

**Driving equity in Alberta, Canada
through the spirit of collaboration**

A case study

Introduction

Educators from Alberta, Canada, have created a complete shared curriculum resource collection with teachers throughout the province and ultimately the world. Nine collaborators, including seven school divisions, Hāpara, and the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium have embarked on a large-scale effort that provides valuable and essential resources. The goal is to increase academic efficacy for classroom and distance learning.

In less than two years, the Alberta Collaboration for Learning (ACL) has built a comprehensive library of Alberta Program of Studies content in both synchronous and asynchronous formats. The content addresses an increasing need for robust resources that fulfill students' 21st century learning needs.

The Alberta core and supplementary curriculum courses are being developed in [Hāpara Workspace](#), a dynamic and differentiated digital curriculum platform. Through Workspace, districts have a private library of course units and lessons which teachers can easily adapt to specific learning situations, communities and individual needs. Additionally, textbooks and recommended reading resources have been replicated in digital copyright-free formats.



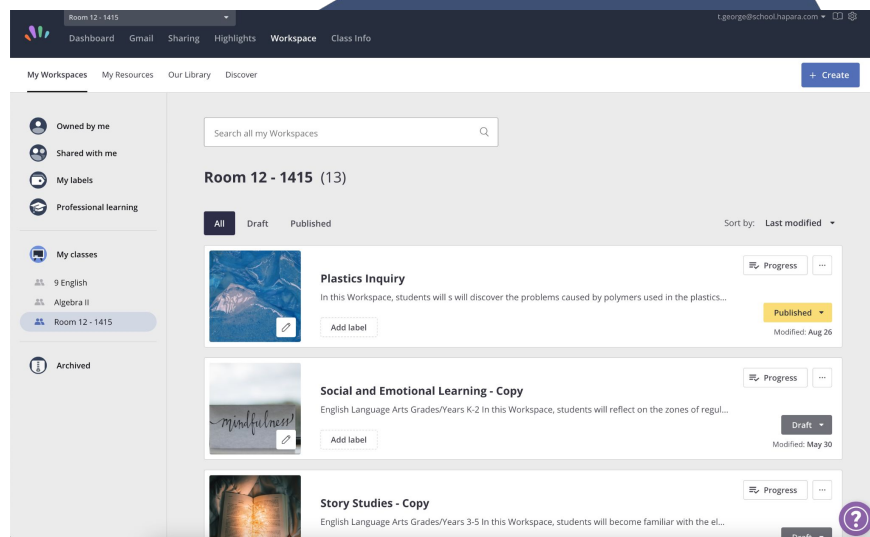
Alberta Regional Consortia

Dedicated to provision of professional learning opportunities at the local, regional and provincial levels



As of summer 2021, the rapidly-growing ACL had curated more than 200 literature, science and math resources along with a collection of 40 Alberta curriculum textbooks. Schools are using these open educational resources (OER) in Hāpara's recently-launched Digital Backpack. Digital Backpack is a combination digital reader/student dashboard that students easily access from personal or school devices. Both Workspace and Digital Backpack educational resources easily lend themselves to updating and modification. When used asynchronously, they also facilitate self-directed learning.

Ultimately, this two-fold initiative, which can be replicated by school jurisdictions nearly anywhere, improves educational equity for students and teachers at significant cost savings for districts. Having enhanced student curriculum and professional development resources widely available to educators helps level the playing field for young people living in urban centers, isolated rural areas and everywhere in between.



Background

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a global uptake in online education, harsh weather often prevented buses from running or forced schools to close. This caused students to lose class time. Other factors more regularly affect educational access for students. In sparsely populated rural areas, ongoing issues of enrollment and proximity make it challenging to deliver the content students need.

As in many places in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic only deepened existing gaps and made problems related to access more widespread. Even more recently came a new announcement. The distance learning curriculum the province provided for teachers who instruct asynchronously would be discontinued in summer 2021.

Distance learning resources serve a wide range of students across Alberta, including professional athletes and students missing credits. It also supports young people from Hutterite colonies, communal farming communities and Inuit and other First Nations communities. Many of these students study at outreach centers where they do the majority of the work remotely or at school with their teacher in a different location. If nothing was done, this change would have directly impacted these learners.

The technology solution

Technology is not new to Alberta, a province known for having a robust infrastructure. Like good educators anywhere, many in Alberta understand that students' social-emotional health is equally as important as academics. Understandingly, they are cautious and discerning in how they use educational technology.



As Principal Shea Mellow of the Horizon School Division, one of the ACL initial collaborators, puts it, "The shift to teaching online will forever impact our instruction and assessment. The question is how do we best harness and leverage technology?"

The Hāpara Instructional Suite has been a favored choice in school divisions in Alberta and throughout Canada for the past decade. In 2016, Wolf Creek School Division which had already already used other Hāpara tools, adopted Workspace in its highly-successful pilot of the Enhanced Learning Model at Bentley High School.

Decreasing enrollment drove course offerings down and threatened the existence of the small rural school. Once Bentley's flexible, personalized learning model was migrated to Workspace, students suddenly had the breadth of course selection found at a large wealthy suburban school. They could also work at their own pace, whether they worked from home or in class.

It is important to understand that Workspace is more than a lesson. Rather it's more of a place where students and teachers work together. A teacher can have some students in the classroom and others at home interacting in real time. Workspace, like Student Dashboard is easily accessible from Google Classroom or directly from within the Hāpara Instructional Suite.

Kevin Bissoon, Director of Educational Technology at Grande Yellowhead School Division, says that Hāpara has been instrumental. Hāpara has ensured that educators can meet the needs of all the students navigating through their coursework at the largely rural division, where proximity and enrollment are big concerns.

"Take a high school in one of our five communities where one particular teacher is teaching all the chemistry and there isn't another chemistry teacher within that same building to be able to connect with," says Bisson. "With Hāpara Workspace this teacher can collaborate with other teachers outside the brick and mortar school walls."

Grande Yellowhead is also using Hāpara's recently launched [Digital Backpack](#). This tool, which combines a digital reader with Student Dashboard, allows students to easily access the open educational resources (OER) that their teachers have adapted and use them like textbooks. The open license and digital format of OER makes it easy to customize learning materials to meet division-level standards, class objectives and distinct student needs. Teachers are able keep class materials relevant unlike traditional printed textbooks that are perpetually outdated.

"We were looking for a learning management system and saw that Hāpara could meet our needs in helping our division expand. We have such a vast division that sharing resources among our teachers and maybe having our star math teachers be able to share what they're doing with our newer teachers was a big benefit," explains Sean Nicholson, Grande Yellowhead Secretary-Treasurer.

Launching the Alberta Collaboration for Learning

Prior to the pandemic, educators at Buffalo Trail Public Schools saw the possibility of expanding the reach of the Hāpara technology they were already using to support student-centered learning in the classroom.

“We wanted to have a learning platform available 24/7 so our students would be able to access quality content at any time,” says Heather Rentz who led the initiative along with Katrin Heim, both of Learner Services at Buffalo Trail Public Schools.

While development of some remote learning content had already begun on a small scale within Buffalo Trails, the COVID-19 pandemic really kicked the initiative into high gear. “Once COVID hit, we had no idea how we were going to move forward,” explains Rentz. “We had teachers that were panicking because they'd never used technology.”

Reaching out to other users of Hāpara Workspace, Buffalo Trails asked who had content they'd be willing to share and connected with Horizon School Division. The collaboration was born. Teachers from both divisions united to create in Workspace full courses that were lacking between the two divisions. The sheer volume of content created, as well as the number of people willing to jump in and share, impressed the entire team.

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“The big, audacious goal that Buffalo Trail set as a small rural community was a little bit of a surprise,” shares Wayne Poncia, CEO Hāpara. “It was quite noticeable that a school district would say we’re going to share everything with not only our school district, but also the province, and ultimately the world.”

Noting the international scope of Hāpara, Rentz points to its 2.2 million subscribers around the globe who have shared more than 400,000 hours of K-12 instruction. In response to hardship, the school divisions opened a new era of opportunity for both educators and students.

“I think there’s a bit of a gold mine in all this. We’ve been forced to curate and find the best tools that are necessary for our kids to be prepared in a digital way to move forward in this world,” says Mellow.

A clear shared vision of creating powerful resources for students united these original members. For other school jurisdictions considering undertaking a similar collaborative effort, developing a common goal helps streamline the process and keep teams focused. For the ACL, it set the groundwork for a burst of growth.

A ripple effect of interest brought more school divisions on board as partners including Grande Yellowhead Public School Division, Westwind School Division, Northland School Division, Sturgeon Public Schools and Livingstone Range School Division.

The clock was ticking until distance learning materials across Alberta would be discontinued. Adelee Penner of the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium worked with the expanded team to raise the bar for developing new asynchronous digital course materials to fill the gap.

The previous year they built synchronous courses in Workspace. Now they worked to create asynchronous courses in Workspace and curate a new library of digital OER textbooks that they adapted to Alberta curriculum standards. Learners could access these resources with Digital Backpack to be used on a Chromebook, computer or student’s mobile device.

Best practices behind organizing a highly-successful initiative

Three fundamental best practices stand out as key to the rapid success of the ACL. School jurisdictions anywhere can adapt these to their particular circumstances as the pillars for their own initiative.

1. Working with your values in action

As teachers from each division contributed their time and expertise to the development of Alberta-aligned courses in Workspace and OER materials for Digital Backpack, their cooperation and enthusiasm during this phase was again phenomenal.

“I think there's something to be said for a group of people who have probably taught in their most challenging year ever, who still at the end of it want to continue to give back to their profession. It's stunning, actually,” says Penner. “It's been really humbling to work with folks who have been stretched, and they continue to stretch themselves.”

The ACL operated according to the deep set of values each individual and organization brought to the table. Along with the perseverance and cooperation Penner mentions, it is easy to see evidence of courage, patience, positive mindset, kindness and collaboration. Team leaders continue to foster an environment that supports such phenomenal participation.

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The words of Amber Darroch, Associate Superintendent of Learner Services at Horizon School Division, demonstrate the leadership team's level of compassion and empathy towards the teachers developing the curriculum resources. "On the heels of the pandemic, I never knew what the level of teacher engagement would be," says Darroch. "There was no mandate or quota required. Whether you contributed on a grand scale or smaller, that didn't matter; a partner is a partner."

Inclusiveness, one of the values of Horizon, is also evident in practice along with setting reasonable expectations.

The collaborative spirit is a legacy in Alberta school divisions and throughout the province where neighbors traditionally pull together to help one another get through harsh winters. Penner notes that it's significant that school jurisdictions are coming together rather than competing.

"We have massive shifts happening in all directions. So the fact that several of these really smaller divisions have banded together to attack finding solutions to all of these problems and move forward together, I think is really quite remarkable to be honest," says Mellow. "And the leadership in those divisions banding together and then finding support with Adelee to move together forward with the same vision to support students and teachers in delivering the best material they can in 2021 and moving forward."

"It's a very open community. We're there for each other. We're not into purchasing material; we're into sharing content with each other," notes Rentz. She links this mindset with the way Hāpara shares their message and has always been a place to freely share content with other users.

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2. Using a roadmap for collaboration

The team's best practices were intrinsically tied to their values. At the onset of the project, potential risks were anticipated and systems were put in place to offset them.

The onboarding process with partners was significant. As the circle broadened, new partners coming to the table were fully briefed so they would understand the benefits and potential gains. They also were given clarity on what they would be able to contribute.

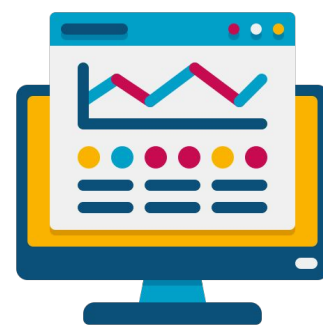


"One of the things that we said right from the beginning, we'd like to work with the end in mind and make sure that everyone knows the task design. So that was given out very publicly, " says Penner.

Darroch adds that in collaboration there is a risk that the standards differ between participating organizations. To mitigate potential lack of consistency, the group defined standards for course development. Together they decided that each course must offer high-level engagement for students as well as crystal clear learning outcomes and assessment.

To verify that quality standards were met, they developed a rubric to assess how well the finished courses were built in terms of organization and consistency of layout and clarity of student instruction.

Along with laying the groundwork in advance, channels for regular communication integrated, including weekly meetings and outreach to partners to hear different perspectives.



3. Selecting an edtech partner that supports your values and task

Aligning with a values-driven edtech company made all the difference for the ACL.

Besides offering well-designed tools that streamlined the work, Hāpara operates with a double bottom line where success is measured not only financially but by doing good for the world.

The people at Hāpara are former teachers, principals, superintendents and other educators who already care deeply about differentiation, personalization, student agency and embracing executive functioning. This means products are designed to incorporate a pedagogical approach.



Vast, adaptable resources save teachers time and districts money

From a teacher's perspective, Hāpara is a time saver.

"It's amazing to be able to come into a learning management system and have all of your content up and ready to go," says Penner. "You've got a starting place as an educator."



"Rather than having to start from scratch, rebuild and try to put something together, this gave all of our teachers across Alberta equity in terms of having a basic resource to start from. Taking those resources and updating it means that there's a higher quality of product. This gives our teachers a chance to have high-quality resources that have been thought through, with different design principles for student success and achievement," explains Penner.

"Hāpara makes courses more fluid and easy to update, change, revise and modify for student needs. It's not static like a traditional print textbook. No spending 70 hours developing the course," says Mellow. "As a teacher, I have such a strong framework to start with and choice to select from that I can then refine and come up with better quality content, and then spend the time with my students."

Mellow talks about the ease of creating a Workspace that's intended to be fully asynchronous so that students can be 100% online. You have that Workspace created, and if you want it to be synchronous in a classroom, you have the framework. You slightly tweak it so that it's useful in a slightly different way, but you don't have to reinvent the wheel. That great framework is useful for asynchronous as well as a traditional classroom.

Mellow also explains that it is especially valuable for first-time teachers or a person who hasn't taught asynchronously. It supports teachers with all of the complex pressures they have. It also alleviates some of the burnout that comes with the immense changes required in a pandemic world, a new curriculum coming in and increased needs of students and families.

The ACL continues to grow, providing valuable and essential resources for the modern day classroom. It does this at previously unheard of savings, higher academic efficacy and learner equity. The entire collection of Alberta curriculum is accessible to Alberta schools from the Hāpara Suite, saving school districts hundreds of dollars per student. Over time, districts review and evaluate the efficacy of their learning library and make adjustments as required.



Top-quality courses prepare students everywhere for today's changing world

The end result is a Digital Backpack full of dynamic, multi-dimensional learning spaces that provide opportunities to engage with subject matter. Unlike printed material which are static, these digital resources are easily updated and tailored to specific learners and needs.

"Rather than being one-dimensional, all the courses created through this collaboration are student-centered in that they promote self-agency and choice. They also offer opportunities for collaboration to have that dynamic human aspect of learning and of bringing the content alive," explains Darroch.

The group worked to go beyond the typical asynchronous course offering to create Workspaces that Penner calls "really powerful at the end of the day in terms of not only their pedagogical approach, but also how they can support student learning."

Instead of one size fits all, the Workspaces now incorporate differentiation, personalization, student agency and executive functioning skills. She also worked with teachers to ensure that assessment is not just product-based, but also based on conversation and observation of what students know.

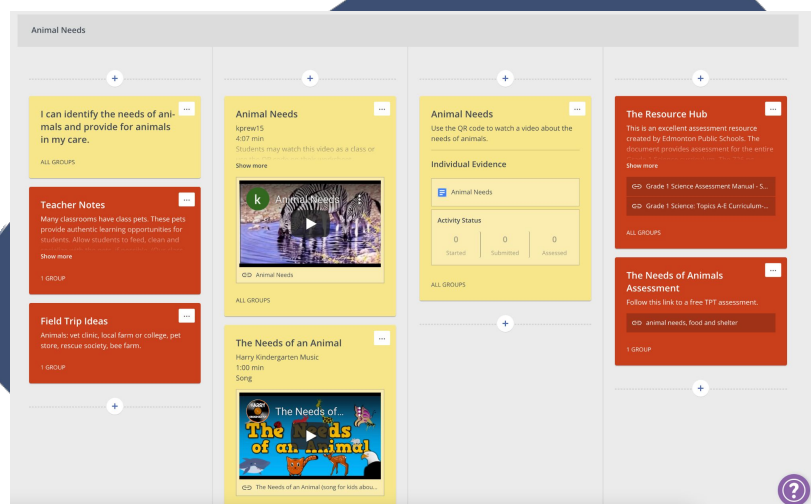
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Hāpara Digital Backpack literally delivers this depth of learning to students regardless of where they reside. Whether I'm a kid in a small community near the Arctic circle or in an urban center like Calgary or Edmonton, I open up my Digital Backpack on my cell phone, I see my week, all my Workspaces, textbooks and resources ready to go. This multi-prong solution spells a much greater breadth of programming in largely-rural jurisdictions like Grande Yellowhead School or Northland School Division.



"Smaller schools with limited staff are challenged to offer a broad range of core and complementary courses. Hāpara Workspaces can be used to expand course offerings and also to help teachers manage teaching multiple streams/courses with one cohort of students," says Darroch.

The Hāpara solution serves a wide audience. Darroch also adds that since Workspaces are designed to accommodate a variety of students' learning needs with opportunities to leverage assistive technologies and differentiated tasks, course content can meet each student where they are. In a nutshell, these resources are exactly what students need now.



Big picture impact in terms of equity, access and quality

“My vision for the project is reaching all classrooms. It has the potential to support every teacher within every school division as a complementary curriculum resource,” Darroch notes.

“For folks who don't have library access, now their parents and grandparents are reading some of the old novel texts that they've always wanted to read because it's been made available to them through Hāpara and the school board,” points out Penner. “Those are significant pieces that in our rural communities we really struggle with sometimes.”

Being able to get the same things as colleagues usually comes down to money or location. This is not a unique problem for Alberta. It can be seen across the United States and globally as well.

“I think that there's certainly a global significance in coming together within our communities, our cities, states or countries, depending on how the education system is organized, and looking at how we can collaborate and share staff resources so that everyone has access to top-quality Workspaces and learning opportunities for kids,” adds Penner.



“Asking how can our marginalized folks have access to the same resources as everybody else? It takes away some of the privilege. It takes away some of the socioeconomic status and creates some equalizers.”

The grand scale of the ACL project and its far-reaching benefits sets a new precedent.

“Who would have thought that small districts like this would be able to create so much and have a significant impact on equity and resources and budget,” says Wayne Poncia. “They don’t have all the choices in city schools. With this initiative, they DO have them, SO much more for the students.”

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Eight ways to get started with Hāpara

1

Adopt the Hāpara Instructional Suite and Student Dashboard Digital Backpack in your school district.

Cost effective and easy to implement, learners that use Student Dashboard Digital Backpack are able to organize their learning workflow (homework, assignments, notifications, classwork, group work) and access a library of district selected and teacher personalized OER resources within only a few days.

2

Talk to us and ask about the most cost effective and impactful approaches to K-12 full curriculum collections.

Using Hāpara, many school districts have developed full curriculum year-long courses in all K-12 core subject areas in less than six months with only a handful of professional staff: administration, librarians and teachers from your team who vet content and create personalized district collections.

3

Pursue partnerships within the Hāpara network of more than 4,000 school districts from your state, province, nation or globally.

4

Identify areas of high need and impact such as select content areas, grade levels, student populations, and pedagogical approaches.

5

Engage in careful and effective curriculum alignment processes supported by Hāpara's content evaluation and vetting specialists and resources.

6

Access and rely on Hāpara's deep professional learning resources

on subject areas such as copyright, open licensing and digital licensing permissions, curation of resources, adapting resources created by other educators, teaching through technology, and differentiating instruction within easy to use instructional management tools.

7

Join a global community of Hāpara educators in the Hāpara Community for support, training and collaboration.

8

Be willing to share within the Hāpara community.

Currently more than 400,000 hours of shared instruction from K-12 have already been shared for your district to review and teachers to access.

OK, sounds great, but how much is this going to save me?

This is where Hāpara gets very proud! From an average of \$7.50 per student/year, districts are able to replace their entire textbook purchasing and provide teachers with complete year curriculums for all subjects online.

Talk to us to find out how.

In closing, it's important to recognize the job of equity is never finished. Hāpara's guiding principle is that every child deserves equal access to a great education, and we provide tools and support that make classrooms more equitable and help them get better everyday. But of course, we can't do it alone. An objective as ambitious as this one necessitates systemic change and investment -- a paradigm shift even. Hāpara is glad to be part of that change as we have been for millions worldwide. We will advocate for your students and teachers every day on this journey together towards equity.

To learn more about how Hāpara can help your school district power awesome learning, schedule a session with a Hāpara team member.

Visit hapara.com to get started.

