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library to learning commons



implementation guide

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Calgary Board
of Education

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Why are schools shifting from a school library to a school learning commons?

There is a new culture of learning. Today's learners cannot imagine life without the Internet and supporting technology. They are accustomed to the immediate and social nature of information and communication.

Education has become far more complex as learning extends into the broader global community, beyond the classroom, school, and textbooks. Learning can be intensely collaborative, directly and indirectly supported by rapidly evolving technologies.

Libraries are evolving to meet these new realities. The Learning Commons philosophy is about the transformation of the school library and is driven by this shift in learning. The Learning Commons model supports a learner-centered approach with a focus on active and collaborative engagement. The Learning Commons supports the intersection of teacher, student, content and technology.

The Learning Commons philosophy complements the Alberta Education "[Framework for Student Learning](#)" 2011 that "...describes a future in education that acknowledges the need for competencies to be more central in the education of Alberta's young people in the 21st century." The [School Library Services Initiative](#) acknowledges the evolving nature of a Learning Commons as "...a concept that helps schools innovate and collaborate within a design that adapts to student and teacher needs."

"What happens to learning when we move from the stable infrastructure of the twentieth century to the fluid infrastructure twenty-first century, where technology is constantly creating and responding to change?"

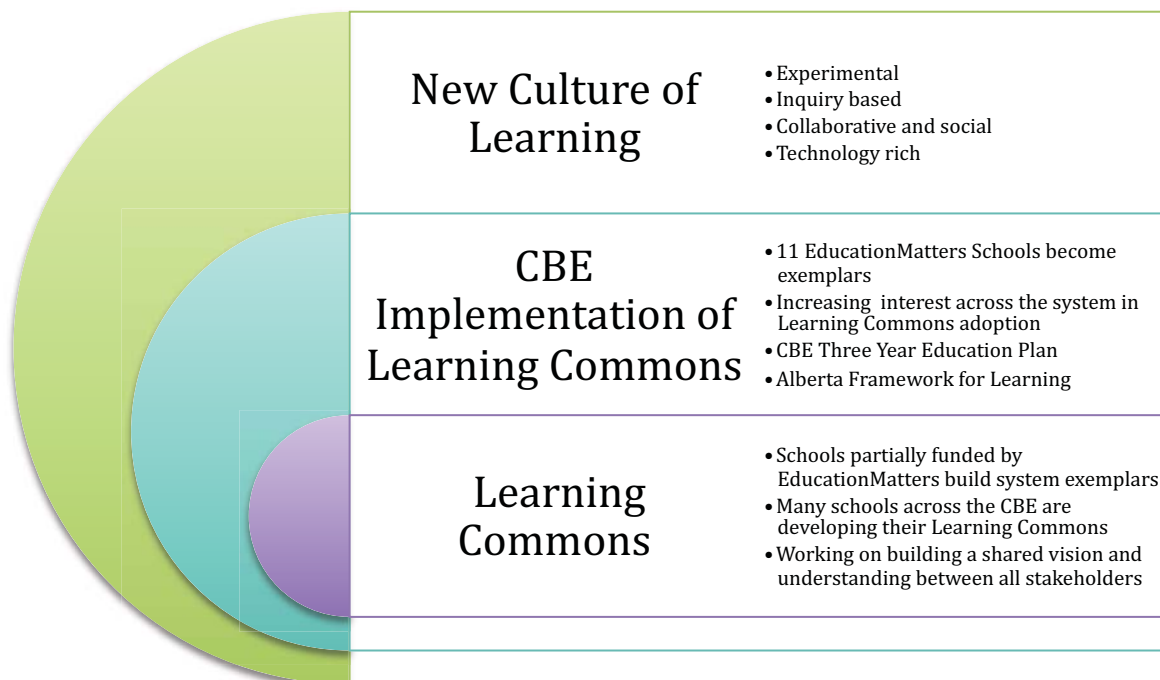
—John Seely Brown

Learning Commons within the CBE

As a result of current pedagogical understanding and in response to initiatives within Alberta Education, the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) has embraced the Learning Commons philosophy as a way to access high quality learning and teaching opportunities. Eleven schools within the CBE are developing and living the Learning Commons philosophy within their own buildings, supported by Learning Innovation and EducationMatters. This is in addition to a number of schools within the CBE who have already established the essential conditions and are setting the stage for their own Learning Commons. Schools across the CBE are invited to join in the dialogue and professional learning as opportunities arise. Their journey is being documented and shared with the intent of providing the

system with models and exemplars of the Learning Commons philosophy and implementation processes.

Fig. 1: Learning Commons and the New Culture of Learning



“A Learning Commons is.... more than a room. It calls for the creation of new environments that improve learning. It is about changing school culture and about transforming the way learning and teaching occurs. It is a transformation that calls for physical, virtual and pedagogical changes as well as a shift in mindset for all players.”

Retrieved from <http://jo-online.vsb.bc.ca/bondi/?p=8>
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Calgary Board of Education and EducationMatters Library to Learning Commons Project

In support of Learning Commons’ development throughout the CBE, EducationMatters, working with private donors, has provided funding for eleven schools to transform their libraries into learning commons. Recognizing that this is a means by which schools can support the personalization of learning, a number of additional schools beyond the original group have also agreed to participate and share their journeys and data with the system. The Learning Innovation team will co-construct a shared understanding of the learning commons philosophy with the participating schools with the goal of informing the ongoing work within all CBE schools.

Major focus areas for schools as identified by EducationMatters are as follows:

- Foster intellectual, academic and social engagement
- Increase access to all resources
- Improve student autonomy

Fig. 2: EducationMatters Learning Commons Funded Schools



“A Learning Commons is a vibrant, whole-school approach, presenting exciting opportunities for collaboration among teachers, teacher-librarians and students. Within a Learning Commons, new relationships are formed between learners, new technologies are realized and utilized, and both students and educators prepare for the future as they learn new ways to learn.”

*—Together For Learning-
Ontario School Library
Association*

What is a Learning Commons?

The learning commons philosophy is a means of increasing student engagement and improving student achievement. The learning commons promotes personalization, inquiry, and the integration of technology through the implementation of innovative curricular design and assessment. This space, which is a blend of physical and virtual environments, transforms teaching and learning by allowing both staff and students to co-create knowledge. Within the learning commons, technology supports the construction of new understandings by the learner rather than the learner passively consuming information.

The shifting needs of today’s global economy require increased commitment between education and the community. Together education and community stakeholders can work together to ensure that students have a deep understanding of curricula and a diverse, dynamic and current skill set.

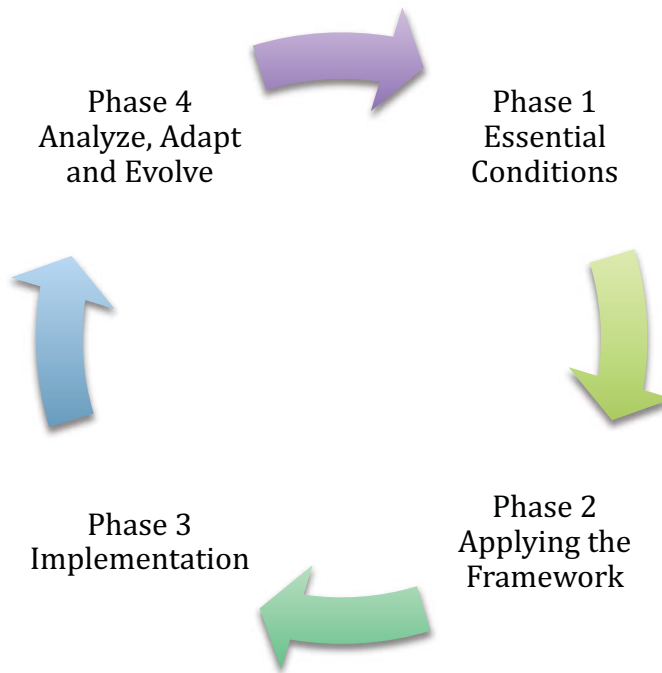
“Properly understood, librarians and academic computing staff cannot alone create a learning commons.”

—S. Bennett

Stages of Implementation

As a key component of the new culture of learning, the learning commons philosophy is contextual, iterative and evolving. There are four cyclical implementation stages.

Fig. 3 Library to Learning Commons Implementation Phases



As learners, teachers and members of the extended community “live” in the learning commons, they will be part of this cycle of continually improving learning opportunities as they journey through the four phases.

Phase 1: Essential Conditions

Building a shared vision with staff, students and the larger school community is one of the first and most important steps in transforming a library into a learning commons. The diagram below identifies key components of phase 1.

“A learning space that can be reconfigured on a dime will engage different kinds of learners and teachers.”

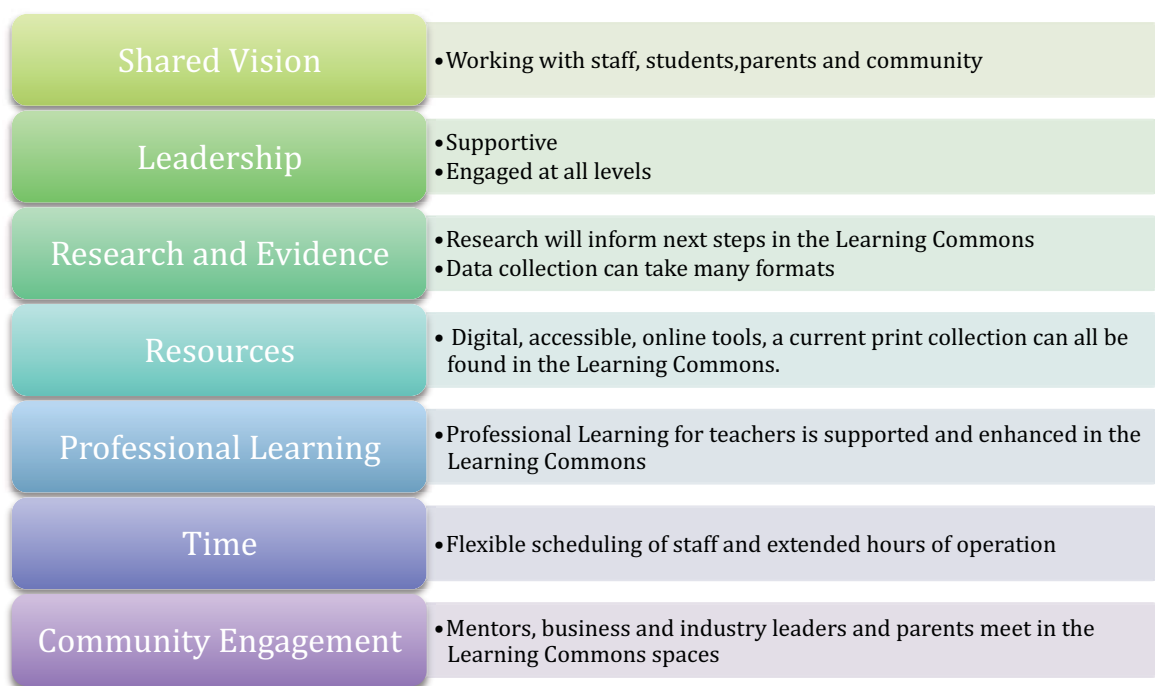
—The Third Teacher

Essential Question: What is our shared vision of a learning commons: What are the opportunities, successes and challenges we face as a school community in creating a learning commons?

Fig. 4: Essential Conditions for Implementation of Learning Commons

(Adapted from Alberta Education’s Draft Transformation From a School Library to a Learning Commons Policy: Seamless Access Strategies for Library Services Content (2011) using A Guide to Support Essential Conditions

<http://www.essentialconditions.ca>)



Suggested Implementation Plan

(Adapted from Alberta Education’s Draft Library to Learning Commons Checklist)

Shared Vision

- Have you created a shared vision, understanding and team with your school community?
- Are you able to connect the school development plan to this vision?



“Research shows that when students are enthusiastic learners, they can solve problems, ask new questions and create new knowledge.”

—2012 Community Report

Leadership

- How will administration facilitate and support the shift from library to learning commons?
- How can individuals with pedagogical, content and technological expertise (internal and external) be accessed and utilized to move the learning commons forward? Who will champion the pedagogical shift?
- Is digital citizenship part of the learning commons plan?

Research and Evidence

- How can current research, evidence and lessons learned inform implementation decisions? (i.e. site visits to other learning commons, participation in webinars, cohort, professional reading)
- What are the processes by which data is collected and gathered? How will this information be analyzed and shared?
- How will this information be gathered, analyzed and shared? How will the findings inform the learning commons plan?

Resources

- Is your collection current, balanced (print, video, audio, digital) and accessible to multiple users?
- Has the collection been weeded, replenished and in good repair?
- Has consideration been given to the utilization of resources using CORE, ePortfolio, Iris and Alberta Education?
- Are technologies current, readily accessible and inclusive? Has consideration been given to sustainability?
- Has consideration been given to the creation of knowledge building centres (maker stations)? What opportunities exist that allow students to inquire, tinker, analyze, synthesize, communicate and create information in new and meaningful ways?

Teacher Professional Growth

- How are staff (certificated and non-certificated) becoming informed of the learning commons philosophy?
- How can opportunities be provided to support pedagogical and technological interests?



“Creativity is a great motivator because it makes people interested in what they are doing. Creativity gives hope that there can be a worthwhile idea. Creativity gives the possibility of some sort of achievement for everyone. Creativity makes life more fun and more interesting.”

—Edward De Bono

- What opportunities exist for embedded professional learning through the learning commons? (i.e. expert bar)
- How can connections be made between professional learning and the learning commons philosophy?

Time

- How can teachers be given time to support the implementation of the learning commons philosophy?
- How will timetabling, scheduling of staff etc. be adapted to support the learning commons philosophy?
- Do the hours of the learning commons support multiple users? Is there a virtual learning commons?
- Is there an appreciation of the circular nature of the shift toward a learning commons?

Community Engagement

- How are all stakeholders supporting and enhancing the learning commons? (parents, school councils, students, community members, businesses, industry and post-secondary institutions partners)
- How are you engaging mentors and experts from the community? (parents, grandparents, community businesses including other libraries, industry, post-secondary, etc)
- Have you developed a Communication Plan for the learning commons that provides information through a variety of formats to a variety of audiences?

(Adapted from Alberta Education’s Draft L2LC Checklist)

“It seems obvious but is often forgotten: Teaching and learning should shape the building, not vice versa.”

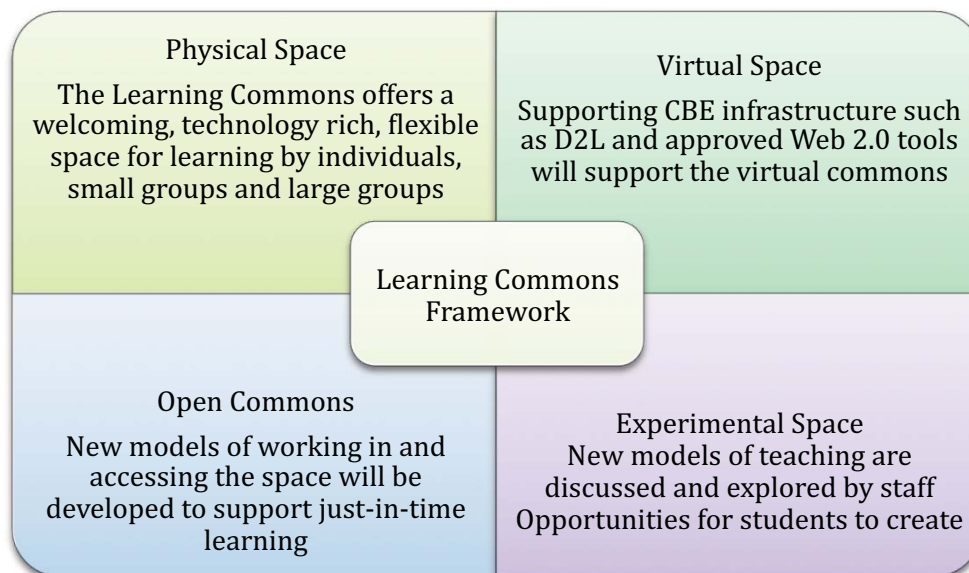
—Dieter Rams

Phase 2: Applying the Framework

The Learning Commons conceptual framework identifies four learning spaces: the open commons, the virtual commons, the physical commons and the investigative commons.

Essential Questions: How can these learning spaces be adapted to the context of your school? What role might the learning commons play in informing school culture? How might it transform the way that teaching and learning occur?

Fig. 5: Framework of a Learning Commons



“Free teachers from the traditional desk at the front of the classroom and encourage new settings for teaching and learning.”

—The Third Teacher

Once there is a common understanding of the conceptual framework of the learning commons there are a number of elements to consider. How you will design your learning commons given the resources available within your learning community? What resources are available to support the desired elements of the learning commons? Some of the desired learning elements of a learning commons are identified on the next page:

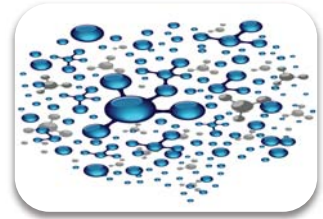
Fig. 6: Elements of a Learning Commons



Student Centred
students have a voice



Flexible Spaces
adapts to support
individuals, small
groups, large groups



Connectivity
virtual access,
connects with experts
and ideas from around
the world



**Higher Order
Thinking**
activities, assessment
and feedback support
the development of
these skills



**Participatory
Learning**
collaboration and the
co-creation of
knowledge



Collaboration
establishing networks
to support new ways of
learning



Showcased Learning
physical and virtual
displays demonstrating
learning



Engagement
social, intellectual and
academic



Alberta Framework for Student Learning, Alberta Education, 2011

“Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things.”

—Steve Jobs

Student Centered

- How can the learning commons support the competencies of engaged thinkers, ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit?
- How will students be given a voice in the learning commons? For example, will they be included in digital citizenship discussions and development of learning common policies?
- How will the learning commons support student engagement and achievement? Creativity and innovation? Collaboration? Student leadership? Critical thinking and problem solving?
- How will students be encouraged to use/book the learning commons for their own showcases?
- How will students be able to create their own personal learning network (PLN) through the learning commons?

Flexible Spaces

- Can all users of the space reposition the furniture and shelving?
- Does your technology plan support a variety of devices, such as portable and student-owned devices?
- Have the number of fixed shelves been limited? Are they located on perimeter walls?
- Are there alternative spaces within the school that can be used to support the learning commons?
- Are individuals, small and large groups able to use the facility at the same time in a variety of arrangements?

Connectivity

- In what ways does your school connect to other schools, experts and ideas around the globe?
- Are your school’s digital citizenship plans ready for this increased level of connectivity?
- Is there a virtual booking system in place (accessible from home and school) for the spaces and resources?



“Build a nest. Children need comfort just as much at school as they do at home. Give them a soft, quiet, and cozy area to play in by themselves or with a few friends.”

—The Third Teacher

Higher Order Thinking

- Are learning activities designed to teach, apply and demonstrate critical and creative thinking skills and processes?
- How does assessment and feedback influence the design of learning activities?
- Are students able to effectively evaluate and select print and digital resources for themselves and the school community?

Participatory Learning

- How can the Learning Commons support collaboration and the co-creation of knowledge? How can technology support this? (i.e. on and offline environments)
- Do students collect, question and *synthesize* information and ideas with others?

Collaboration

- How can teachers, students and others establish networks to explore and experiment with new ways of learning?

Showcased Learning

- Are there active, dynamic and virtual displays showcasing completed and in-process learning?
- Do activities showcase and demonstrate excellence in teaching and learning?

Engagement

- Are there authentic learning experiences that emulate real-world processes?
- How can the learning commons support social, intellectual and academic engagement in learning through the use of its physical and virtual spaces?

Koechlin, C., Rosenfeld, E., & Loertscher, D. V. (2010). Building the learning commons: A guide for school administrators and learning leadership teams. Salt Lake City, UT: Hi Willow Research & Publishing.



“Look at your learning space with 21st-century eyes: Does it work for what we know about learning today, or just for what we knew about learning in the past?”

—Sir Ken Robinson

Phase 3: Implementation

Essential Question: How can our school adopt/adapt the four elements of a Learning Commons?

Open Commons

- How has shared ownership of the Learning Commons been established? Do teachers and students have equal voice in the development of policies and guidelines?
- Is the Learning Commons a place where knowledge can be socially constructed? Is there an inviting and collaborative atmosphere?
- Does the space run on its own calendar to avoid chaos and overcrowding? Is the calendar flexible and does it support individual drop-and group use?
- Has an equitable and flexible means of sharing space and resources by individuals and groups been established?
- Do users understand that booking a space is not owning a space? Does staff understand that the open commons will have a buzz and be a rich and active learning environment?
- How have the various specialists in the school been organized to have a presence in the learning commons?

Experimental (Knowledge Building)

- How can this become a centre for staff to discuss, explore and share innovative methodologies such as cross-curricular/cross-grade level initiatives and emerging technologies?
- How can the learning commons create opportunities for all students to engage in or create “maker stations” where engagement, new technologies and pedagogy meet?
- How does the learning commons capitalize on student expertise in support of experimental learning for all?

Virtual

- How is the learning commons taking advantage of existing technical infrastructure? i.e. D2L, CORE, IRIS, and the LAWN
- How does this space support 24/7 access to learning resources?



- Are there opportunities for 2-way communication, collaboration and construction of knowledge, both locally and globally?
- Is there a virtual space that captures and showcases student learning?

Physical

- Is the furniture flexible enough to provide a variety of learning configurations?
Does it move?
- Are you storing unused furniture and/or resources?
- Does it look like a knowledge warehouse or a knowledge creation centre?
- Have you considered the long-term sustainability of your purchases?
- Is the space a technology rich environment?
- Is there sufficient access to power and data for all technology mechanisms? i.e. school-owned and personally-owned devices

Koechlin, C., Rosenfeld, E., & Loertscher, D. V. (2010). Building the learning commons: A guide for school administrators and learning leadership teams. Salt Lake City, UT: Hi Willow Research & Publishing.

“If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow.”

—John Dewey



“Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important.”

—Bill Gates

Phase 4: Analyze, Adapt and Evolve

The Learning Commons is an ongoing process. As the learners' needs change and grow the Learning Commons must grow with them.

Essential Question: What are the next steps your Learning Commons must take? How well is it supporting the learners' needs within the school? What feedback are you receiving from students, staff and community members?

Analyze

- How has the learning commons been supporting teaching and learning in the school in new and meaningful ways?
- What does the data suggest?
- What feedback have you received from those using the learning commons?
- Where has the learning commons been successful?
- What elements of the learning commons could be further developed?

Adapt

- Is the learning commons supporting the changes that teachers are attempting to implement and students are asking for?
- Are the spaces within the learning commons functioning as was hoped? Can simple changes improve functionality?

Evolve

- Remember that the learning commons will change as student needs , pedagogical understandings, parental input and community evolve
- The learning commons will always be a dynamic environment-evolving to support the needs of the learner and school community

Resources

Calgary Board of Education

[Forest Lawn High School Virtual Learning Commons](#)

[Calgary Learning Commons](#)

[Calgary Public Henry Wise Wood High School Virtual Learning Commons](#) (*Video in development with Learner Supports*)

Alberta Education

[Framework for Student Learning: Competencies for Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens with an Entrepreneurial Spirit.](#)

- [A Guide to Support Implementation: Essential Conditions](#)
Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia, Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta School Councils' Association, Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, College of Alberta School Superintendents, Faculties of Education, Alberta Universities, Alberta Association Consortium, Alberta Education
- [School Library Services Initiative](#)
A draft revised *School Library Services Policy and Guidelines* includes transitioning to a school library learning commons perspective where students are supported in their diverse learning needs through physical and/or online library services.

Learning Commons Summary Draft

The revision is currently being reviewed by Alberta Education in consideration of future curriculum development as outlined in [Our Children Our Future: Getting it Right](#) and the [Framework for Student Learning: Competencies for Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens with an Entrepreneurial Spirit.](#)

[LearnAlberta.ca](#) - Alberta Education has made this resource available to all school authorities which provides teaching and learning resources and a virtual library through the Online Reference Centre at no cost to authorities.

Canada/U.S.

[The Learning Commons in BC](#)

- [Ontario School Library Association Together for Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons](#) – can be used as a study guide

- [Achieving Information Literacy](#) – discuss the student learning outcomes pgs. 9-17

[American School Library Standards for the 21st Century Learner](#) and supporting documents:

- [Guidelines and Standards](#) links to many helpful tools

- [Standards for the 21st Century Learner in Action](#) includes benchmarks, etc. for division levels

- [Learning for Life Implementation Toolkit](#)

Loertscher, D. V., & Marcoux, E. (2010).

Learning commons treasury. Bowie, MD: Teacher Librarian Press.

Loertscher, D. V. (2011). *New learning commons: where learners win!*. Salt Lake City, UT: Hi Willow Research & Publishing.

Thornburg, D. D. (1999). *Campfires in cyberspace*. San Carlos, CA.: Starsong Publications.

Research on Academic Achievement

– *Library Research Service* <http://www.lrs.org/index.php>

– [Scholastic. Research Foundation Paper: School Libraries Work!](#) 2008

– BC Study January 2012