



FOUNDATIONS

for **New** School Leaders

REFLECTIONS

by
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I have been part of the SD No. 43 (Coquitlam) community for more than 25 years and, throughout that time, my passion for both learning and leadership has continued to grow. Most of my career has been spent in middle schools, where I have had the privilege of working as a teacher and Vice-Principal. Each role has taught me something new about the power of connection, collaboration, leadership, and the importance of creating spaces where students, their families, and staff feel seen and supported.

This past year, I stepped into a new chapter as Principal of École Westwood Elementary in Port Coquitlam. It has been a year of learning, listening, and leading with heart. Transitioning from middle school to elementary has deepened my appreciation for the foundational years of education, and the incredible impact that early learning environments have on a child's development.

At the core of my leadership philosophy is a simple but powerful belief: strong relationships and shared vision are the heartbeat of a thriving school community. I strive to lead in a way that builds

trust and encourages open communication while empowering others to grow. Whether it is supporting staff in their professional journeys, partnering with families, or celebrating student successes, leadership is about lifting others up and creating a culture where everyone feels they belong.

To me, leadership is about helping others thrive while staying grounded in my personal values. It is about creating a space where people feel safe, heard, and inspired to bring their best selves forward. I don't see leadership as issuing orders — it is about listening deeply, supporting thoughtfully, and leading by example. The most impactful leaders I have known ask meaningful questions, spark reflection, and empower those around them to grow their own strengths. Leadership, especially in education, is about building trust, making thoughtful decisions, and lifting others up, especially when things get tough. And, boy: I know you can all relate!

My journey into educational administration began during one of the most challenging times in recent history: the global pandemic. My personal



Dr. Andrea McComb, BCPVPA Director of Professional Learning,
and Misti Askew, Principal, SD 43 (Coquitlam) at the
2025 Foundations for New School Leaders

I gained new professional tools that have helped me to support others with empathy and intention, and to grow both as a reflective leader and in my personal life.

So, when the call went out for the 2025 Foundations facilitators, I didn't hesitate. I jumped at the chance to be part of something that had shaped me, and to help in creating the kind of experience I had longed for during my own Foundations journey. Being selected was an honour and, as the week approached, I felt a mix of emotions — nervousness about the unknown, and excitement about the adventure ahead. Although I had just finished a very hectic but rewarding first year as a Principal, I knew this experience would be a great way to kick off my summer!

Thankfully, once I arrived, the nerves began to melt away. Gathering with the other facilitators to prepare for the week felt like stepping into something familiar and energizing. There was quiet reassurance in knowing I wasn't alone. I was surrounded by others who were just as committed to creating a meaningful experience for our participants. As we settled in, I realized that my role was exactly what I had longed for during my own Foundations experience: the chance to listen to inspiring presenters, guide thoughtful conversations within my table group and, most importantly, foster genuine connections amongst our table group.

On 'Day 1', I woke up early — I was excited, a little anxious, and full of anticipation. I made my way to the venue, wondering who I would be spending time with over the next five days. As participants began to arrive, one by one, I started to hear familiar stories. Many had come with similar intentions: they had heard glowing feedback about Foundations,

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In 2023, I had the opportunity to take Cognitive Coaching through the BCPVPA, and it was a turning point in my leadership. I discovered a deep passion for coaching not just as a skill, but as a way of being.

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and were eager to connect with others who were navigating similar leadership journeys. That shared sense of purpose created an immediate bond. It was comforting and affirming to know that we were all here not just to learn, but to grow together.

Throughout the week, I found myself deeply moved by the openness and vulnerability in the room. Our guest speakers presented meaningful content,

participants shared their stories, their challenges, and their hopes, and in doing so, we created a space that felt safe, authentic, and alive. I saw firsthand how powerful it is when educators come together with curiosity and compassion. The conversations at my table were rich and layered, filled with laughter, reflection, and moments of real insight. I felt honoured to witness and be a part of the growth happening around me and grateful to play a small part in it.

Misti Askew connecting with her Foundations table group, Table 1

