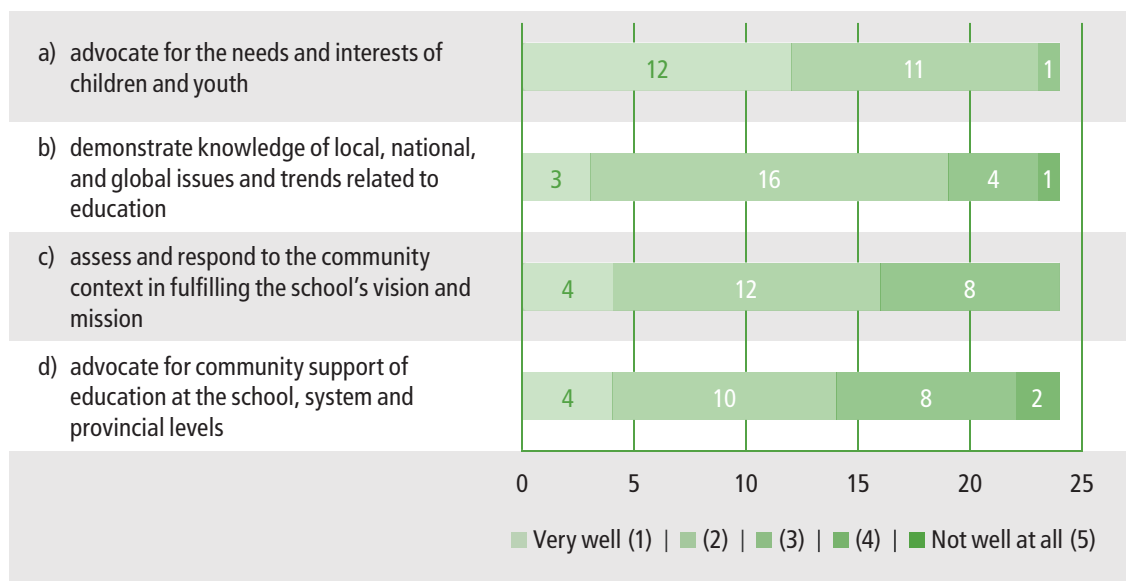
Post-Test Coaches**7. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...**

Figure 14. Beginning Principals on Professional Practice Competency 7: Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context.

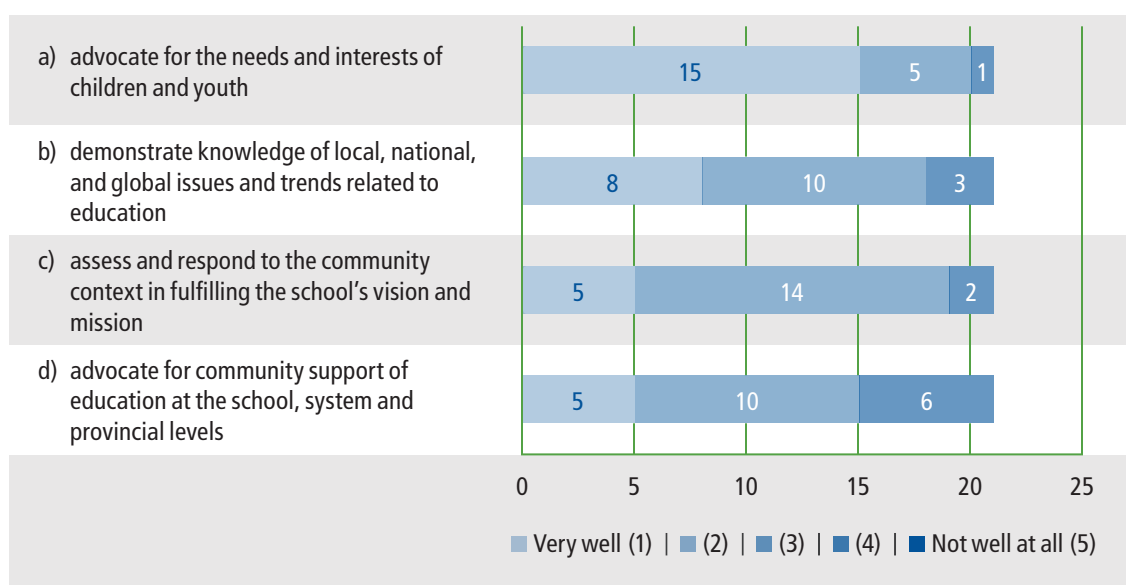
Pre-Test Beginning Principals

7. (Pre-test) As the principal of this school I ...



Post-Test Beginning Principals

7. (Post-test) As the principal of this school I ...



The participants, overall, reported a small increase in their competence in understanding and responding to the larger societal context. Continued encouragement and support for principals in this area could bolster Alberta's education system by positioning school leaders as leaders for educational reform.

Measuring Sense of School Climate

To determine the participants' perceptions of their school climate, as well as changes in the school climate during the program, the study used the School Climate Index (SCI) for principals (DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran 2005). A baseline test was administered in January 2012, and a post-test was administered in April 2014.

The 2012 baseline results suggest that, in comparison with the beginning principals, the coaches had a more positive perception of the overall school climate. Following participation in the L2L program, the respondents reported higher scores for each area of school climate: collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press (academic emphasis) and community engagement. While beginning principals continued to rate school climate lower than their coaches did, the gap between how the two groups perceived teacher professionalism in their schools diminished.

The results suggest that the L2L program helped improve the school climate—or, at least, the perception of the school climate—for both beginning and experienced principals.

Measuring Self-Efficacy

The study employed the Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale (PSES) (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis 2004) to assess participants' sense of self-efficacy, both at the outset and at the conclusion of the pilot program.

In the baseline survey, administered in January 2012, coaches unsurprisingly reported higher levels of self-efficacy than the beginning principals did, in all three areas rated: instructional leadership, management and moral leadership. Yet, while the coaches' scores in instructional leadership and management were significantly higher than the beginning principals' scores in those areas, reports of self-efficacy for moral leadership differed little between the two groups. Further, results from the PSES survey conducted toward the end of the pilot indicate that the gap between coaches and protégés in relation to instructional leadership and management had diminished. For the pre-test, there was a statistical difference between the scores of the coaches and protégés; at the end of the project, the difference was not significant.

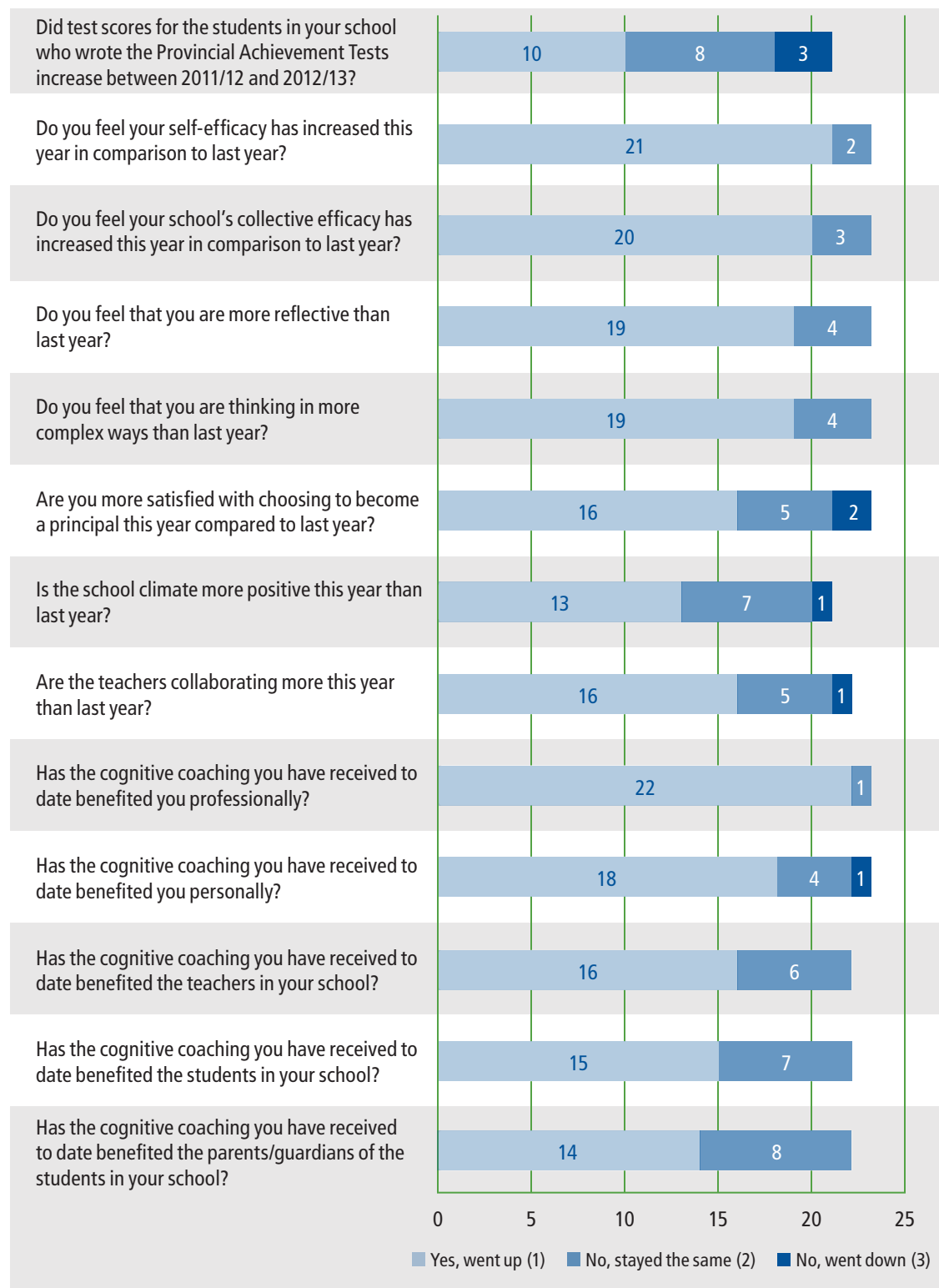
Overall, the participants' responses signalled an increased sense of efficacy, suggesting that the L2L program can encourage school leaders' positive perceptions of their own capabilities.

Measuring Overall Changes

Toward the end of the pilot, participants were invited to reflect on how the L2L program had influenced various dimensions of their work. The beginning principals responded to questions regarding changes in themselves and in their schools, while all participants responded to questions regarding their level of knowledge and trust within school community relationships. The results for questions directed only to the beginning principals are of interest in relation to this report because they focus on change and the effectiveness of the L2L program.

To gauge the beginning principals' perceptions of the program, researchers posed a number of questions that primarily related to the school community and climate, as well as self-efficacy. Although respondents did not uniformly indicate positive change for each question, the results (reported in Figures 15, 16 and 17) suggest that the L2L program had an overall positive effect on the principals and, by extension, their schools.

The distribution of responses in Figure 15 shows that, with very few exceptions, the beginning principals felt that their self-efficacy, as well as their school's collective efficacy, had improved. Responses also indicate the multilayered success of the program, with many beginning principals agreeing that the Cognitive Coaching process benefited them professionally and personally, as well as benefiting their schools' teachers, students and parents/guardians. The specific ways in which the benefits manifested were not explored in the context of the survey, but they might be worth investigating in future projects.

Figure 15. *Beginning principals on changes following the L2L program.*

As shown in Figures 16 and 17, the beginning principals generally perceived themselves to be well prepared for and confident in carrying out their responsibilities as school leaders following the Cognitive Coaching program. The respondents appeared particularly confident in administering student discipline and interacting with the community at large. In relation to attending to personnel issues, one principal continued to feel unprepared and less confident. However, the overall results demonstrate thoughtful self-reflection and improved levels of efficacy.

Figure 16. Beginning principals on changes in their preparation for principals' activities.

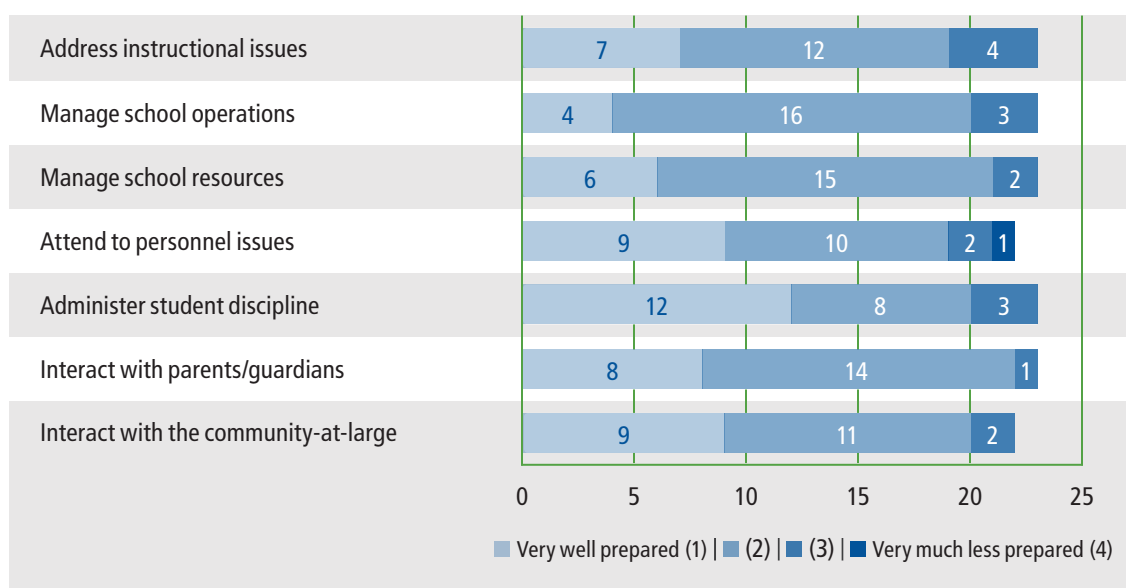
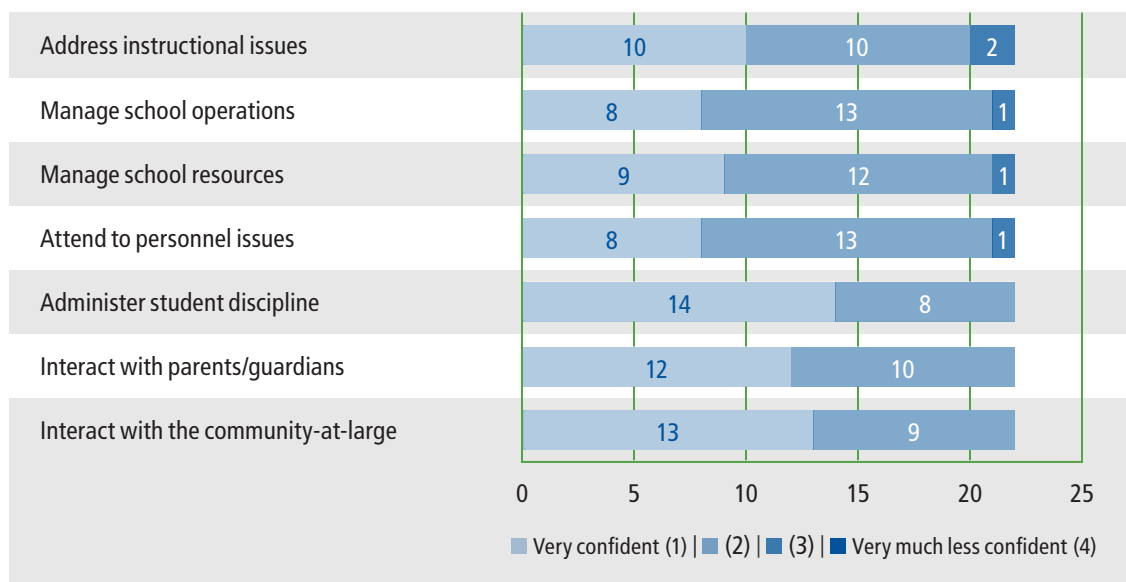


Figure 17. Beginning principals on changes in their confidence to carry out principals' activities.



EVALUATING THE PILOT PROGRAM

The results from the pre- and post-tests for the competencies suggest that the L2L program strengthened both coaches' and beginning principals' competence in each of the seven areas. Overall, a marked shift toward greater competence in the beginning principals is apparent, with the gap between the responses of the coaches and the beginning principals diminishing in the post-test. Though the program appears to have enabled improvement in school leaders' professional competence, the results signal the need for continued professional development. Specifically, the results suggest that the participants were most capable in fostering effective relationships and least capable in providing instructional leadership. Therefore, instructional leadership might be a topic for future workshops.

Like the competency measures, results from the other surveys conducted signal the positive potential of the L2L program. Cognitive Coaching created benefits for the beginning principals and their school communities. Further, the results indicate that the program positively influenced school climate and enabled participants—both beginning and experienced principals—to enhance their school leadership skills and self-efficacy.

Comments from the participants support the data discussed above. Speaking to the L2L program's potential, all of the coaches and beginning principals indicated that they would recommend the program to incoming principals. One participant explicitly encouraged the program sponsors to “continue on with the program as it will strengthen teachers [and] principals in Alberta.” Other participants' comments also underline the benefits of the program. Representative comments made by participants at the end of the pilot appear in Table 1.

Table 1. Representative participant comments on the L2L program in response to the question, *What is the most important point that you would like to share with the project sponsors about the L2L experience?*

Addressing complexities of the principalship	• Mentorship helped us have the tools for the complex and difficult work of focusing on student learners, and not on institutional barriers. • L2L gave us an empowered ability to meet the exhausting demands of [being] a principal.
Attracting and retaining new school leaders	• More teachers will enter into administrative positions because they know they can get support and mentorship. • There is great value in the Leader2Leader project. I have improved in many areas and, as a result of the coaching, have the ability to remain in this challenging position.
Developing professional networks	• The L2L program was valuable for providing connections to administrators across our province, especially for those of us in small, rural schools where you can feel so isolated. • Providing time to meet and dialogue with other educators in leadership positions is essential to personal and professional growth.
Enhancing professional growth	• Administrative capacity, learning and practice are strengthened for both mentor and mentee. • L2L was among the very best professional growth opportunities for administration. • L2L provided ongoing professional development that was intentional and just in time.
Improving school leaders' self-efficacy	• The most important outcome for me is increased confidence in my leadership ability. • [The] L2L program creates great school leaders in a two-year span.
Promoting educational improvement	• [The program] recognize[s] and value[s] the role of principals in advancing the provincial agenda and quality of education. • The process of supporting/mentoring leaders is consistent with all current innovations (inclusive education, Inspiring Education, etc). • Time spent in this program is an investment in students by strengthening education leadership.

The findings clearly suggest that the pilot program enhanced the participants' leadership capacity. While other factors could have contributed to participants' improved competence and efficacy, the feedback from the principals demonstrates the prominent role the program played in enhancing their abilities and confidence as school leaders.

The beginning and experienced principals—protégés and coaches—stressed the many benefits of the L2L program and clearly advocated for its continuation.

The Future of L2L: Supporting Alberta's School Leaders

The success of the pilot program signals the wider potential of the L2L program to build school leadership capacity.

After reviewing the data collected, the stakeholder advisory committee requested funding for another two-year project. The committee also proposed that the L2L program become a permanent part of principal induction and suggested revisions to the program that would enable more school leaders to participate in the quality professional learning experience. Revisions made to the proposed program also took into account participants' feedback. Key recommendations, endorsed by at least 90 per cent of participants, focus on clarifying the Cognitive Coaching process itself and on increasing the number of in-person meetings between the coach and the protégé:

- Clarify the nature of consulting and Cognitive Coaching, and allow consulting when it is most appropriate.
- Provide protégés with a primer on the Cognitive Coaching process prior to the beginning of the coaching process so that they are better informed.
- Provide financial support for coaches and protégés to travel to hold face-to-face meetings and school visits.
- Encourage visits between schools, perhaps during introductory consecutive meetings, so that the coach and protégé are aware of and have greater understanding of the context in which each works.
- Increase the number of face-to-face meetings.
- Increase the number of fully qualified, accredited coaches in the northern part of the province.

For a complete list of participants' suggestions, see the program report (ATA 2014b, 95–98).

In addition to these suggestions for improving the program, the following recommendations—directed at several stakeholders—address effectively scaling the program. Further, they stress the importance of supporting beginning principals in creating a provincewide network of strong school leaders, thereby bolstering Alberta's education system.

Recommendation 1

That Alberta Education give consideration to working with education partners to develop guidelines to support beginning principal induction with particular attention to the workload of beginning principals placed in challenging school contexts.

Recommendation 2

That induction programs for beginning school leaders include cross-jurisdiction coaching utilizing the Cognitive Coaching model.

Recommendation 3

That induction programs for beginning principals include professional learning opportunities that are aligned with the Professional Practice Competencies for Alberta School Leaders, reflect the context of Alberta's education system, focus on the development of practical skills specific to Alberta school leadership, and support the development of personal strategies to promote collegial and collaborative relationships among all members of the school community.

Recommendation 4

That all education partners apply the best practices outlined in the Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning⁴ and the necessary conditions for implementation when designing quality professional learning programs for Alberta school leaders.

Recommendation 5

That Alberta Education support the provincial induction of beginning principals by funding the L2L Program Proposal submitted by the Alberta Teachers' Association (May 2014).

With Alberta's educational landscape changing (ATA 2015b), competent school leaders are needed to ensure that teachers and students have the means to be successful. At the same time, principals also need support to navigate change, from increasing diversity in the student population to shifts in curriculum. As the pilot participants indicated, the L2L program helps to

- address complexities of the principalship,
- attract and retain new school leaders,
- develop professional networks,
- enhance professional growth,
- improve school leaders' self-efficacy and
- promote educational improvement.

To address the complex, challenging nature of the principalship, the L2L program offers opportunities for professional learning that not only focus on developing specific skills and competencies but also create networks of support that can sustain that development. The effects of the program can extend beyond the participating principals and their schools. In continuing and expanding this program, stakeholders would be enabling principals to be more effective leaders in co-creating great schools for all and a more vibrant future for Alberta's education system.

Notes

1. Cognitive CoachingSM is a service-marked term, but for editorial purposes the service mark will be left off for the remainder of this document.

2. The competencies were measured on a five-point Likert scale, with a range from 1 = “not at all” to 5 = “very well.” The figures that follow show the number of responses in relation to the competencies and their indicators. The full program report (ATA 2014b) details the mean and standard deviation.

3. Two beginning principals did not provide responses for professional practice competencies 3 to 7 for the post-test.

4. See http://education.alberta.ca/media/6412416/guide_to_comprehensive_pd_planning_2004.pdf (accessed September 30, 2015).

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The Alberta
Teachers' Association