

# STRONG DISTRICTS AND THEIR LEADERSHIP PROJECT

## FINAL REPORT

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# PART ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Aimed at improving the contribution that school districts in Ontario make to student success in school, this report describes the most recent results of a nine-year combined research and professional development project. Supported by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Institute for Educational Leadership, the results of this nine-year effort have, by now, been widely disseminated and used by districts across the province (e.g., Leithwood, 2013).

The research strand of the project, described in Part Two of this report, replicates most features of a study of high performing districts carried out in the province in 2010 (Leithwood, 2011; Leithwood & Azah, 2016), as well as extending it in two important ways. First, the 2010 study assumed that district effects on students were mediated by features of the environment closer to students' experiences but it neither identified nor measured those features. The present study remediated that limitation by identifying and measuring 12 conditions (or variables) associated with schools, classrooms and students' families which are potentially malleable by districts and known, through previous research, to have significant effects on students. Second, the dependent or outcome variables used for the 2010 study were exclusively student achievement variables (language and math). The present study included the same set of achievement measures as in 2010 but added measures of both student well-being (a key student outcome in current provincial policy) and student engagement (a leading indicator of longer term student achievement). This expansion of dependent measures also helps overcome an important limitation of most previous research on effective districts, an exclusive focus on student test scores (Trujillo, 2013). Testing the efficacy of nine district characteristics identified in the 2010 study, as well as deepening understandings about the profile of each district characteristic in its most effective state were among the primary objectives for this study.

The professional development strand of the project, described in Part Three of this report, includes agendas, presentations of selected background research, teaching guidelines, case studies and evaluations for eight learning modules. Each of the eight modules aims to improve the capacities of participants to improve the condition of each of the nine characteristics of Strong Districts identified through extensive prior research as well as original evidence provided by earlier work in Ontario. The modules are second-generation products. Earlier versions of these modules were developed and partly field tested during the 2015-16 period. All modules included in this report have undergone extensive field testing with several hundred senior district leaders in most regions of the province.





## PART TWO

### FINAL REPORT OF RESEARCH STRAND

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We were assisted in the work reported in this section of the report by three people.

Professor Jingping Sun (U. Alabama) provided advice on the calculation and justification of Power Indices; she and her students also prepared reports of results for each of the 45 districts participating in the research.

Doris Jantzi was responsible for the analysis of data reported in most of the Tables appearing in the report.

Dr. Vera Azah prepared the initial summary of the interview results which are used to answer question 8 in the Results section of the report.

Our study has benefitted significantly from this assistance.

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## 1. PURPOSES FOR THE STUDY

This study is the latest in a nine-year combined research and professional development project aimed at improving the contribution that school districts in Ontario make to student success in school.<sup>1</sup> The scope of the research is framed by a working definition of a “district” or a “school district”, both terms used in reference to local school systems in Ontario. After Rorrer and her colleagues, we conceptualize the district as “an organized collective constituted by the [director]; the [elected] district; the central office-level

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief summary of this work, see Leithwood and McCullough (2015)

administration; and principals, who collectively serve as critical links between the district and the school for developing and implementing solutions to identified problems” (2008, p. 311).

Supported by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Institute for Educational Leadership, the results of this nine-year effort have, by now, been widely disseminated and used by districts across the province (e.g., Leithwood, 2013). The current study replicates most features of a study of high performing districts carried out in the province in 2010 (Leithwood, 2011; Leithwood & Azah, 2016), as well as extending it in two important ways. First, the 2010 study assumed that district effects on students were mediated by features of the environment closer to students’ experiences but it neither identified nor measured those features. The present study remediated that limitation by identifying and measuring 12 Conditions (or variables) associated with schools, classrooms and students’ families which are potentially malleable by districts and known, through previous research, to have significant effects on students. Second, the dependent or outcome variables used for the 2010 study were exclusively student achievement variables (language and math). The present study included the same set of achievement measures as in 2010 but added measures of both student well-being (a key student outcome in current provincial policy) and student engagement (a leading indicator of longer term student achievement). This expansion of dependent measures also helps overcome an important limitation of most previous research on effective districts, an exclusive focus on student test scores (Trujillo, 2013).

Testing the efficacy of nine district characteristics identified in the 2010 study, as well as deepening understandings about the profile of each district characteristic in its most effective state were among the primary objectives for this study. Data collected for the study provided answers to eight more specific questions contributing to the study’s primary objectives:

1. On average, just how “strong” are Ontario school districts?
2. How well developed in Ontario schools are those Conditions in schools, classrooms and families prior research indicates make significant contributions to student success?
3. Do those Conditions in schools, classrooms and families identified in prior research as making demonstrable contributions to student success have comparable effects in Ontario?
4. To what extent do each of the nine characteristics of Strong Districts<sup>2</sup> influence Conditions in schools, classrooms and families known to influence student success?

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<sup>2</sup> The term “strong districts” was first used in a paper commissioned by CODE about the features of high performing districts and their leadership (Leithwood, 2013). The term is widely used across the province now in reference to the nine district characteristics explored in this study.

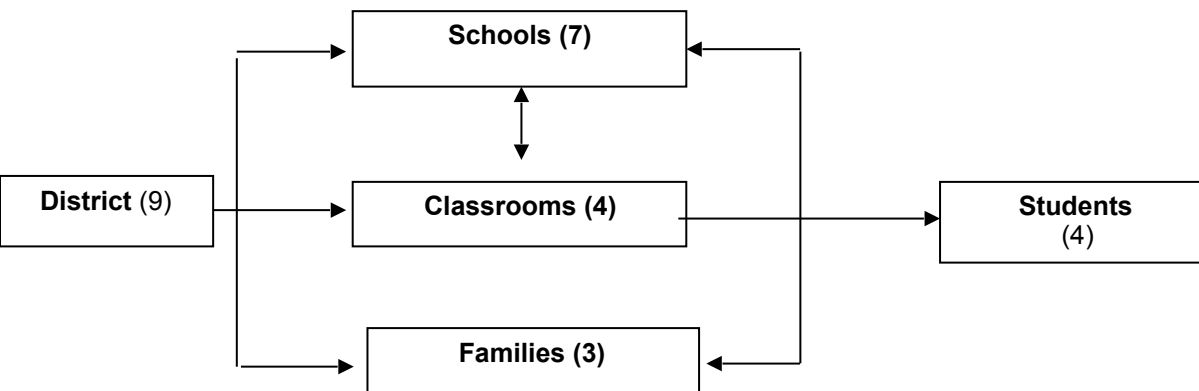
5. How large are the direct and indirect effects of the nine characteristics of Strong District on student outcomes?
6. How large are the direct and indirect effects of School Leadership on student outcomes?
7. Is there a significant relationship between student achievement in math and language and student well-being and engagement?
8. How do school leaders understand their districts' work and its helpfulness to them?

## 2. FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 OVERVIEW

Summarized in Figure 1, the framework for the study identifies both primary and secondary causal relationships between five sets of variables. Nine characteristics of high performing districts are assumed to make a contribution to student success through mediating Conditions in the school (7), classroom (4) and family (3). The three sets of mediating Conditions, Figure 1 suggest, also have reciprocal effects on one another and both individual and combined effects on student outcomes – math and language achievement, student well-being and student engagement.

*Figure 1. Framework for Study*



Equity concerns are top-of-mind among educational policy makers and practitioners in Ontario, as in most other educational jurisdictions at this time, and the framework for this study was built on evidence about what districts and schools do to provide equitable outcomes for all students. Since this feature of the framework will not be evident to those unfamiliar with the research, a more explicit account is provided here.

First, the nine district characteristics included in the framework were initially identified through an extensive review of research about what successful districts do to improve the success at school of children who are socially and economically disadvantaged in some way; the title of the review is “Characteristics of school districts that are exceptionally effective in closing achievement gaps” (Leithwood, 2010). Of the 30 studies included in that review, 29 were conducted in districts chosen for study by the researchers because of their success in providing more equitable education to students in

challenging circumstances. The purpose of those studies was to identify what those districts did that accounted for such success.

Second, four of the seven Conditions in the framework are based on research, by far the largest proportion of which has been conducted in schools serving children in challenging circumstances (e.g., inner-city schools). For example, empirical evidence about the nature of effective School Leadership began to be collected in the early 1970s when Weber (1971), Edmonds (1979) and later Brookover (1985), Levine & Lezotte (1990), Sammons et al (1995), and others, concerned with the inequitable treatment children based on race and poverty, developed the “effective schools movement”. Early effective schools researchers included School Leadership among a small handful of effective school “correlates” initiating much of the School Leadership research which has been conducted over the subsequent four decades. School Leadership, as we now know, makes its largest contributions where it is needed most. A considerable proportion of the contemporary evidence about effective School Leadership (including the evidence on which the *Ontario Leadership Framework* is based) has also been aimed at providing more equitable outcomes for students.

Third, similar motivations and evidence underlie three of the other six School Conditions in the framework including Academic Emphasis (developing a pervasive focus on learning), Disciplinary Climate and Safe and Orderly Environments. Improving the status of these Conditions is especially important in schools serving students in challenging circumstances.

Finally, the three Family Conditions included in the framework (parental expectations, parent/child communications, parents’ social capital) were identified by research aimed at determining how schools can achieve more equitable outcomes for children from families in culturally diverse and economically challenging circumstances (e.g., Jeynes, 2011, 2015). The status of these Conditions will be exemplary in many families without any intervention by schools. But evidence suggests that schools addressing these three variables in what will often be a small proportion of their students’ families can significantly increase equity of outcomes.

## 2.2 DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS<sup>3</sup>

The nine district Characteristics serving as independent variables for this study were originally identified through an extensive review of original empirical evidence about what districts do to close achievement

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<sup>3</sup> Although not all Ontario school systems are “districts”, this term will be used as a generic term throughout the report for ease of references.



gaps among their students (Leithwood, 2010). Because all but one of the 30 studies in that review were based on data from U.S. districts, the framework for the 2010 study, as well as the current study also included modifications and additions specifically aimed at capturing the policy context and wider environments in which Ontario school districts found themselves at the time of the study. These modifications and additions were made in response to: the outcome of a content analysis of relevant Ontario educational policy; a series of “focus group” interviews<sup>1</sup> with directors of education (CEOs) in the province; feedback provided about a draft of the framework discussed at an annual meeting of the Council of Ontario Directors of Education; and feedback about the early drafts of the framework from Ontario Ministry of Education staff.

Rorrer et al (2008) have pointed to “a void in our understanding of the complexities associated with the ability of district-level leaders to contribute to successful, systematic educational reform” (2008, p. 307). Conceptualizing districts as “institutional actors” (collectively influencing from within), these authors argue that lack of theory is an important weakness of most research on effective districts, an argument reiterated more recently by Trujillo (2013). The nine district characteristics in this framework were derived through a content analysis of studies included in the literature review, not as inferences from theory. Nonetheless, the more detailed features of each of these Characteristics are consistent with an eclectic array of relevant and well-established theory. In our view, efforts to better understand successful functioning on the part of districts by invoking a single theoretical lens is likely to be too abstract to identify the particular nature of those practices that matter most to district success.

Figure 2 summarizes the specific features of each of the nine characteristics of Strong Districts. Although additional research about districts has been reported since the 2010 study, the current study was guided by this original conception of Strong District characteristics to serve its replication purpose. Results of more recent district research appear in later sections of the report.

*Figure 2. Nine Characteristics of Strong Districts<sup>4</sup>*

Characteristics	Specific Features
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<sup>4</sup> This figure is copied from Leithwood and McCullough (2015)

1. Broadly shared mission, vision and goals founded on ambitious images of the educated person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that a transparent visioning/direction-setting process is carried out</li> <li>• Consult extensively about district directions as part of the process</li> <li>• Spend sufficient time to ensure that the mission, vision and goals (directions) of the system are widely known, understood and shared by all members of their organizations</li> <li>• Articulate, demonstrate and model the system's goals, priorities, and values to staffs when visiting schools</li> <li>• Embed district directions in improvement plans, principal meetings and other leader-initiated interactions</li> </ul>
2. Coherent instructional guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a service orientation toward schools</li> <li>• Align curricular goals, assessment instruments, instructional practices and teaching resources</li> <li>• Insist on ambitious goals for teaching and learning</li> <li>• Advocate for attention to the best available evidence to inform instructional improvement decisions</li> <li>• Expect schools to focus on needs of individual as well as groups of students</li> <li>• Encourage staff to be innovative within the boundaries created by the district's instructional guidance system</li> </ul>
3. Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use data from all available sources to assist decision making in the central office</li> <li>• Insist on the use of the best available research and other systematically collected evidence to inform decisions wherever possible</li> <li>• Encourage collaboration in the interpretation and uses of data</li> <li>• Build system's capacity and disposition for using systematically collected data to inform decision-making</li> <li>• Provide training for principals and staff on the use of data and research literature to sustain decision-making</li> <li>• Model evidence-informed decision-making to school staffs</li> <li>• Ground interactions with, and advice to, trustees in sound evidence</li> </ul>
4. Learning-oriented organizational improvement processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require improvement processes to be evidence-informed</li> <li>• Set a manageable number of precise targets for district school improvement</li> <li>• Include school-level leaders in decisions about district-wide improvement decisions</li> <li>• Create structures and norms within the district to encourage regular, reciprocal and extended deliberations about improvement progress within and across schools, as well as across the system as a whole.</li> <li>• Develop and implement district and school improvement plans interactively and collaboratively with school leaders;</li> <li>• Create structures to facilitate regular monitoring and refining of improvement processes</li> <li>• Acknowledge Provincial goals and priorities in district and school improvement initiatives</li> <li>• Allow for school-level variation in school improvement efforts</li> </ul>
5. Professional development for all members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide extensive PD opportunities for both teachers and school-level leaders, most of it through some form of learning community or on-the-job context</li> <li>• Use internal system networks as central mechanism for the professional development of school-level leaders</li> <li>• Align the content of professional development with the capacities needed for district and school improvement</li> <li>• Require individual staff growth plans to be aligned with district and school improvement priorities</li> <li>• Hold staff accountable for applying new capacities by monitoring the implementation of school improvement plans</li> </ul>
6. Alignment of budgets, personnel policies/procedures and uses of time with district mission, vision and goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align the allocation of resources with district and school improvement goals</li> <li>• Align personnel policies and procedures with the district's improvement goals</li> <li>• Align organizational structures with the district's improvement goals</li> <li>• Provide principals with considerable autonomy in the hiring of teaching staff</li> <li>• Expect and assist schools to allocate instructional resources equitably</li> </ul>

1.	7. A comprehensive approach to professional leadership development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use the best available evidence about successful leadership as a key source of criteria used for recruiting, selecting, developing and appraising school and district leaders</li> <li>● Match the capacities of leaders with the needs of schools</li> <li>● Provide prospective and existing leaders with extended opportunities to further develop their leadership capacities</li> <li>● Develop realistic plans for leadership succession</li> <li>● Promote co-ordinated forms of leadership distribution in schools</li> </ul>
	8. A policy-oriented district of trustees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Encourage trustees to focus on district policy and the achievement of the district's goals and priorities (policy governance model of trustee practice)</li> <li>● Encourage participation of the elected district in setting broad goals for its use in fulfilling its policy-setting and policy-monitoring responsibilities</li> <li>● Regularly report to the district progress in achieving these broad goals</li> </ul>
	9. Productive working relationships with staff and stakeholders	
	<i>Internal district and school staffs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop communication systems and processes throughout the district to keep all members informed</li> <li>● Develop open, accessible and collaborative relationships with principals</li> <li>● Encourage reciprocal forms of communication with and among schools</li> <li>● Promote high levels of interaction among all school leaders, driven by a shared sense of responsibility for system improvement</li> <li>● Create structures to facilitate reciprocal forms of communication, resulting in deeply interconnected networks of school and system leaders working together on achieving the system's directions</li> <li>● Buffer schools from external distractions to the district's and schools' priorities and goals</li> </ul>
	<i>Local community groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Routinely consult with community groups on decisions affecting the community</li> <li>● Encourage staff to participate directly in community groups</li> <li>● Demonstrate the importance the district attaches to its community connections</li> </ul>
	<i>Parents</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hold schools accountable for developing productive working relationships with parents</li> <li>● Influence the work of schools toward fostering improved educational cultures in the home environments of their students</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop/maintain high levels of engagement with provincial department/ministry of education</li> </ul>
	<b>Ministry of Education</b>	<p>Continued on next page...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engagement with department/ministry is frequently proactive rather than only responsive</li> <li>● Make flexible, adaptive use of provincial initiatives and frameworks, ensuring that they contribute to, rather than detract from, accomplishing system goals and priorities.</li> </ul>

## 2.3 SCHOOL, CLASSROOM AND FAMILY CONDITIONS

The study included 12 Conditions assumed to mediate the influence of districts on student outcomes. For purposes of this study, 7 of these variables are classified as school-level Conditions, 4 are classified as classroom-level Conditions and 1 is classified as a Family Condition<sup>5</sup>. These Conditions were selected

<sup>5</sup> There are three components of Family Conditions. However, most of the subsequent analysis treats them in aggregate.

because of evidence that they are malleable in response to intentional intervention and that they make significant contributions to valued student outcomes. The brief reviews of evidence about each of the 12 Conditions below does not describe the leadership practices that are helpful in developing each Condition. However, there is a corpus of research informing this issue, much of it distilled into the *Ontario Leadership Framework*.

## **SCHOOL CONDITIONS**

*School Leadership.* The conception of School Leadership used for this study was based on the leadership practices described on the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (OLF) (Leithwood, 2012). Recently judged to be the most comprehensive, evidence-based account of effective school leaders practices available (Hitt & Tucker, 2016), the OLF includes an account of both effective leadership practices and leadership “dispositions” (not included in the conception of leadership for this study).

The OLF defines leadership as “the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization’s vision and goals” (p. 3). Leadership is exercised through relationships between and among individuals who may or may not hold formal leadership positions. The OLF does not align itself with any specific leadership model or theory but it does reflect most of the practices found in current models of both “instructional” and “transformational” leadership. Using a term that has become common in the educational leadership literature, it is an “integrated” model (for example, see Printy, Marks & Bowers, 2010) although a more fully developed one than appears in most literature to date. This integrated model aims to capture the relatively direct efforts of successful leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their schools (the primary focus of instructional leadership models), as well as leaders’ efforts to create organizational Conditions which enable and support those improvement efforts (the primary focus of transformational leadership models). This conception of leadership and the evidence on which it is based reflects the meaning of the term “leadership for learning” (Hallinger, 2011; Knapp et al, 2010)

Table 1 describes the five domains of practices outlined in the OLF, along with the specific practices associated with each domain. The more specific practices are closely aligned to evidence about successful leadership, whereas the domains are best thought of as conceptual organizers.

**Table 1**

### **Effective Leadership Practices**

<b>Domains of Practice</b>	<b>Specific Practices</b>
Set Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Build a shared vision</li> <li>● Identify specific, shared, short-term goals</li> <li>● Create high-performance expectations</li> <li>● Communicate the vision and goals</li> </ul>
Build Relationships and Develop People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff</li> <li>● Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members</li> <li>● Model the school's values and practices</li> <li>● Build trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents</li> <li>● Establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives</li> </ul>
Develop the Organization to Support Desired Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Build Collaborative Cultures and distribute leadership</li> <li>● Structure the organization to facilitate collaboration</li> <li>● Build productive relationships with families and communities.</li> <li>● Connect the school to its wider environment.</li> <li>● Maintain a safe and healthy school environment</li> <li>● Allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals</li> </ul>
Improve the Instructional Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Staff the instructional program</li> <li>● Provide instructional support.</li> <li>● Monitor student learning and school improvement progress</li> <li>● Buffer staff from distractions to their work</li> </ul>
Secure Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Build staff members' sense of internal accountability</li> <li>● Meet the demands for external accountability</li> </ul>

The domains or categories of practice described in Table 1 encompass underlying theories or explanations for why the described leadership practices are successful. Each of the leadership practices described in the

OLF reflects one of five broad domains or categories: Setting Directions, Building Relationships and Developing People, Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices, Improving the Instructional Program and Securing Accountability. The first three of these domains originate in two sources. One source is a corpus of empirical research accumulated over at least three decades identifying a set of practices that are core or essential across many organizational contexts and sectors (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Yukl, 1994). The second source is what Rowan, Fang-Chen and Miller (1997) described as “Decades of research on teaching” which explains variation in teachers’ contributions to student achievement (teachers’ performance or P) as a function of their knowledge and skill (ability or A), their motivation (M), and the settings in which they work (S): this explanation is captured succinctly in the formula  $P = f(A, M, S)$ .

Both sources cited above point to key functions of leaders as assisting their teachers and other organizational colleagues to further develop their motivations (one of the primary purposes for Setting Directions) and abilities (the purpose for Building Relationships and Developing People) to accomplish organizational goals, as well as to create and sustain supportive work settings (the goal of Developing the Organization to Sustain Desired Practices). In addition, every organization has a technology for accomplishing its primary purposes and the fourth domain of practices included in the OLF, Improving the Instructional Program, reflects that “technology” for schools (teaching and learning). Finally, the fifth domain of OLF, Securing Accountability, is justified by the policy context in which contemporary public schooling finds itself, one which places unprecedented demands on leaders to publicly demonstrate the progress being made toward accomplishing the purposes established for their organization.

The value of OLF practices depends, finally, on leaders enacting the practices in ways that are sensitive to the specific features of the settings in which they work, the people with whom they are working and changes over time (Hallinger, 2016). This expectation acknowledges the necessarily contingent nature of leaders’ work in the dynamic environments of schools.

*Academic Emphasis.* School improvement research has suggested that Academic Emphasis is a key feature of high performing schools (Cannata, Smith & Haynes, 2017). Hoy and his associates (Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998) define Academic Emphasis as “a combination of teachers setting high, but reasonable goals, students responding positively to the challenge of these goals, and the principal supplying the resources and exerting influence to attain these goals” (p. 342). Academic Emphasis has been found to be positively related to achievement in all types of schools including schools serving poor and minority students (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006), with its effect stronger in

low-SES high schools (Shouse, 1996). For low and middle SES schools, the greatest achievement effects follow from strong combinations of communality and Academic Emphasis (Shouse, 1996).

*Disciplinary Climate.* School Disciplinary Climate includes: students' discipline concerns, class disruptions, student absenteeism and tardiness, student counseling about discipline, students' discipline experience, the rules for behavior, race or cultural conflicts at the school, students' behaviors and the punishments for misbehaviors at the school, teachers' behavior, teacher-student relations (Ma & Willms, 2004). Disciplinary Climate has a significant relationship with student learning (Leithwood et al., 2010). Its effects are larger than the effects of student variables including student SES, as reported in a few large-scale studies both in US and Canada (Ma & Crocker, 2007; Ma & Willms, 2004).

*Safe and Orderly Environment.* Assuming a holistic approach to school safety and orderliness, this Condition relies on the coordination of school, parents, community and community services, efficient provision of mental health services for those students who need it, threat assessment rather than violence surveys, emphasis on prevention vs. suspension (on safe school vs. school violence), and increasing the use of restorative justice practices in progressive discipline (vs. retributive practices) (Astor, Guerra, & Acker, 2010; Dewey, Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Swearer, Espelage; Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Providing an inclusive environment and inclusive instruction consistent with diverse learning styles and fostering students' self-efficacy has become essential to the success of all students. This construct captures the features of both an orderly Disciplinary Climate and an inclusive environment.

*Collaborative Cultures and Structures.* This Condition captures key elements of teachers' collaborative instructional knowledge sharing, creation and experimentation based on student progress data.. One review (Sun., 2014) of data use research revealed that teachers felt the opportunity to work with their colleagues, using common assessment to monitor student academic progress, engage in shared instructional decision-making and sharing best practices supported by formative assessment data, was an integral part of the process leading to increased academic scores. This feature is especially prominent in schools making significant progress with their students' achievement (e.g., Hill, 2010). Collaborative school culture and community has positive correlations with teacher perceived effectiveness in specialized programs for students with disabilities (Kristoff, 2003) and student achievement (Lomos et al., 2011).

*Organization of Planning and Instructional Time.* This school Condition includes two components: providing time and structure for teachers' common planning and maximizing instruction time at the school level. Common planning time is probably the support teachers need most from school administration for

collaboration and professional development. Teachers' developing common assessment tools, sharing effective assessments and teaching strategies, identifying students' need and developing interventions during common planning times has been reported as one prominent feature of successful schools - a typical way to improve 'social capital' in schools (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013), and an effective way to move students forward (Leithwood, Aitken & Jantzi, 2006; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012; Sun et al., 2016). Across OECD countries, the average amount of time scheduled for learning is positively, but weakly, related to country average performance, while learning time in out-of-school-time lessons and individual study is negatively related to performance.

Limited access to collaborative planning time for teachers and limited time for targeted professional development created to carry out the demands related to instruction and curriculum, as well as the lack of formal structure and time dedicated to teachers' data use all hinder teachers from full engagement in precise or focused instruction (Deike, 2009; Gallagher, Means, Padilla & SRI, 2008; Quezada, 2012). In addition, collaborative data interpretation only seems useful when teachers feel that their time is not being wasted (Fischer, 2011).

*Collective Teacher Efficacy.* This Condition is defined as the level of confidence a group exudes in its capacity to organize and execute the tasks required to reach desired goals (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al, 2004). Correlations between measures of CTE and student learning range from .38 to .99, with an average  $r$  of .69 (e.g., Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Angelle and Teague (2014) report a strong relationship between teacher's sense of efficacy and the likelihood of them taking on leadership role in their schools.

## **CLASSROOM CONDITIONS**

*Classroom Instruction.* This Condition incorporates teaching practices that research from three bodies of literature indicate are effective in enhancing student learning: high yield instructional strategies (e.g., Hattie, 2009; Marzano et al., 2001), data-informed instruction (e.g., Mandinach & Gummer, 2013;; Schildkamp & Karbautzki, & Vanhoof, 2013), and technology use to facilitate face-to-face instruction.

Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis identified a handful of Conditions associated with "high yield" instruction. Providing formative evaluation or assessment ( $d = 0.90$ ), tailored micro teaching ( $d = .88$ ), and providing prompt and detailed feedback ( $d = .73$ ) are among the most influential of those Conditions.

Using student data to inform instructional decisions has been identified as another key feature of successful Classroom Instruction (e.g., Crum, Sherman & Myran, 2009; Fullan et al., 2006). Though some studies report no significant link between teachers' data use and student learning (e.g., Prichett, 2008;



Gates, 2008; Hoover, 2009), the bulk of available evidence indicates that increased use of formative and/or summative assessment data increases student achievement in various subjects (e.g., Dalton, 2009; Ferguson, 2009; Filbin, 2008; Gates, 2008; Hoover, 2009; Palucci, 2010; Rayor, 2010; Soslau, 2009; Williamson, 2012; Yao, 2009).

There is only limited evidence about the effectiveness of online learning for K–12 student. Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, and Jones (2010) meta-analysis found a significant impact on learning using technology (about 0.2 average effect size). This effect was the result of blended rather than purely online approaches and parent-directed or collaborative uses of technology rather than independent, self-directed instruction. Technology is effective with children learning at home when it triggers learner activity or learner reflection and self-monitoring of understanding. The value of online learning is attributed to the expansion of learning time outside of school hours.

*Teachers' Use of Instructional Time.* Instructional time in formal classroom settings accounts for a large portion of public investment in student learning and is central component of effective schooling (OECD, 2011). Total instructional time matters less than how the time is spent, the subjects on which time is spent, and the strength of the curriculum (OECD, 2012). Time on task is an important contributor to achievement. The content of the curriculum in which students spend time studying, “opportunity to learn”, has quite strong effects on learning (Tornroos, 2005; Wang, 1998). Teachers' Use of Instructional Time includes teachers' efforts to maximize teaching and learning time, create classroom Conditions that allow for an appropriate pace of instruction, and help students take charge of their own learning in age-appropriate ways. The total amount of “time actually devoted to instruction” has moderate effects on student learning (e.g., Bellei, 2009). Time on task is an important contributor to achievement.

*Teacher Trust in Others.* Common to most concepts of trust is one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the belief that the latter party is competent, reliable, open, honest and benevolent (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). Teacher Trust in Others in this study includes Teacher Trust in colleagues, school administration, students and parents. This Condition has been linked positively to school effectiveness (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001), school climate (Hoy et al., 1996) and student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2010), even when socioeconomic status and other student demographics (prior achievement, school SES, race, and gender) are controlled (e.g., Goddard et al., 2001).

*Teacher Commitment.* Evidence has accumulated about four types of Teacher Commitment: commitment to teaching, to students, to the school organization, and to change. This study measured only Teacher Commitment to the school organization because evidence suggests this type of commitment is most closely associated with student learning. Organizational commitment is about an individual's strong belief in the organization, identification and involvement in the organization, and a strong desire to remain a part of the organization (Freeston, 1987; Leithwood et al., 1999; Porter et al., 1974).

Teacher Commitment contributes to teachers' instruction (Granger, et al., 2002; Hendel, 1995) and various student outcomes including moral growth (Williams, 1993) and academic achievements (Gill & Reynolds, 1999; Janisch & Johnson, 2003; Harvey, Sirna & Houlihan, 1999; Housego, 1999).

## **FAMILY CONDITIONS (FAMILY EDUCATIONAL CULTURES)**

To reduce the complexity of analysis and reporting, results described later, this report treats Family Conditions in the aggregate, using the label Family Educational Culture. This aggregate Condition, however, was measured in the study as three distinct Conditions including parent expectations, forms of communication and social capital.

*Parent Expectations for Children's Success at School and Beyond.* This Condition is defined as "The degree to which a student's parents [hold] high expectations of the student's promise of achieving at high levels" (Jeynes, 2005, p 246). Personally-held and challenging but achievable goals (or expectations) are at the heart of most contemporary theories of human motivation (e.g. Bandura, 1997). Many people, whether children or adults, either rise or fall to the level of expectations that valued others have for them; their own goals and sense of confidence about what is possible for them are, to a great extent, socially constructed. Jeynes' (2005) meta-analysis identified parental expectations, among all forms of parental involvement in school, as having the greatest impact on student achievement by a large margin, a significant effect size of .58 (p.253).

*Forms of Communication between Parents and Children.* Schools typically spend considerable effort on creating meaningful ways of communicating with parents (Epstein et al, 2002) such as school newsletters, curriculum nights at school, online messaging systems and the like. However, it is the forms of communication between parents and children in the home that has by far the largest effect on student success at school. Underlying most such communication is what the literature refers to as "parenting styles." (e.g., Jeynes, 2005). While it may seem presumptuous to view parenting styles as something schools might influence, the styles described in this literature are centrally defined by different approaches

to communication between parents and their children. Creating effective parent/child communications necessarily entails clarifying with parents the advantages of adopting a supportive yet firm approach to interacting with their children, as compared with more extreme forms of either autocratic or laissez-faire approaches.

The more that parents and teachers share pertinent information with each other about students, the better equipped they are to help those students become successful. Parent and teacher consultation and collaboration create the climate for maximum realization of a student's potential (Davis, 2000; Epstein, 1995). Overt, direct discussions of parenting styles between parents and school staffs may go beyond the boundaries of what some parents will accept from schools and what some school staffs will feel is a legitimate part of their role. However, schools can strive for parent engagement by tending to lead with their ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about (Ferlazzo, 2011). The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners. So creating effective parent/child communications about school-related matters requires school staff to focus on how productive parenting styles are applied to obviously school-relevant issues (Leithwood & Patrician, 2015).

*Parents' Social and Intellectual Capital about Schooling.* This Condition includes the power and information present in parents' social relationships that can be used to leverage additional resources helpful in furthering their children's success at school (Leithwood & Patrician, 2015). "The more people do for themselves, the larger community social capital will become, and the greater will be the dividends upon the social investment" (Ferlazzo, 2011, p.11). Parents' Intellectual Capital has been defined as the knowledge and capabilities of parents with the potential for collaborative action. Taken together, Parents Social and Intellectual Capital encompass parent engagement, involvement, and assistance in student learning and school activities. Parent engagement is nurtured when parents believe they should be involved in their children's education and schooling and have a positive sense of efficacy about the usefulness of their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1977, p.27).

Parent involvement in their children's learning is widely acknowledged as having a positive effect on student academic success (e.g. Fan & Chen, 2001; Harris, Andrew-Power & Goodall, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005; Mapp, 2002). While all students benefit from family involvement in education, the influence of parent engagement can mitigate differences in socioeconomic status (SES) and family background (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). Family participation is twice as predictive of students' academic success as family socioeconomic status.

Some of the more intensive programs designed to encourage parent participation had effects that were 10 times greater than other relevant factors (Walberg, 1984).

## 2.4 STUDENT OUTCOMES

Four sets of student outcomes served as the dependent variables for this study including student achievement in both language and math, as well as student well-being and student engagement.

*Student achievement in language and mathematics.* The conception of student achievement in this study focused on both language and math achievement in both elementary and secondary schools as specified in the curricular guidelines provided to districts and schools by the provincial government. Two estimates of such achievement in these subject areas were included: an estimate based on a single year's performance (2016, the latest year for which data were available) and a change in performance from 2011 to 2016.

*Student Well-Being.* Commonly defined as “the state of being happy, healthy or successful” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2016), well-being is a disposition considered important to many disciplines and institutions. For example, the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (no date) suggests that:

Well-being is associated with numerous health-, job-, family-, and economically-related benefits. For example, higher levels of well-being are associated with decreased risk of disease, illness, and injury; better immune functioning; speedier recovery; and increased longevity. Individuals with high levels of well-being are more productive at work and are more likely to contribute to their communities. (p. 1)

Conceptions of well-being in the literature vary from those that are holistic to those that are rooted in particular domains of human experience. Ontario's well-being strategy includes one example of a holistic definition, “...that positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social and physical needs are being met” (Discussion Document, page 1). Another example of a holistic definition of (subjective) well-being is provided by OECD:

good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences (OECD, 2013).

Our study has adopted a domain-specific, subjective, conception and measure of student well-being focused narrowly on the achievement mission of schools. This approach locates our definition *within* Ontario's more holistic conception and is justified for our research purposes by both practical and theoretical considerations.

Practically, the scope of the study has restricted our choice of evidence to what is available from existing sources. We have neither the opportunity nor the resources to collect original data about student well-being. Among the categories of well-being identified in the literature, subjective, domain specific satisfaction with some reflection of “functionality” (explained below) comes closest to the form of well-being that can be measured using existing evidence to which we have access.

Although limitations in the evidence available to us have constrained our choices about how to measure well-being in this study, there are sound theoretical justifications for the approach we have adopted. These justifications include (a) the instability or inconsistency of well-being states and dispositions across domains of lived experience, (b) the salience of demands for institutional responsibility and accountability, and (c) the primacy of achievement in the mandate for public schooling.

Instability of a sense of well-being across domains of human experience is the first justification of our measure of well-being. Most holistic conceptions of well-being provide additional specification through the identification of “dimensions” of well-being as, for example, the cognitive, emotional, social and physical dimensions outlined in Ontario’s well-being strategy, and Fraillon’s (2004) distinction between “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” dimensions of well-being.

These dimensions notwithstanding, a fundamental, although often unacknowledged, assumption underlying holistic conceptions of well-being is that well-being is a relatively stable state or disposition across the many contexts of peoples’ lives. This assumption, however, is inconsistent with OECD’s (2013) position on subjective well-being, as well as a considerable amount of most people’s common experiences. For example, one may experience, at the same time, different levels of well-being physically, socially and cognitively, although there is likely to be some leakage in one’s sense of well-being across such states.

Our choice of a sector- or domain-specific, subjective, conception of well-being acknowledges these widely-experienced inconsistencies and is at least a defensible, school-relevant response to OECD’s recommendation that “All of these aspects of subjective well-being should be measured separately to derive a more comprehensive measure of people’s quality of life and allow a better understanding of its determinants...” (2013, p. 10-11). For example, one may experience, at the same time, different levels of

well-being physically, socially and cognitively, although there is likely to be some leakage in one's sense of well-being across such states.

A second justification for adopting a sector or domain-specific conception of well-being is rooted in concerns about the scope of institutional responsibility and accountability. Many other public institutions also are responsible for the well-being of children. As the paper argues “supporting the well-being of Ontario’s children and youth is a priority shared by many -families, various government ministries, and a wide range of organizations in sectors such as health, social services, and community safety” (page 4).

While acknowledging interdependencies among different forms of well-being (referred to as “leakage” above), many of these public institutions, like schools, have primary responsibility for domain-specific forms of well-being (e.g., physical well-being, social well-being, mental well-being). Indeed, the family is one of the very few institutions responsible for domain-general or “holistic”<sup>6</sup> conceptions of children’s well-being. Public institutions with responsibilities for the well-being of their clients are held accountable for, and typically measure, how well their services contribute to well-being in the specific domain of their primary responsibilities. We argue that schools should do the same, even if they chose to adopt a broader set of responsibilities and accountabilities.

Justification for this argument is reflected in Fraillon’s (2004) important analysis of well-being for the Australian government aimed at the provision of a measurement model. Fraillon (2004) argues that conceptions of well-being should acknowledge the context in which responsibility and accountability for nurturing well-being is to be exercised. Student well-being should focus on those elements of well-being that are susceptible to school interventions. As he recommends:

An operational measurement model of student well-being will refer to student well-being in the school community where the school community is defined as: *the cohesive group with a shared purpose that is centred around a school.*

The overarching definition of student well-being for the operational measurement model [described in his report] is that student well-being is: the degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community. (page 26)

Academic achievement as the primary mission of public schooling is the final justification for our conception of well-being. While Fraillon’s two recommendations narrow the focus of student well-being to the “school community”, we believe that further constraining the conception and measure of student

well-being to the domain of academic achievement is justified, at least for our research purposes. This additional constraint is in response to the enormous scope of responsibilities now advocated for schools. Such expansion in scope is especially well illustrated in recent research about school/family partnerships (e.g., DeMathews et al, 2016; Curry et al, 2016). Publicly-funded K-12 schooling, however, has a long history of over-promising and under-delivering in response to external demands for expanding the scope of their responsibilities. That history has not served them well.

The primary responsibility of schools has always been, at minimum, to nurture student achievement. This fundamental responsibility is nowhere more evident than in the widespread attention devoted to results of the most common and well-known instruments for assessing student achievement<sup>7</sup>. Demands to improve on the delivery of that responsibility have grown significantly with additions of policies about greater equity and diversity as part of the achievement goal, leaving schools with fewer rather than more resources to take on additional non-achievement responsibilities. We argue, therefore, that it was reasonable to limit at least our conception and measure of well-being to the most fundamental and unchanging part of the public school mission.

The items chosen to measure the domain-specific, subjective conception of well-being make clearer than do definitions of well-being alone, just how much overlap there is between well-being as a concept, and other dispositional concepts such as confidence, self-efficacy, academic self-concept and optimism (e.g., Morris, 2016).

*Student Engagement.* Simply defined, student engagement in school refers to the “the attention, investment and effort students expend in the work of school” (Marks, 2000, p.155). Student engagement includes such obvious behaviors as attending classes, following teacher directions, doing school assignments and the like (Finn & Zlimmer, 2012). In the Preface to the *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, Christenson et al, (2012) provide three compelling arguments for why student engagement should be considered a central outcome in assessments of both school and district effects. Student engagement is a central explanation for high school dropout and graduation; it is positively associated with students’ academic, social and emotional learning. Engaged students, furthermore, exercise effort and persistence in their own learning and self-regulate that learning.

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<sup>7</sup> In Ontario, these instruments include EQAO’s tests of reading, writing and mathematics. In Canada, these instruments encompass CMEC’s *Pan Canadian Assessment Program* testing achievement in of reading, math and science. The international testing programs conducted by TIMMS, PISA and PIRLS, together also measuring student mastery in reading, math and science, are further illustrations of the primary and unique responsibility schools have for fostering their students’ academic achievement

Student engagement is widely considered to be a multi-dimensional state (Quin, 2017). Behavioural manifestations of engagement include persistence, effort and attention, for example, while emotional manifestations of engagement include such things as interest in school and pride in success (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Cognitive engagement encompasses the intentional use of learning strategies (Wolters & Taylor, 2012) while social engagement is evident in students' participation in extracurricular activities and the development of friendships at school (e.g., Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris 2004; Fredricks & McColskey, 2011).

The scope of this study limited our measure of student engagement to those dimensions for which data were readily available from results of the EQAO student attitude surveys administered annually. These data allow for the construction of scales for measuring three dimensions of student engagement – cognitive, social and behavioural engagement.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1 OVERVIEW

This was a mixed-methods study (Wei & Lin, 2017) including the collection and analysis of survey and student outcome data to answer seven questions addressed by the research, along with interview data used to answer the eighth and final question. Mixed methods research combines features of both quantitative and qualitative methods helping to overcome the limitations of each and adding both depth and breadth of understanding (Johnson, et al, 2007) to what is possible with the use of only quantitative or qualitative methods. This study used mixed methods research to expand understandings (Greene & Caracelli, 1997) about both the characteristics of districts making exceptionally effective and equitable contributions to the cognitive and emotional lives of students.

### 3.2 MEASURES

#### QUANTITATIVE

*Surveys.* Two surveys were administered simultaneously. With strong encouragement from the researchers, this data collection typically occurred during a regularly scheduled meeting of district and school administrators. Attendees were divided into two groups. One group, including only principals and vice-principals, responded on-line to the *Leading and Teaching in Schools Survey*. The second group, including both district and school-level administrators, responded on-line to the *Ontario District Survey*.



Both surveys were adaptations of instruments that had been used in previous studies and each required about 15 minutes to complete.

The *Ontario District Survey* was adapted from an instrument used in the earlier study on which this study built (Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood & Azah, 2016). This survey includes 67 items measuring each of the nine district characteristics in the study framework. The *Leading and Teaching in Schools Survey* was adapted in only minor ways from its use in studies recently carried out in both Ontario<sup>8</sup> and Texas<sup>9</sup>. This survey includes 87 items forming scales measuring each of the 12 school, classroom and family Conditions included in the study framework. Results from earlier uses of both surveys reported scale reliabilities exceeding the commonly acceptable norm of about .70 (Nunnery & Bernstein, 1994) by a wide margin.

*Student math and language achievement.* All student achievement data used for the study were based on results of the province's (Educational Quality and Accountability Office) testing program including math, writing and reading in grades 3 and 6, literacy in grade 10, and math in grades 3, 6 and 9. Collected annually, results of these tests are reported as the percentage of students achieving at each of 4 levels (1 = lowest, 4 = highest). Level 3 is typically considered an acceptable level. Achievement evidence in this study was reported as average results for 2016 (1-year achievement), as well as changes over five years in the proportion of students in each district achieving level 3 or above. All math and all language scores were combined to provide two achievement scores.

*Student well-being measure.* The measure of student well-being incorporated items found in EQAO's student attitude survey. This survey asks students about their subjective sense of well-being (our interpretation) in both language and math. Using two well-being distinctions identified by OECD, these measures reflect student's "affect" or feelings ("I like"), as well as their sense of flourishing - a "focus on functioning and the realization of the persons' potential" (p. 31) - reflected in the phrases, for example, "I am able to" and "I am good at".

The items used to measure well-being in math, treated as one scale, included:

- I like mathematics

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<sup>8</sup> This work was part of the *Leading Student Achievement: Networks for Learning* project annual evaluations.

<sup>9</sup> Leithwood & Sun (2016).

- I am good at mathematics
- I am able to answer difficult mathematical questions
- I do my best when I do mathematics in class

Items to be used to measure well-being in language, treated as a second scale, included:

- I like to read
- I am a good reader
- I am able to understand difficult reading passages
- I like to write
- I am a good writer
- I am able to communicate my ideas

*Student engagement measure (cognitive, social and Behavioural).* The scale measuring *cognitive engagement* included items about the use of intentional strategies for both language and math learning. Items similar to those in our scale are included, for example, in the University of Minnesota's Student Engagement Instrument (Campus Compact, no date), a subscale about *control and relevance of school work* (no date). Fredricks and McColskey (2011) review of instruments points to several other self-report instruments about student engagement that measure self-regulation, cognitive strategy use and planning. Compelling practical and theoretical reasons for including self-regulation as part of broader conceptions of student engagement have been provided by Wolters and Taylor (2012); these elements of student engagement are reflected in the scales developed for this study.

While cognitive engagement is often treated as a global (or domain general) disposition, common experience suggests that such engagement might well be at least partly domain specific. We were able to explore this possibility using the two sub-scales described below:

#### *Language*

- Before I start to read, I try to predict what the text will be about
- I make sure I understand what I am reading
- I slow down my reading if it is difficult
- When I come to a word I do not understand, I look for clues (e.g., punctuation, word parts, other words in the sentence)
- When I am finished reading, I think about what I have read
- I organize my ideas before I start to write

- I edit my writing to make it better
- I check my writing for spelling and grammar

### *Mathematics*

- I read over a mathematics problem first to make sure I know what I am supposed to do
- I think about the steps I will use to solve a mathematics problem
- I ask for help if I do not understand the problem
- I check my work for mistakes
- I check my answer to see if it makes sense

The EQAO student surveys providing data for our measure of student engagement included only three items that could be used as a scale for measuring *social engagement* including:

- Participate in sports or other physical activities
- Participate in art, music or drama activities
- Participate in after-school clubs

While these items measure a limited type of social engagement in school, compelling evidence now indicates that each of these forms of participation contribute significantly to student achievement, students' sense of academic self-efficacy as well as their motivation toward learning (Hee Im, Qian, Oimman Kwok, 2016; Morris, 2016).

The six items from EQAO's student survey used to assess *Behavioural engagement* entailed student behavior in the home with parents. This scale misses many common behaviors associated with engagement in classroom and school settings. However, a growing body of evidence points to the significant contribution made to student success at school by many forms of student – parent engagement in the home (e.g., Jeynes, 2005). Acknowledging at least some of these forms of engagement, six items are included in this scale:

- Talk about the activities they do in school
- Talk about the reading and writing work they do in school
- Talk about the mathematics work they do in school
- Read together
- Look at their school agenda
- Use a computer together

## QUALITATIVE

The interview protocol used in the study consisted of a brief overview of the study and the purpose for the interview followed by 10 sets of questions. The first question was a broad and largely open-ended about what respondents' districts had done in the past year that was most and least helpful for respondents and their staffs. Each of the remaining nine sets of questions was about the status, in the respondent's district, of one of the nine district characteristics included in the study framework, along with perceptions of what about each of these characteristics influenced (positively or negatively) the improvement efforts in respondents' schools.

## 3.3 SAMPLES

### QUANTITATIVE

The unit of analysis for this study was the district. Ontario's publicly-funded school system includes 72 districts of which 45 provided sufficient numbers of responses to be included in the study, a 63% response rate. Across the 45 participating districts, 1252 school administrators responded to the *Leading and Teaching in Schools Survey* (an average of 29 respondents for each district) while 1072 district and school administrators responded to the *Ontario District Survey* (an average of 24 respondents for each district).

To qualify for inclusion in the quantitative portion of the study, the number of responses to each of the two surveys from a district had to closely approach the number required to be statistically representative at the .05 level of probability. This number, determined by using one of the many on-line sample size calculators, varied from one district to another, reflecting differences in the population of potential respondents in each district. Close approximations to the ideal size were accepted to retain as much data as possible but responses from nine districts agreeing to be part of the study failed to meet our flexible criterion.

### QUALITATIVE

Principals and vice-principals were randomly selected for interviews from districts representing each sectors of the province including the southwest, southeast, central and north. Numbers selected from each sector approximately reflected the proportion of schools in each sector, both elementary and secondary. A total of 44 interviews were conducted by phone averaging about one hour in length. These interviews

were with 12 secondary and 32 elementary school leaders. A total of 20 interviewees worked in Catholic school districts, 24 in public school districts.

## 3.4 ANALYSIS

### QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Because the unit of analysis for the study was the district, the sample size for purposes of statistical analysis is quite small (45) and precludes the use of some of the more powerful techniques for estimating causal relationships among variables in studies using non-experimental designs. Analysis of the quantitative data included the calculation of scale reliabilities along with means and standard deviations of both scales and individual survey items.

Correlations (Pearson Product) and standard tests of statistical significance were used to assess the strength of direct relationships among variables (e.g., the relationship between district characteristics and all four sets of student outcomes). The strength of causal claims based on correlational evidence depends, in large part, on the quality of underlying theory and/or previous evidence and the framework for the study is relatively robust for this purpose. The nine District Characteristics were derived from extensive literature reviews and each characteristic reflects one or more social science theories. The 2010 Ontario study, replicated and extended by the current study, provided evidence of the effects of these characteristics on student achievement. Each of the twelve school, classroom and family Conditions serving as mediators of district effects has been the subject of varied and quite extensive research demonstrating effects on several different types of student outcomes.

A new method, the calculation of “Power Indices” (first published in Sun and Leithwood, 2016) was used to estimate indirect relationships, for example, the relationship between district characteristics and student outcomes, mediated by school, classroom and family Conditions). This method entails the combination of correlations among three sets of variables, as is illustrated in the report of results below. For this study, Power Indices were used instead of regression analysis, in part, because they require little statistical background to interpret. While Power Indices approximate the outcomes of regression analysis, they do lack some of the valuable properties of regressions. The logic used in calculating a Power Index is similar to the path model of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). In the former, the two estimates are multiplied (e.g., the extent to which a district characteristic (A) impacts a school Condition (B) and the extent to

which that school Condition influences student achievement (C)). Similarly, in SEM path models, path coefficients are multiplied to obtain an index that estimates the indirect impact of A on C through B.

While a Power Index is easy to calculate and can be applied to small samples, this method cannot estimate the interactions among path impacts whereas SEM, can model the impact of a latent variable formed by a few closely related path variables and thus discover which effects are obscured when variables are entered into an equation. This sophisticated technique, however, imposes a set of model restrictions on the sample covariance matrix and can only be used with large data sets. While a Power Index is by no means superior to the results that can be obtained through SEM, it does provide another method, beyond correlations, for examining indirect influences in studies with small samples.

The strength of the Power Indices calculated in this study was interpreted using common rules of thumb applied to Effect Size (ES) statistics (Cohen, 1988; Hattie, 2009). Despite inconsistencies in how ES is defined, there are generally three approaches to it (Preacher & Keeley, 2015). One typical approach, held by scholars such as Cohen (1988), regard effect size as the magnitude of departure from a particular null hypothesis. Another approach defines ES as a numeric quantity intended to convey *practical importance* (i.e., substantive importance of an effect in real terms). The third group use both kinds of definitions interchangeably. This report adopts a more general, inclusive, definition of effect size provided by Preacher & Kelley (2011): “any measure that reflects a quantity of interest, either in an absolute sense or as compared with some specified value” (p. 95).

Generally, there are two types of effect sizes:  $d$  family (e.g., Cohen  $d$ ; Hedges’  $g$ ) and  $r$  family (e.g.,  $\beta$ ;  $r$ ;  $t$ ,  $R^2$ ;  $\omega^2$ )(Cohen, 1992). The effect size in this report to denote the impact of school leadership on various school, class and family Conditions, the impact of these Conditions on student achievement, and the impact of district characteristics on school leadership and school class and family Conditions is the Pearson correlation coefficient  $r$ . To convey the meaning of effect size index, it is necessary to apply some idea of its scale (Cohen, 1992). This report adopted Cohen’s (1992) conventions, probably the most widely used ones across disciplines, to appraise effect sizes; .10, .30. and .50. are interpreted to be small, medium, and large effect sizes respectively.

Indirect effect, a key interest in this study, can be signified by products of the direct effects. Suppose  $a$  coefficient represents the impact of school leadership on School, Class and Family Conditions and  $b$  coefficient represents the impact of those Conditions on student achievement. To calculate the indirect effect, either the standardized regression coefficient or the raw correlation can be used as an effect size

measure for the  $a$  coefficient, and a partial correlation can be used as an effect size measure for the  $b$  coefficient (MacKinnon, 2008; Mackinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). Defined this way, the indirect effect usually represents the variances in the criterion variable explained by the predictor through the mediator, partialling out the effect of predictor. We were not keen on partialling out the effect of the predictor, or controlling for the effect of school leadership. Instead, we were interested in the effect of the predictor on the criterion variable through the mediator. Thus, in calculating the Power Index, which denotes the indirect impact of school leadership on student outcomes as well as the indirect effects of district characteristics on student math achievement, we did not use a partial correlation for  $b$ . Rather, we used the raw correlation for  $b$ . This study was more interested in the relative rather than absolute values of Power Indices. That said, it was important to appraise the practical importance of the power indices. So Cohen's conventions on the interpretation of  $r$  (*Pearson Product-Moment correlations*) family of effect sizes (i.e.,  $R^2$ ) was used to interpret the importance of size of the Power Indices. That is if small, medium, and large effect sizes are respectively .10, .30. and .50., then the product of  $ab$  of .01, .09, and .25 are interpreted as small, medium and large for the Power Index. In this study, a Power Index of .20 or more was considered strong enough to have some practical value and worth further discussion.

While correlations and Power Indices are relatively weak methods for testing causal claims, the theory and evidence on which the framework guiding this study was based is relatively robust. This is our justification for using causal language when reporting results in subsequent sections of this report.

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Digital voice recordings were made of the 48 individual interview responses. These recordings were transcribed and then summarized in tabular form including precis of response to each of the interview question and representative quotations illustrating each response. The 10 sets of interview questions provided the first set of coding categories; these questions asked about the status of each of the nine districts characteristics included in the study framework along with interviewee perceptions about the contributions (positive or negative) each characteristic made to improvement efforts in interviewees' schools. Axial or thematic coding was then conducted with interview responses about each district characteristic to identify key ideas about the status of district practices and their value for the work of school leaders. These data were then summarized in the results section of this report responding to question 10, "How do school leaders understand the work of their districts and its helpfulness to them?".

## 4. RESULTS

This section of the report uses data from the study to answer the 8 questions described in the first section of this report. Quantitative data were used to answer the first 7 questions and qualitative data are used to answer the 8th. Detailed responses to the first 7 questions include tables summarizing relevant data. The unit of analysis (the district) in each of these tables is 45.

### 4.1

#### **On average, just how “strong” are Ontario’s school districts?**

Appendix A reports the means (on a 4-point scale) and standard deviations for responses to all items included in the *Ontario District Survey*. Table 2 summarizes these results and reports the reliabilities (Cronbach alpha) of scales measuring all nine district characteristics, as well as the number of items included in each scale. Two variables, central office staff relations and relationships with local community groups, were measured with just one item so reliability cannot be reported. All scales in this survey exceeded the commonly agreed on acceptable standard for reliability of .70 (Nunnery & Bernstein, 1994) by a significant margin.

Each of the nine district characteristics received mean ratings above the mid-point on the 4-point response scale. Highest ratings were awarded to Mission, Vision and Goals ( $m = 3.28$ ) and Extent of District Alignment ( $m = 3.24$ ). Lowest rated was Learning-oriented Improvement Processes ( $m = 2.72$ ). Standard deviations for all characteristics were relatively small indicating considerable uniformity in ratings among respondents. An exploratory factor analysis (details not reported) conducted on this instrument found that all items loaded on nine factors and almost all items conceptually associated with each district characteristic loaded as expected.

In sum, all nine characteristics of Strong Districts are at least moderately well developed in the province’s school districts at present. Three of the nine characteristics are especially well developed - Mission, Vision and Goals for Students, Extent of Alignment and Coherent Instructional Programs. While Elected Leadership is rated among the least well- developed of the nine characteristics, there is also more variation (a larger standard deviation) in responses to this characteristic than the other

**Table 2**

#### **The Status of District Characteristics in Ontario**

*Ontario District Survey*



Mean, Standard Deviation (SD), Scale Reliability (SR) and Number of Items (N) in Scale

	Mean	SD	SR	N
<b>Characteristics (Aggregate)</b>	2.98	.22	.94	
Mission, Vision, Goals for Students	3.28	.22	.92	7
Coherent Instructional Program	3.07	.29	.97	5
Uses of Evidence	2.92	.28	.94	6
Professional Development	2.89	.25	.90	7
Professional Leadership	2.87	.28	.94	8
Extent of District/District's Alignment	3.24	.26	.90	4
Elected Leadership	2.86	.36	.95	7
Organizational Improvement Processes	2.72	.27	.94	8
Relationships (Aggregate)	2.93	.23	.86	

## 4.2

### **How well developed in Ontario schools are those school, classroom and family Conditions known to make significant contributions to student success?**

Appendix B reports the means (on a 5-point scale) and standard deviations for responses to all items included in the *Leading and Teaching in Schools Survey*. Table 3 summarizes these results and reports the reliabilities (Cronbach alpha) of all scales and the number of items included in each scale. Scales on this survey exceed the commonly agreed on acceptable standard for reliability (.70), all but two (Disciplinary Climate and Safe and Orderly Environment) by a significant margin.

The 12 variables measured by this survey all received mean ratings above the mid-point on the 5-point response scale. Highest ratings were awarded to Safe and Orderly Environment ( $m = 4.09$ ) and Teacher Commitment ( $m = 4.00$ ); lowest rated were Classroom Instruction ( $m = 3.52$ ) and Organization of Planning and Instructional Time ( $m = 3.59$ ). Similar to the results of the district survey, all standard deviations were relatively small indicating considerable uniformity in ratings among respondents.

Results of an exploratory factor analysis (details not reported) conducted on items in this survey closely reflected the conception of variables on which the instrument was developed for half of the 12 variables, while the distribution of items measuring the remaining 6 variables were not readily interpretable. Given the relatively high reliabilities of all 12 scales, subsequent analyses retained the original conception of item assignment.

In sum, all school, classroom and family Conditions measured by the survey are at least moderately well developed in the province's schools. Safe and Orderly Environments and Teacher Commitment are the

most fully developed while Classroom Instruction and Organization of Planning and Instructional Time are least well developed. There is significant agreement among respondents about these results.

**Table 3**

**The Status of School, Classroom and Family Conditions in Ontario Schools**

***Leading and Teaching in Schools Survey***

Mean, Standard Deviation (SD), Scale Reliability (SR) and Number of Items (N) in Scale

		<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SR</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Conditions Aggregate</b>		3.77	.17	.94	
School Leadership		3.95	.19	.96	22
Classroom Instruction	3.52	.21	.93	.11	
Uses of Instructional Time		3.62	.18	.87	6
Academic Emphasis		3.76	.19	.84	5
Disciplinary Climate		3.62	.23	.75	4
Teacher Commitment	4.00	.23	.94	.06	
Teacher Trust in Others		3.97	.18	.82	4
Teacher Collective Efficacy		3.84	.21	.88	5
Organization of Planning and Instructional Time		3.59	.31	.80	4
Safe and Orderly Environment		4.09	.19	.77	6
Collaborative Cultures and Structures		3.69	.21	.92	9
Family Educational Culture		3.61	.26	.89	5

## 4.3

### **Do those Conditions in schools, classrooms and families with demonstrable effects on student success in prior research have comparable effects in Ontario?**

The portion of the framework for this study about school, classroom and family Conditions summarized a considerable amount of evidence about the contribution of each of 12 Conditions to student success. This question asks whether that evidence can be replicated in the specific context of Ontario districts. Results reported in the Tables 4 through 7 suggest that this is the case. These results are reported as correlations

between each of the 12 Conditions and all four student outcomes measured as both a 1 year and a change-over-five years estimate.

## LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT

Only Uses of Instructional Time and Organization and Planning for Instruction do not contribute to the 1-year measure of Language Achievement but 11 of the 12 Conditions have non-significant negative relationships with the five-year change in Language Achievement (see Table 4). The strongest effects on (correlations with) the 1-year measure of Language achievement (in order) are

- Teacher Trust (.61)
- Academic Emphasis (.59)
- School Leadership (.50)
- Classroom Instruction (.49)
- Teacher Commitment (.49)
- Disciplinary Climate (.45)

We have not explanation for the negative 5-year change correlations.

**Table 4**  
**Relationships between School, Class and Family Conditions and Language Achievement**  
(Correlation Coefficients)

	1 year	5-year change
<b>Conditions aggregate</b>	<b>.64**</b>	<b>-.17</b>
School Leadership	.50**	-.25
Classroom Instruction .49**		-.03
Instructional Time	.25	.06
Academic Emphasis	.59**	-.24
Disciplinary Climate	.45**	-.25
Teacher Commitment .49**		-.06
Teacher Trust .61**		-.12
Collective Efficacy	.63**	-.19
Organization & Planning	.29	-.18
Safe Environment	.64**	-.06
Collaborative Culture .47**		-.09
Family Ed. Culture	.57**	-.17

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

## MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT

As Table 5 indicates, all 12 Conditions are significantly related to the one-year measure of math achievement and two Conditions make weak but significant contributions to changes in math achievement over five years – Uses of Instructional Time (.34) and Academic Emphasis (.31).

Table 5 distinguishes between results for Academic and Applied math achievement. As this table makes clear, the 12 Conditions generally have much stronger relationships with Academic as compared with Applied math achievement, as well as the 1-year achievement results compared with changes in such achievement over five years.

All 12 Conditions are significantly related to the 1- year measure of Academic Math achievement. Similar and especially strong relationships are evident for Collective Teacher Efficacy (.68), Safe and Orderly Environment (.65), Teacher Trust (.63) and Academic Emphasis (.63). Only Uses of Instructional Time and Organization of Planning for Instruction are significantly related to changes over five years.

Four Conditions are significantly but relatively weakly related to the 1-year measure of Applied Math achievement – Teacher Commitment (.39), Collective Teacher Efficacy (.33), Safe and Orderly Environment (.33) and Collaborative Culture (.31)

**Table 5**

### **Relationships between School, Class and Family Conditions and Student Academic and Applied Math Achievement**

	Gr. 3, 6 & 9 Academic		Gr. 9 Applied	
	1 year	5-year change	1 year	5-year change
<b>Conditions Aggregate</b>	.68**	.16	.30*	.05
School Leadership	.55**	.12	.21	.17
Classroom Instruction .51**	.15		.22	-.05
Use of Instructional Time	.32*	.40**	.11	-.13
Academic Emphasis	.63**	.23	.17	-.07
Disciplinary Climate	.49**	.22	.12	-.11
Teacher Commitment .56**	.12		.39**	.06
Teacher Trust .63**	.14		.23	-.04
Collective Efficacy	.68**	.02	.33*	.11
Organization & Planning	.42**	.30*	.21	.18
Safe & Orderly Environment .65**		.06	.33*	.09
Collaborative Culture .54**	.06		.31*	.10
Family Educational Culture	.48**	-.25	.14	.08

## STUDENT WELL-BEING

Table 6 reports correlations between the 12 Conditions and three estimates of student well-being, an aggregate estimate, as well as separate estimates of well-being in math and well-being in language. In the case of each estimate, correlations are reported with a 1-year measure and a change-over-five-years measure.

The first two columns of data report correlations between the Conditions and the aggregate measures of student well-being. As a whole, the 12 Conditions are moderately related to the 1-year aggregate measure of well-being (.40) but not the five-year change measure. Academic Emphasis (.56) and School Leadership (.49) stand out as the most influential of the 12 Conditions although Teacher Trust (.36) and Collective Teacher Efficacy (.39) also have significant but weaker relationships with well-being. The change-over five-year aggregate measure of well-being is significantly related to Academic Emphasis (.40) and Organization and Planning for Instruction (.29) only.

School Leadership (.34) and Academic Emphasis (.40) are also significantly related to the 1 year measure of well-being in language but none of the 12 Conditions is related to the five-year change in language well-being.

As compared with well-being in language, school, classroom and family Conditions play a much more influential role with well-being in math. Ten of the 12 Conditions are significantly related to the 1-year measure of this outcome and five of the 12 Conditions are significantly related to the change-over-five-years measure.

**Table 6**  
**Relationships between School, Classroom and Family Conditions and Student Well-Being**  
(Correlation Coefficients, N=45)

	Well-Being Aggregate		Well-Being Language		Well-Being Math	
	1 year	5-year change	1 year	5-year change	1 year	5 year change
<b>Conditions Aggregate</b>	.40*	.28	.18	-.02	.48**	.36*
School Leadership	.49**	.22	.34*	-.12	.49**	.36*
Classroom Instruction .21	.19	.02	-.10		.30*	
Instructional Time	.24	.22	.15	.08	.26	.22
Academic Emphasis	.56**	.41**	.40**	.03	.55**	.49**
Disciplinary Climate	.31	.33*	.10	.06	.40**	.38*

Teacher Commitment	.26	.18	.11	.01	.31*	.21
Teacher Trust	.36*	.23	.17	.02	.42**	.27
Collective Efficacy		.39**	.23	.20	.07	.44**
Organization & Planning		.29	.29*	.11	.00	.37*
Safe Environment		.22	.23	.02	.08	.33*
Collaborative Culture	.23	.20	.05	-.03	.31*	.27
Family Ed. Culture		.22	-.12	.09	-.27	.27
						.04

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Table 7 reports correlations between the 12 Conditions and three measures of student engagement - an aggregate estimate, as well as separate estimates of engagement in language and engagement in math. In the case of each estimate, correlations are reported with a 1-year measure and a change-over-five-years measure. Scales separately measuring cognitive, Behavioural and social engagement were combined for this analysis.

The first two columns of data report correlations between the Conditions and the aggregate measures of student engagement. As a whole, the 12 Conditions are moderately related to the 1-year measure of engagement (.42) but not the change-over-five-years measure. School Leadership (.60), Academic Emphasis (.53) and Family Educational Culture (.51) are the most influential of the 12 Conditions, although four other Conditions are also significant. School Leadership (.46), Academic Emphasis (.38) and Collaborative Cultures (.30) have moderate to weak but significant relationships with the change-over-five-years measure of aggregate student engagement.

Results for the 1- year measure of language engagement closely mirror the aggregate engagement results. None of the Conditions is significantly related to the change-over-five-years measure of language engagement. Math engagement (1-year measure) is moderately influenced by 7 of the 12 Conditions, the strongest of which include School Leadership and Academic Emphasis (both .55) along with Family Educational Culture (.45), Collective Teacher Efficacy (.44) and Teacher Trust (.42). Change-over-five-years measures of math engagement are significantly influenced by School Leadership (.44) and Academic Emphasis (.39), as well.

In sum, these results point to the significant role that a large handful of school, classroom and family Conditions has on student engagement. While the influence of School Leadership, Academic Emphasis and Family Educational Cultures stand out in relation to most measures of engagement, Teacher Trust,

Collective Teacher Efficacy and Safe and Orderly Environments constitute a weaker but still significant set of influences.

Results across all four student outcomes, reflect, in the Ontario context, research about the 12 Conditions reported in prior research. These results provide a clearly affirmative answer to the question posed in this section of the report with respect to math and language achievement. Furthermore, these results remain affirmative in relation to both well-being and engagement, outcomes not commonly addressed by prior research, although this affirmation is not as strong as it is in reference to math and language achievement.

**Table 7**  
**Relationships between School, Class and Family Conditions and Student Engagement**  
(Correlation Coefficients, N = 44)

	Engage Agg.		Engage. Lang		Engage Math		
	1 year	5-year	1 year	5-year	1 year	5-year	
Conditions	.42**	.26		.41**	.14	.46**	.30*
School Leadership	.60**	.46**		.50**	.12	.55**	.44**
Classroom Instruction .15	.11		.21	-.01	.19	.15	
Instructional Time	.04	.05		.20	.19	.22	.15
Academic Emphasis	.53**	.38**		.44**	.22	.55**	.39**
Disciplinary Climate	.20	.00		.28	.10	.25	.00
Teacher Commitment .19	.07		.21	.00	.22	.07	
Teacher Trust .39**	.24		.35*	.20	.42**	.25	
Collective Efficacy	.41**	.25		.42**	.14	.44**	.29
Organization & Plan	.26	.20		.23	.12	.32*	.29
Safe & Ord Environment	.32*	.25		.35*	.18	.39**	.29
Collaborative Culture .34*	.30*		.28	.02	.35*	.32*	
Family Ed. Culture	.51**	.17		.39**	.04	.45**	.22

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

Results reported in Tables 4 through 7 demonstrate that, across all 8 indicators of student outcomes (4 outcomes, 2 measures of each), the two most powerful Conditions are Academic Emphasis (significant effects on 7 of the 8 outcome measures) and School Leadership (significant effects on 5 of the 8 outcome measures). While Collective Teacher Efficacy influences only four outcomes, it has the strongest effects, of all 12 Conditions, on one-year measures of language and math achievement. Three additional Conditions have significant effects on 4 of the 8 outcome measures – Disciplinary Climate, Teacher Trust and Collaborative Cultures.

## 4.4

### **To what extent do each of the characteristics of Strong Districts influence those Conditions in schools, classrooms and families with demonstrable effects on student success?**

This question reflects one of the most important assumptions on which the framework for the study is based. That is, districts rarely influence students directly. Rather, districts contribute to student success by helping to create the Conditions in schools, classrooms and families that nurture such success. Justification for this assumption in the present study depends on finding significant correlations between District Characteristics and the 12 Conditions.

Results reported in Table 8 provide such justification in relation to 9 of the 12 Conditions. The effects of the nine district Characteristics on each of the 12 Conditions are described in that table. As the first column (District aggregate) of data in this table indicates, the aggregate measure of district characteristics has significant effects on 6 of the 12 Conditions including Classroom Instruction (.37), Teacher Commitment (.42), Teacher Trust (.45), Collective Teacher Efficacy (.41), Safe and Orderly Environment (.39), and Collaborative Cultures (.44).

From 5 to 8 of the 9 district characteristics contribute significantly to these effects:

- Coherent Instructional Programs has a significant effect on 8 Conditions
- Mission, Vision and Goals has a significant effect on 7 Conditions
- Uses of Evidence has significant effects on 6 Conditions
- Relationships (aggregate) has significant effects on 6 Conditions
- Alignment has significant effects on 5 Conditions
- Professional Leadership has significant effects on 5 Conditions
- Organizational Improvement processes has significant effects on 5 Conditions

Seven of the nine district characteristics (not Professional Development or Elected Leadership) have significant effects on five Conditions -the three teacher dispositions (commitment, trust and efficacy), as well as Safe and Orderly Environments and Collaborative Cultures. These five Conditions seem to be especially susceptible to district influence.

In sum, considering the correlations reported in Table 6, it is reasonable to claim that at least seven of the nine District Characteristics are important influences on consequential Conditions. Most of these seven are significantly related to multiple Conditions while two district characteristic appears to influence only



one Conditions: Mission, Visions and Goals for Students has a significant effect on Academic Emphasis (.31); Coherent Instructional Programs has a significant effect on Disciplinary Climate (.33).

None of the nine district characteristics is significantly related to School Leadership, Uses of Instructional Time, Organization and Planning for Instruction, or Family Educational Culture.

These results raise questions for district leaders about how to make greater contributions to those four Conditions. Results also point to the lack of significant contributions to any of the 12 Conditions of district -sponsored Professional Development and Elected Trustees. While the contribution of Elected Trustees might be considered too diffuse, or its role in school improvement too complex to discern in a study such as this, no such argument can be made for district-sponsored Professional Development. These results warrant a review by district leaders of how best to ensure that this feature of districts can make a more significant contribution to improving both Conditions and those student outcomes (see Table 4) measured by the study.

**Table 8**  
**Effects of District Characteristics on School, Class and Family Conditions**

(Correlation Coefficients, N = 45)

	<b>District Characteristics***</b>									
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Conditions Aggregate</b>	.38**	.41**	.46**	.42**	.16	.34*	.30*	.18	.32*	.31*
School Leadership	.13	.21	.17	.14	-.05	.15	-.01	.08	.21	.03
Classroom Instruction .37**	.32**	.48**	.35*	.16	.27	.27	.24	.38*	.33*	
Use of Instructional Time	.29	.15	.32*	.20	.24	.19	.26	.27	.27	.18
Academic Emphasis	.24	.31*	.28	.22	.09	.24	.10	.12	.28	.17
Disciplinary Climate	.25	.28	.33*	.29	.17	.19	.21	.08	.16	.16
Teacher Commitment .42**	.38*	.47**	.40**	.21	.31*	.34*	.20	.44**	.40**	
Teacher Trust .45**	.42**	.43**	.44**	.27	.42**	.37*	.20*	.43**	.45**	
Collective Efficacy	.41**	.46**	.49**	.53**	.16	.40**	.32*	.10	.36*	.32*
Organization & Planning	.16	.24	.18	.18	.05	.19	.19	.14	-.05	.06
Safe & Orderly Environ.	.39**	.40*	.44**	.53**	.11	.32*	.33*	.21	.28	.32*
Collaborative Culture .44**	.47**	.51**	.50**	.24	.37*	.32*	.20	.33*	.38*	
Family Ed. Culture	.09	.21	.20	.191	-.09	.12	.07	-.12	.04	.13

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

\*\*\* 1 = District Aggregate

2 = Mission, Vision, Goals

6 = Professional Leadership Development

7 = Alignment

3 = *Coherent Instructional Guidance*

8 = *Elected Leadership*

4 = *Use of Evidence*

9 = *Learning-oriented improvement processes*

5 = *Professional Development*

10 = *Relationships*

## 4.5

### **How large are the direct and indirect effects of Strong District Characteristics on Student Outcomes?**

#### **DIRECT EFFECTS**

The term “direct effects”, as it appears in this question, should not be interpreted literally. Almost everything a district does is, in some way, filtered through or mediated by other Conditions much closer to the real experiences of students. Data reported in this section, however, does not take any of those Conditions into account. Typically, such direct effects estimates underrepresent actual effects, as compared with analyses that also include measures of mediating Conditions.

Table 9 reports correlations between each of the nine district characteristics and four student outcome measures. There are two sets of correlations reported for each of the four student outcome measures, a 1-year measure and a 5-year change measure.

The first line of data in Table 9 indicates significant and similar size correlations between the aggregate measure of district characteristics and the 1-year measures of Language (.36) and Math (.30) achievement. District characteristics do not have a significant effect on (or relationship with) changes in math and language achievement over five years or on any of the measures of student well-being and engagement. Indeed, many of the correlations between district characteristics and the well-being and engagement measures are negative, albeit not significantly so.

Three of the 9 district characteristics have significant direct effects on both Language and Math achievement – Mission, Vision and Goals (.43 and .39), Coherent Instructional Programs (.41 and .40) and Organizational Improvement Processes (.41 and .33). An additional three characteristics have significant effects on Language alone - Uses of Evidence (.34), Professional leadership (.30) and Relationships (.35).

In sum, none of the nine district characteristics have significant direct effects on changes- over-five-years in any of the student outcomes included in the study and none of these characteristics had significant effects on student well-being or engagement. However, most of the nine district characteristics (all but Professional Development and Elected Trustees) have significant direct effects on the one-year measure of

Language achievement and two of the nine have significant effects on the one-year measure of Math achievement: (a) Mission, Vision and Goals and (b) Coherent Instructional Guidance.

**Table 9**  
**Direct Effects of District Characteristics on Student Outcomes**

	Language		Mathematics		Well-Being*		Engagement**	
	1 year	5 year	1 year	5 year	1 year	5 year	1 year	5 year
<b>Characteristics Aggregate</b>	<b>.36*</b>	<b>-.01</b>	<b>.30*</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.13</b>	<b>.00</b>	<b>-.02</b>	<b>-.14</b>
Beliefs & Vision for Stud.	.43**	-.15	.39**	.04	.20	.04	.14	.02
Coherent Instruct. Program	.41**	-.13	.40**	.04	.15	.00	-.02	-.17
Use of Evidence	.34**	.03	.27	-.01	.06	-.00	.14	.08
Professional Development	.09	-.00	.09	.12	.00	-.03	-.14	-.19
Professional Leadership	.30*	-.07	.26	.07	.23	-.01	.12	.00
Extent of Alignment	.24	.14	.18	.09	.03	.04	-.13	-.25
Elected Leadership	.11	.04	.09	.07	.06	.06	-.18	-.21
Organizational Imp. Process	.41**	.00	.33*	.03	.17	-.01	-.00	-.11
Relationships Aggregate	.35*	.06	.20	-.09	.03	-.05	-.06	-.22

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

\*Well-being here is the mean of well-being in language & math.

\*\*Engagement includes engagement in language, math (cognitive, social & behavioural combined)

## A COMPARISON OF 2017 AND 2010 RESULTS

One of the overall goals of this study was to determine the extent to which results from the 2010 study of high performing Ontario districts about the direct effects of district characteristics on students' math and language achievement could be replicated. The 2010 study (Leithwood, 2011; Leithwood & Azah, 2016) did find greater direct effects of district characteristics on five-year change scores in math and language than did the 2017 study. Table 10 compares results of the two studies on one-year measures of math and language.

**Table 10**

**Direct Effects of District Characteristics on Student Outcomes:  
A Comparison of 2017 and 2010 Results**

<b>District Characteristics</b>	<b>1-year Math</b>		<b>1-year Language</b>	
	<b>2017</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2010</b>
Mission, Vision and Goals for Students	.39	.41	.43	.38
Coherent Instructional Guidance	.40	.36	.41	.43
Uses of Evidence	.27	.30	.34	.37
Professional Development all members	.09	.24	.09	.33
Alignment	.18	.34	.24	.35
Learning-oriented improve processes	.33	-.07	.41	-.04
Professional Leadership	.26	-.00	.30	-.02
Elected Leadership	.09	.08	.11	-.01
Relationships Aggregate	.20	.18	.35	.13

Both studies found similar, practically meaningful effects of four district characteristics on one-year measures of both math and language achievement: Mission, Vision and Goals, Coherent Instructional Guidance, Uses of Evidence, and Alignment. Weak effects on both math and language achievement were reported by both studies for Elected Leadership. The 2017 study reported much stronger effects for Professional Leadership and Learning-oriented Improvement Processes on both math and language than did the 2010 study, while the opposite was true for Professional Development.

In sum, this study largely replicates the results of the 2010 study for five of the nine district characteristics and provides justification, not found in the 2010 study, for Professional Leadership and Learning-oriented Improvement Processes.

## **INDIRECT EFFECTS**

To explore the indirect effects of district characteristic on student outcomes, Power Indices were calculated with a narrow focus only on mathematics, currently a key priority in the province<sup>10</sup>. As a reminder, Power Indices in Table 11 were calculated by multiplying the correlations between each of the 12 Condition and math achievement and the correlations between each of the nine district characteristics

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<sup>10</sup> Power Indices were calculated for student well-being also but none achieved close to the .20 level judged to be practically meaningful.

and each of the 12 Conditions. For example, the correlation between School Leadership and academic math achievement is .55 (see Table 5) and the correlation between Mission, Vision and Goals for students and School Leadership is .21 (see Table 9). The power index resulting from the multiplication of these two correlations is .12 (top left cell of Table 11)

As a means of focusing on the most promising district paths to improving students' math achievement, we limit our discussion to Power Indices at the .20 level and beyond. Of 108 Power Indices in Table 11, 32 achieve this standard (an additional four are either .18 or .19). None of these 32 Power Indices, however, are associated with School Leadership, Uses of Instructional Time, Disciplinary Climate, Organization and Planning for Instruction or Family Educational Cultures. Evidence reported earlier indicates that all five of these Conditions have significant relationship with math achievement. The Power Indices suggest that districts were not having much influence on student math achievement through these five Conditions at the time of data collection, not that they could not nor should not in the future with some intentional action by districts. In particular, Family Educational Culture is associated with very weak Power Indices but its effects can be quite significant primarily for the math achievement of students in challenging circumstances. With equity of achievement as a primary provincial goal for education, this Condition should continue to be considered very important for district improvement purposes.

Seven of the remaining 12 school, classroom and family Conditions are associated with Power Indices at or above .20 and point to three distinct paths (adopting labels from LSA's theory of action) that districts are pursuing with some success in their math improvement efforts.

*The Emotions Path.* The most powerful district path to improved math achievement includes a cluster of three teacher dispositions - Teacher Trust, Collective Teacher Efficacy, and Teacher Commitment – hence the “Emotions” label. Seven of the district characteristics have some influence on the cluster of Conditions defining this path. So, work toward improving any of these seven should be done in ways likely to instill Teacher Trust, commitment to their district's expectations for student achievement in math along with a sense of collective efficacy about accomplishing those expectations. High levels of trust and commitment will be promoted by transparency about existing approaches to math instruction, motivation to work with others to find more effective practices and willingness to risk trying promising new practices. Teacher Trust and commitment will develop to the extent that teachers understand and share the district's expectations for student success in math and participate in district decision making about the most promising approaches to math instruction. Teachers sense of collective efficacy will develop as teachers come to believe that the professional development available to them contributes to the capacities

they need to improve math achievement among their students and that the district's policies, procedures and allocation of resources are closely aligned with - and enable - their efforts to improve students' math achievement.

**Table 11**

**Power Indices for Academic Math Achievement**

<b>Conditions</b>	Vision	Coh. Inst.	Eviden ce	PD	Align	Elect Lead	Prof Lead	LOIP	Rel
School Leader	.12	.19	.07	.03	.05	.04	.08	.12	.02
Classroom Instruction	.16	<b>.25</b>	.18	.08	.14	.12	.14	<b>.20</b>	.17
Uses of Instructional Time	.05	.10	.06	.08	.08	.09	.06	.09	.06
Academic Emphasis	<b>.20</b>	.18	.14	.06	.06	.08	.15	.18	.11
Disciplinary Climate	.14	.16	.14	.08	.10	.04	.09	.08	.08
Teacher Commitment	<b>.21</b>	<b>.21</b>	<b>.26</b>	.12	.19	.11	.17	<b>.25</b>	<b>.22</b>
Teacher Trust	<b>.26</b>	<b>.26</b>	<b>.27</b>	.17	<b>.23</b>	.13	<b>.26</b>	<b>.27</b>	<b>.28</b>
Collective Efficacy	<b>.31</b>	<b>.31</b>	<b>.33</b>	.11	<b>.22</b>	.07	<b>.27</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>.22</b>
Org & Plan	.10	.10	.08	.02	.08	.06	.08	.04	.03
Safe Environ.	<b>.26</b>	<b>.26</b>	<b>.29</b>	.07	<b>.21</b>	.14	<b>.21</b>	.18	<b>.21</b>
Collab culture	<b>.25</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>.28</b>	.13	.17	.11	<b>.20</b>	.18	<b>.21</b>
FES	.10	.10	.09	.04	.03	.04	.06	.02	.06

*The Organization Path.* A second less powerful cluster of related Conditions includes Safe and Orderly Environments and Collaborative Cultures. Approximately the same district characteristics have some influence on these Conditions as on Conditions on the Emotions path. District efforts to improve student math achievement should include explicitly embedding instructional expectations about math in districts' visions, missions and goals for students, providing coherent but flexible instructional guidance to schools about math instruction, especially guidance that is "balanced", that is, guidance that includes both district advice about promising instructional practices and considerable local autonomy about whether and how to implement those practices. This path relies on the use of multiple sources of evidence to (a) identify those components of the math curriculum needing focused attention (b) locate evidence about the most promising approaches to instruction related to those components and (c) monitor the challenges and successes associated with implementing improved math instruction in classrooms.

*The Rational Path.* The third and least powerful, but still significant, of the three clusters of related Conditions includes Academic Emphasis and Classroom Instruction. Four of the nine district characteristics have some influence (significant or close to significant) on these two Conditions. Two of these district characteristics also influence the Emotions Path and two the Organizational path. Mission, Vision and Goals for Students, Coherent Instruction Guidance and Learning-oriented Improvement Processes are an especially critical sub-set of the 9 characteristics for districts aiming to improve their students' math achievement.

## **DISTRICT-LEVEL LEADERS INFLUENCE ON OTHER DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS**

The status of district characteristics measured in this study is undoubtedly influenced by many "forces," for example: constraints and opportunities provided by the province, district cultures which may have deep historical roots, and both strong and sometimes contradictory community expectations. District characteristics most certainly interact in complex ways, as well. However, district leadership, including both professional and elected leadership, is among the influences held most directly accountable for the status of such characteristics as well as valued student outcomes. Keep in mind that "professional" sources of leadership are multiple and include district efforts to recruit, select, develop and assess leaders at both school and district levels in keeping with the conception of a "district" described in the first paragraph of this report.

Although results described in Table 3 report almost no direct effects of leadership (either source) on student outcomes, expecting direct effects is neither reasonable nor consistent with relevant leadership theory and evidence. Even the effect of school-level leadership on student achievement is now widely understood to be largely mediated by school and classroom Conditions. It is, however, quite reasonable to expect significant district leadership effects on other district characteristics.

Table 12 summarizes the results of examining the effects of district leadership (professional and elected) on the status of other district characteristics. These data indicate that both sources of district leadership combined (far right column) have significant moderate to strong effects on all other district characteristics. The strongest effects are on three district characteristics - Mission, Vision, and Goals (.73), Professional Development (.74) and Alignment (.72). Correlations between Professional and Elected Leadership and other district characteristics, reported in the two middle columns of Table 12, indicate stronger effects of Professional as compared with Elected Leadership on all district characteristics.

In sum, results suggest that district leadership has quite significant effects on features of the organization which are known to improve student achievement. Furthermore, the extent to which Elected Leadership is related to, or influences, important characteristics of districts may come as a surprise to those who remain skeptical about the value that trustees add to districts' efforts to improve student achievement when they enact their policy-oriented roles as the framework for this study suggests is most effective.

**Table 12**

**Effects of Professional and Elected Sources of Leadership on other District Characteristics**

	Professional	Elected	Combined
Mission, Vision, Goals	.74**	.58**	.73**
Coherent Instructional Program	.77**	.47**	.68**
Uses of Evidence	.73**	.43**	.63**
Professional Development	.78**	.56**	.74**
Extent of District/District's Alignment	.76**	.54**	.72**
Organizational Improvement Processes	.55**	.48**	.58**
Relationships (aggregate)	.64**	.59**	.69**

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01



## 4.6

### **How large are the direct and indirect effects of School Leadership on student outcomes?**

School Leadership is one of the 12 school, classroom and family Conditions in the framework for the study. However, it is of significant interest to educational policy makers and reformers premised on the now widely-held belief that School Leadership makes a significant indirect contribution to student success (e.g., Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al, 2010).

#### **DIRECT EFFECTS**

Tables 4 through 7, above, reported the direct effects of School Leadership on the four sets of student outcomes, correlations of .50 for Language, .55 for Academic Math, .21 for Applied Math, .49 for the aggregate Well-Being Measure and .60 for the aggregate Student Engagement measure. These results indicate that the direct effects of School Leadership rank at approximately the mid-point among all 12 Conditions for Language, Academic Math (6 Conditions have weaker effects) and Applied Math (5 Conditions have weaker effects). The direct effects of School Leadership on student Well-Being are stronger than all other Conditions except Academic Emphasis (.49 compared to .56) and the strongest of the Conditions for student engagement.

#### **INDIRECT EFFECTS**

Notwithstanding the impressive direct effects of School Leadership on student outcomes, School Leadership effects on students are mostly indirect raising a question about which other Conditions in schools, classrooms and families are most susceptible to influence by School Leaders. Table 13 provides the first half of the answer to this question. This table indicates that all relationships between School Leadership and other Conditions are moderately to highly significant, the aggregate correlations being .57. While this confirms much earlier evidence about the key role of school-level leadership, it also points to a challenge for district leaders since, as Table 8 indicated, none of the nine district Characteristics had any appreciable effect on School Leadership; on average, districts seem to be making very little contribution to the quality of school leadership or they are doing so in ways not measured by this study

**Table 13**

**Relationships between School Leadership and Other  
School, Classroom and Family Conditions**

<b>Conditions</b>	<b>School Leadership</b>
Conditions Aggregate (without leadership)	.57**
Academic Emphasis	.77**
Teacher Trust in Others	.68**
Organization of Planning and Instructional Time	.66**
Collaborative Cultures and Structures	.65**
Classroom Instruction	.59**
Teacher Commitment	.58**
Instructional Time	.53**
Teacher Collective Efficacy	.51**
Family Educational Culture	.50**
Safe and Orderly Environment	.50**
Disciplinary Climate	.35*

\*\*p<0.01 level; \*p<.05

To complete answering the question about indirect School Leadership effects, a series of Power Indices were calculated. Table 14, reports the results of those calculations - estimates of the indirect effects of School Leadership on the five student outcomes included in the study, mediated by each of the remaining 11 school, classroom and family Conditions<sup>11</sup>

**Table 14**

**Indirect Effects of School Leadership on Four Student Outcomes**

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<sup>11</sup> As a reminder, these indices are the product of multiplying the correlations between each of the four student outcomes and each of the school, classroom and family Conditions by the correlations between School Leadership and each of the 11 other Conditions. For example, the top left cell of the Table reports a relatively large power index of .30 for the indirect effects of School Leadership on Academic Math achievement. This is the product of multiplying the correlation between School Leadership and Classroom Instruction (.59 – see Table 13) with the correlation between Classroom Instruction and Academic Math achievement (.51). This Power Index is  $.59 \times .51 = .30$ . As a rule of thumb for interpreting the practical importance of these indices, we adopted the same rule of thumb used for interpreting the practical importance of effect sizes, so the discussion of data in Table 14 is limited to Power Indices of .20 or greater.

<b>School, Classroom and Family Conditions</b>	<b>Student Outcomes</b>				
	<b>Math Academic</b>	<b>Math Applied</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Well-Being</b>	<b>Engagement</b>
Classroom Instruction	.30	.13	.29	.12	.09
Uses of instructional time	.17	.06	.13	.13	.04
Academic Emphasis	.49	.13	.45	.43	.41
Disciplinary Climate	.17	.04	.16	.11	.07
Teacher Commitment	.32	.23	.28	.15	.11
Teacher Trust	.43	.15	.41	.25	.27
Collective efficacy	.35	.17	.32	.20	.21
Org & Plan	.28	.14	.19	.19	.17
Safe Environ.	.33	.17	.32	.11	.16
Collab culture	.35	.20	.31	.15	.22
FES	.24	.07	.29	.11	.26

Across all five student outcomes, School Leadership has the largest impact by improving Academic Emphasis in schools, followed by Teacher Trust in Others, Collective Teacher Efficacy and Teacher Commitment. Academic Math is especially susceptible to School Leadership when it successfully improves one or more of those four Conditions, in addition to Safe and Orderly Environments and Collaborative Cultures. Applied Math is much less susceptible to School Leadership, although some improvement seems likely by influencing the status of Collaborative Cultures (.20) and Teacher Commitment (.23).

Language outcomes are especially sensitive to School Leadership influence with improvements to at least 8 of the 12 Conditions likely to pay off in greater achievement. Increases in Student Well-Being seem likely when School Leadership nurture improvements in Academic Emphasis (.43) but also Teacher Trust

(.25) and Collective Teacher Efficacy (.20). Finally, School Leadership interventions with 5 other Conditions are associated with Student Engagement - Academic Emphasis (.41), Teacher Trust (.27), Collective Teacher Efficacy (.21), Collaborative Cultures (.22) and Family Educational Cultures (.26).

## 4.7

### Is there a significant relationship between student achievement in math and language and student well-being and engagement?

Table 15 reports relationships between student achievement in math and language and both student well-being and student engagement. Both well-being and engagement measures referred to in this table are based on those scales specific to the subject domain, as explained earlier in the report. For example, the first correlation in the table (.38) is the correlation between the 1 year language achievement score and the 1 year score for well-being in language.

Results concerned with well-being indicate mostly moderate to strong relationships between both 1-year and change-over-5-years achievement scores in mathematics (Academic and Applied) and a significant but weak relationship between 1-year well-being scores and 1-year language scores. One-year engagement scores are moderately (.47) to strongly (.71) related to 1-year language and 1- year math achievement only.

In sum, while both well-being and engagement are positively related to some measures of achievement, well-being and math achievement are especially tightly linked.

**Table 15**

#### Relationships between Well-Being, Engagement and Achievement

	Well-Being		Engagement	
	1 year	5-year change	1 year	5-year change
<b>Grades 3 &amp; 6 Language</b>				
Achievement 1 year	.38*	.10	.47**	.14
Achievement 5-year change	-.19	.32*	-.05	.16
<b>Grades 3, 6 &amp; 9 Academic Mathematics</b>				
Achievement 1 year	.76**	.35*	.71**	.27
Achievement 5-year change	.51**	.64**	.08	.15
<b>Grade 9 Applied Mathematics</b>				
Achievement 1 year	.66**	.53**	.03	-.05

## 4.8

### How do school leaders understand their district's work and its' contribution to their school improvement efforts?

This section summarizes the responses of 48 principals and vice-principles from across the province to a series of ten questions about the work of their districts. The first question was about what school leaders found most and least helpful while each of the nine remaining questions explored the current status and value of one of the Strong District characteristics. For a response to be included in this summary, it had to be provided by at least three interviewees, although many more interviewees provided most of the response included in the summary.

#### 8.1 THE MOST AND LEAST HELPFUL DISTRICT INITIATIVES

The initial question asked interviewees about initiatives taken by their districts, during the current year, that have been most and least helpful to their school improvement efforts and to explain their assessment of those initiatives.

Two sets of district initiatives or practices were identified by principals and vice-principals as especially helpful to their work in schools – provision of opportunities to further develop their own expertise, along with access to supplemental expertise, and flexibility by districts in determining when to exercise central control and when to provide more autonomy to schools.

Opportunities to further develop one's expertise and access supplemental expertise took six forms:

- *Membership on a Principal Learning Team.* Interviewees strongly valued their membership in district-based networks as sources of capacity development for instructional leadership. Such membership allowed one to share ideas and to learn about best practices from one's peers. "Math Pods" were a version of such networks created in at least one district. These pods clarified the priority to be given to improving math achievement and organized school collaboration on the basis of need rather than geography.
- *One-on-one professional conversations with superintendent.* Some interviewees had frequent contact with their superintendents. Such contact was viewed as an important source of professional

development about school improvement, as well as a source of additional support from the district for improvement efforts.

- *School based instructional rounds.* Prevalent in some districts in the province, instructional rounds were viewed as a useful form of capacity building by some interviewees.
- *Openness and encouragement of professional learning opportunities through PD funds and Ministry initiatives for teaching staffs.* These sources of professional development provided funds for release time to engage in professional development
- *Monthly meetings with senior administrator (Director and Superintendents) meetings with all principals, vice principals and senior district leaders.* The typically mandatory attendance required at such meetings forced busy school leaders to take time out once a month to connect with others outside their own schools and to better understand actions being taken by their own districts and by the province. These meetings were valued especially when they included vice-principals. As well, such meetings often provided school-level leaders opportunities for participation in district-wide decision making, opportunities viewed as quite helpful in their subsequent work in schools.
- *Access to instructional coaches and consultants.* Such access reduced the anxiety principals and vice-principals sometimes experienced as expectations for improvement in their schools exceeded the limits of their own professional knowledge and skill.

Flexible approaches by districts to school autonomy and central direction were valued for purposes of instructional improvement, as well as for responding to unexpected events. About instructional improvement, interviewees spoke at length about the value they attributed to opportunities for their schools and their teachers to engage in such work based on needs detected in their own schools and classrooms. Districts were especially helpful when they allowed for such local autonomy within a set of broad central expectations and when they provided professional development time and expertise specifically designed to support school priorities within the districts' broad central priorities and expectations.

About unexpected events, districts' flexible approaches to school autonomy and central direction were also valued when they extended to managing the labour disruptions that had occurred in the province during the year. Respondents valued recognition, on the part of their districts, that the current years had not been "typical" and that schools needed the freedom to decide on their own priorities. Respondents also

valued constant communication with district leaders on how to manage the labour disruptions and how principals could “get things back on track”.

Some of the initiatives identified by respondents as “most helpful” were among district initiatives also viewed as “least helpful”. On the surface, this contradiction could be explained as simply differences of opinion to be expected amongst a large group of people. A more fundamental explanation, however, is the perceived nature or quality of a district initiative as part of school leaders’ responses to the challenges they faced in their own schools. In some districts, and among significant numbers of respondents, least helpful district initiatives included:

- The nature of some district-provided professional development;
- Some of the directions mandated by the Ministry of Education;
- Excessive withdrawal of principals for meetings out of their own schools;
- Initiative overload by districts;
- Insufficient money and time for professional development in schools.

## **8.2 MISSION, VISION AND GOALS**

The introduction to questions about this Strong District characteristic was as follows: “Many districts go through some process to establish a set of overall directions for the district often including a mission, a vision and sometimes more specific goals intended to serve as priorities for schools in their improvement work”. Interviewees were then asked to (a) briefly describe what their district had done about this and (b) how it had influenced, either positively or negatively, the school improvement work of the interviewee and her/his staff.

Some respondents worked in districts which had recently been through a process to establish a new or renewed Mission, Vision and Goals while others were in districts whose primary goal was to sustain and refresh a well-established Mission, Vision and Goals and make it an effective resource for decision making. In both circumstances, the key elements of what was involved when the process and outcome was useful for school leaders was the same: there was broad participation; the outcome was memorable and meaningful; it was frequently invoked; and periodically or continuously revisited.

*Broad participation.* The modal process for creating a widely shared Mission, Vision and Goals for Students in districts included significant participation by most stakeholder groups, including diverse groups of parents and students. For some stakeholders this participation was direct, through membership

on a strategic planning committee, for example, while others participated by responding to surveys often online. The following three excerpts indicate just how extensive this participation could be.

*We just went through a strategic planning process where they asked for inputs from all stakeholders. They had surveys that went out to parents, I know they involve trustees, students, union reps, facilities workers, care takers. And I know they had something electronic where they were gathering information. Then they had meetings where they collaborated in building a strategic plan.*

*So, our district, [with a new director] engaged in a process for a new strategic plan from 2016 to 2019. And, part of her approach ....was to survey parents, teachers, administrators, trustees and the community to get feedback in terms of specific directions for [district name]. And so, she did that in a very collaborative way and really involved all the partners in a strategic direction. While the mission statement itself is really the same [as the previous one], the vision and the strategic plan itself is evolving and will be in place for September.*

*...it was trustees, there were teachers, principals and students all in the community and geographically diverse to the area of the district. So there was a good cross section. My superintended were there as a part of it, there was an outside consultant hired to [manage the process] so that people in the district can participate... I think all of the employee groups were allowed to nominate folks to [a 40 member] committee. I was there on behalf of the Ontario Principal's Council and the local executive and so the union had a voice. Some principals were asked to chose students to participate.*

*Memorable.* If statements intended to capture district priorities are to be useful to school leaders, they must be memorable (and meaningful), according to interviewees. Two principals explained:

*When our current director came in, she very quickly established a committee of all stakeholders and the idea was the vision statement that we had for the district was very wordy, was very long and no one knew it anyway. She wanted something which was going to be short, was going to be meaningful and could be remembered. [Knowing the mission statement] was actually an expectation whenever the principals were at the directors meeting. As a result, there are 46 of us who can all say [the district mission statement] It was repeated once a month at minimum.*

*I really like what our district has done on our mission and vision.....I carry it around and share it with others .... When I have it laid out like this then I can connect it to my School Improvement Plan. Numeracy, Literacy, Catholicity and Well Being I understand are our focus. Look at my budget and what do we need to accomplish and I feel like each year we will focus on a different one.*

*Frequently invoked.* Visions, Missions and Goals for Students can serve purely symbolic purposes.

However, in districts where they are useful to school leaders they are a constant part of the conversation - in principals' meetings, with trustees and other contexts about priorities; they are also key criteria used in decision making. Three of the principals who made this claim said:

*Priority areas are clearly defined and referenced at each principals meeting.*



*...at our principals' meetings, we are constantly out for the feedback on initiatives how things are going and I think that's really important that is ongoing throughout the year as opposed to once every two years or at the beginning of the year.*

*At the beginning of every year we spent a fair amount of time going over our direction you want to call it mission, strategic plan, goals, you could have different names but we had good input into the district improvement plan*

*Our director and superintendent consistently share with us our district results, our district improvement plan. Typically, that is done in August prior to the start of our school year and then it's done again throughout the year as needed or as new information becomes available. I think that is something our district is very good at. It is something that I have always found useful doing our own planning at the school level.*

*Dynamic.* According to the interviewees, when strategic plans and the Missions, Visions and Goals for Students they embody are useful to school leaders, they are not static, they continue to evolve in order to remain relevant to Conditions in schools which, of course, also evolve. Two interviewees explained as follows:

*[district staff] are constantly gathering data throughout the school year from these committees and from the surveys that they have put out in order to find out what's important for people, what's important within their building, what's important for their children.*

*[the Mission, Vision and Goals for Students] was recently revised ...It was developed in consultation with staff, that was brought to senior admin meetings by our director and we had input and it was revised and changed. It was also in consultation with students, parents, and the public. So that, our mission and vision statement is something that was, it took time to develop and it definitely evolved from where it started.*

*Aligned.* Useful approaches to this characteristic, according to interviewees, also entail careful alignment between Ministry priorities and district improvement plans as well as alignment between district plans and school improvement plans. Noted four interviewees:

*We have done a lot in the last couple of years with regards to making sure we have alignment between our district improvement plan and ministry priorities.*

*There has been a concerted effort to mesh the district improvement plan and the strategic plan ... Our school improvement plan was based on the district-wide theory of action and its' goals. We are learning to know and understand each of our learners so that instruction and assessment are differentiated in response to our learners' strengths, needs and prior learning. We are going from the ministry's priorities to the district improvement plan to our school improvement plan.*

*The biggest part that our district has done a good job with, is to try to ensure that we are aligning those priorities with our own priorities. So if our district is aligning their priorities with the multi-year strategic plan, we need to align our school improvement plan with those, taking into consideration other data we have at our school.*

*Our administration team often sets priorities for a year. The mission and vision of the district was established probably about five years ago. And pretty much everything that we do is tailored towards our mission and our vision. We had our directors meeting last week and we had conversations about that. Not all of our principals were aware of what our mission and vision was. I know our director has said that, it's a job that he has to do better is when initiatives are coming out and how is it fitting in within our mission and our vision, in order to keep us streamlined make sure our priorities are intact.*

**Summary.** Interview evidence indicated that the modal process in districts for creating a widely shared Mission, Vision and Goals for Students includes significant participation by most stakeholder groups, including diverse groups of parents and students. For some stakeholders this participation was direct, through membership on a strategic planning committee, for example, while others participated by responding to surveys often online. If statements intended to capture district priorities are to be useful to school leaders, furthermore, they must be memorable (and meaningful), as well as a constant part of the conversation about priorities in principals' meetings, with trustees and in other relevant contexts. Useful statements of directions and priorities serve as key criteria used in decision making and continue to evolve in order to remain relevant to Conditions in schools which, of course, also evolve. Useful approaches to this district characteristic also entail careful alignment between ministry priorities and district improvement plans, as well as alignment between district and school improvement plans

### **8.3 COHERENT APPROACHES TO INSTRUCTION**

The introduction to questions about this Strong District characteristic was as follows: "One way or another, districts often provide guidance to school staffs about priorities for their instructional work, as well as advocate for particular approaches to instruction to be used by teachers. What has your district done about this and what influence has it had on you're the work of you and your staff?"

This Strong District characteristic encompasses potential efforts by districts to insist that all schools use similar approaches to instruction; indeed, the review of research which served as the original source of this characteristic described many districts doing just that with considerable success (a low discretion approach). But this characteristic also allows approaches that rely on considerably more discretion and control by school leaders, although not complete autonomy (a balanced discretion approach). Interviewees provided examples of both approaches.

*Low discretion approaches.* Two examples of low discretion approaches were evident from the interviews. One of these approaches was the writing of a document outlining how teachers should go about improving their math instruction.

*Goal setting for our school improvement plan is linked to goal setting in our district improvement plan goal around maths. So, our superintendent, along with our really highly skilled maths team, have put together a document that I think is about a 30 pages in length math. It's really well-laid out in terms of our priority for maths.*

A second example of a low discretion approach was a district that had adopted inquiry-based approaches to student learning and collaborative inquiry approaches to staff learning and school improvement across most areas of the curriculum. Interviewees from this district described this approach as follows:

*Our district has explicitly said that inquiry based learning is the model for the district and really embraced the idea of high order thinking skills. So, it's been made very clear what the expectations are.*

*The district did a great job about 1.5 years ago pulling out and encouraging collaborative inquiries related to the School Effectiveness Framework and determining what are your urgent learning needs and what changes would an English department agree to make for example. We have had staff members meet with other schools to share the same work.*

*Through the Collaborative Inquiry for Learning process, we've had teachers focus on one area of the curriculum within their departments and really help the kids to focus on literacy skills and in the end, then do better on the literacy test. And we have seen the results gets better. In the future, we will buy more into this. So, the whole CIL process, which really is framed by the school improvement process and the district improvement plan, has been a positive one in the end for that particular area of the curriculum.*

*...through learning cycles, the district is providing guidance. In fact, it's not necessarily guidance it's fairly prescribed. The structure is prescribed anyways. We do have some latitude in terms of our focus inside of learning cycles but learning cycle are "a you shall thing" ...in the district. You shall do learning cycles...give me the names of four of your teachers or five of your teachers that shall participate in learning cycle. Now, once we are in learning cycle, the consultants will lead them will give us an opportunity to come up with a focus.*

Although providing little discretion for staffs, these low discretion approaches were viewed as quite helpful to most respondents who spoke about them. A small number of respondents, however, were concerned about loss of autonomy in local decisions about instructional improvement.

Aside from these two low discretion approaches to creating coherent approaches to instruction, the remaining interviewees described approaches that aimed for a balance of central direction and local autonomy; central control over the priorities for improvement and considerable autonomy (with district support) for school leaders to decide how those priorities were to be realized in individual schools.

*Balanced discretion approaches.* Most of the balanced discretion approaches to developing instructional coherence across districts made considerable use of district improvement plans, regularly reviewed district priorities with school leaders, privileged instructional forms of leadership and carefully aligned professional development with district and school priorities.

*Use of district improvement plan.* Districts took steps to ensure that their district improvement plans were familiar to, and regularly reviewed with, school leaders

*The district improvement plan that is presented each year at the principal's conference, that's when we see, we look at the last year's plan and look at this year's plan and see where the changing initiatives are. And that sets the priorities for us. Like I said, it informs our SIPSA*

*For my staff, what they like is that the district improvement plan is laid out well for us at the very beginning of the year. We start right off with that in our hands on our first PA day before school starts and that gives principals a mindset we need in August. We have a chance to go over the data that has been made available to us, we have the district's mind set very clear as to where the district is going. [District leaders] are very organized. I find that when we get to that PA day in September, staff feel that their voices were heard, that what the district is sharing in their district improvement plan is very much aligned with what we find in each of our buildings.*

*Regular review of priorities.* District used regularly scheduled meetings to reinforce high priority goals for student identified in the district's strategic and district improvement plan. For example:

*In our area meetings, we get clear direction through the district improvement plan which talks about the improvement of elementary math's and sets clear goals and measurable goals for that so in every meeting that we have we are called out of our school."*

*"I think that for my staff, what they like first of all is that the district improvement plan is laid out well for us at the very beginning of the year, so that we start right off with that in our hands on our first PA day before school starts and that gives principals a mindset we need in August. We have a chance to go over the data that has been made available to us, we have the district's mind set very clear in our heads as to where they are going, they are very organized. I find that way and then when we get to that PA day in September, I think staff feel that their voices were heard, that what the district is sharing in their district improvement plan is very much aligned with what we find in each of our building."*

*Privilege instructional leadership.* Districts insisted that school leaders focus their efforts on improving instruction as their main priority. For example:

*In our senior admin meetings, our district does provide some time, usually half a day, to focus our attention on instructional leadership strategies.*

*We also had a school instructional leader and support person at my school. At meetings, she would be there to support the inquiry approach. The Student Success principal at the district would work through facilitating the conversation and lead this with the Student Success person and the instructional lead coordinator. Their role is not teaching but more of a consultant.*

*Align professional development and focus resources.* In districts using a balanced approach to developing instructional coherence, a key "lever" was professional development about the capacities needed to make progress on high priority goals for students identified in the district's strategic plan and/or district improvement plan. As several interviews illustrated:

*We have almost monthly our directors meeting and at these meetings a large component of the day is dedicated to professional development for principals. These sessions are either run by the superintended of program or they bring in consultants or other folks from across the province. This gives us a really great starting point for our PD with staffs. It also gives us a script for PD so that messaging is consistent across the district.*

*When we have principal meetings, sometimes the math leaders will do an activity with us that we can use in our schools,*

*We had a lot of PD both through staff and principal and vice principal groups but separately. We also had a consultant attached to the school, so our vision and what our maths program should look like was clarified. However, it's not "thou shalt do this". It was more about learning together and ways to make change where...the onset was about problem solving in maths. Seven years ago, it was a whole different approach.*

*For the past number of years, so we've had student success teachers ...we have one available to us and another school, so we share her. But she's here to support teachers in their classrooms for periods of time, not just reading strategies but any effort from kindergarten to grade 8 within the school and for longer periods of time. And we connect. She talks with me, we connect with the school improvement plan so we are making sure that we are also tied to that as well.*

*Summary.* Coherent Instructional Guidance, according to interviewees, encompasses efforts by districts to encourage all schools to use either similar approaches to instruction or approaches which schools themselves could credibly justify as "effective. This district characteristic allows for centrally determined approaches, as well as approaches that rely on considerably more discretion and control by school leaders, although not complete autonomy (balanced discretion). Interviewees provided examples of both approaches.

#### **8.4 DELIBERATE AND CONSISTENT USE OF MULTIPLE SOURCES OF EVIDENCE TO INFORM DECISIONS**

The introduction to questions about this district characteristic was as follows: "The past dozen years has witnessed a very large increase in the importance attached to the use of systematically collected evidence to inform decision making in both schools and districts. This is evidence sometimes provided by the province (e.g., EQAO results), sometimes by districts and sometimes by schools themselves (e.g., parent surveys). What has your district done about uses of evidence and how has this influenced the work of you and your staff?

Interview evidence indicates that this characteristic encompasses the collaborative analysis of provincial test data across district and in schools, extending the types of data used for school improvement, and expanding the focus of data beyond ends to means. Interviewees also reported their districts attempting to make data more accessible to schools and providing significant resources to support use of data in schools

*Collaborative analysis of provincial test data across district and in schools.* Provincial test data from EQAO were identified as a necessary if not sufficient source of data for consideration across the district and in each school. Districts had routinized the processing of such data and school leaders viewed the results of the tests as a key consideration in shaping their school improvement plans. Respondents said, for example:

*We have spent time every year in our admin meeting, analyzing the trends in our EQAO data.*

*There has been a primary focus on looking at data at our monthly Director's meeting for principals and then a subsequent follow up at our families of school meetings. So twice a month at the admin level we are getting guidance on how to use data, how to read data and where we find data. There is an expectation that we use it to inform our decisions.*

*In our first meeting in October - usually that coincides with our EQAO data release - and then we look it at our principals meeting and with our consultants who help us get into it a little deeper through the ILRS. That's kind of what our district does.*

*I certainly look at the EQAO data and put a priority on math instruction. And that's probably been the biggest thing we've seen... I think that the math instruction, our focus on math instruction would probably be number one.*

*EQAO data is used to inform our plans and to help determine if your school improvement plan is working.*

*EQAO seems to be a large driver for what our goals are going to be. Whether it's the grade 3, 6 or 9 or 10 results that usually is what dictates what our improvement plan is going to be. Particularly because the data that we used to collect in our system, we are no longer allowed to request from our teachers because of PPM155.*

*With EQAO usually in the Fall we generally look at the results as a family of schools and we identify questions kids have had difficulties with and we align that with Math processes. We bring back strategies to our schools and we have done this with our special assignment schools. Breaking down questions for example in Mathematics and examining why they would have picked a certain answer. Going forward we looked at faces on the data. Recognizing who was having trouble specifically Focus on kids who were level two and moving them to level 3.*

*Extending the types of data used for school improvement. Results of the provincial testing program were front and center in respondents talk about data they used for decision making and how data were used. But respondents also identified additional types of data available in their districts which were useful to them.*

*Well we have different data that we look at, we have admin surveys, surveys from students and families, teachers, administrators those EQAO scores or PM data prime data. So we take a look at all of that evidence in other to set our school goal. I don't know in terms of sharing, is that what you ask about?*

*I think we're getting better and better at figuring out what the data is saying. We now do an awesome job with our PM benchmarks and our DRA and tracking the kids that are coming out of kindergarten and how many of them are ready for Grade 1. We do a great job with that and that's*

*really important. To me that's more important than how the kids did on a standardized test the last week of May in Grade 3 and Grade 6.*

*We have PM Benchmarks and CASI and we use a tool called Leaps and Bounds too. It is a diagnostic tool. Once kids do the assessment it talks about strategies for gap closing. A Miriam Small suggestion. It is great at our school that is the beginning of a strand and teachers are finding that teachers need to consolidate the schools at their grade level. Lessons to help with that gap closing.*

*Expanding the focus of data from ends to means.* While several different sources of student outcome data were being collected in many districts, those districts also were extending the focus of their data collection beyond student outcomes to factors that contribute to, or influence, those outcomes. Using surveys, in particular, respondents pointed to data about, for example, school climate, school safety and student attitudes.

*In terms of the parents' survey, there's been a lot around school safety and obviously the anti-bullying. That they put an emphasis on the survey, not only the parents but the school, the student survey...well in elementary, I think they do some in high school as well around school safety and school culture.*

*I know that the faith schools division with the district, they do those surveys where they send them out to parents regarding, if a child feels safe in the school, and in which areas does your child feel safe in the school, and concerns that away. I know the district collects data that way as well.*

*"The district sends out a survey about how students feel about the instruction they are receiving, do they feel the schools are meeting their needs, do they feel the schools are safe, do they have caring adults in the school? That type of information that is sent to parents and students to access. And then we get the results back for the system as well as individually from our school that exact comments of students.*

*We do "tell them from me" survey for our students from grade 4 to 8, which is really sort of online questionnaire and anonymous and really just digs into climate and culture. We do a parent survey every two years. Our school climate survey, there are some mental health pieces in there. They are designed by our mental health lead and other individuals.*

*The district has done parents surveys, equity surveys, safe schools surveys. These have all been done across the district in all schools with all staffs, all employee group, so not just teaching staffs. And I really like that they have done that. They have said very clearly to all employee groups we value what you say about our school. They have done a mandatory survey, if you will, with all school staff and given staff time to do it during the work day which really improves the number of people who completed that survey in the first round and those results were shared with principals to include that data in school improvement planning.*

*Making data more accessible.* Respondents spoke about the problem of gaining access to data that that had been collected by the district and the steps taken by some districts to improve such access. The following comments reflect some of what their districts have done:

*Our district has been trained on using the Scopus program, an electronic data system to collect marks, look at grades, marks within the high school as opposed to EQAO. Our department heads have all been trained on that also.*

*Our district has been trained on using the Scopus program ...an electronic data system to collect marks, look at grades, marks within the high school as opposed to EQAO.*

*Our district also uses a program or software called Skopus. We pursued some training on that; it allows schools to dig into data, similar to EQAO but its school-based data. Skopus basically mines information from our Trillium database and pulls out stuff like student report card marks, so we can start to look at some of that information and again, look for where we can change our practices to bump up certain area. So, we do a lot of those things.*

*We also have something called "Compass for Success" and we have a couple of programs where the teachers input their class data and the "Compass for Success" takes EQAO data, report card data, class assessment data and pulls it all together into a data wall ... electronic data source and we can use that for whatever we need to and teachers next year will have access to that as well ... you know look and the data and use that to drive their instructions and take a look at the previous class ... what their needs are and things like that.*

*We have moved into a new computer data program called Compass for Success, which is a kind of data warehouse. Just trying to provide easier access to the data.*

*We have Trillium and we can also build data in term of report card marks and we use the software. Skopus is the software and we can look at individual students and build documents and a profile of student.*

*Provision of resources to support data use in schools. Many respondents described initiatives undertaken by their districts to provide the training and other resources useful in schools to make effective use of available data for decision making. For example:*

*I am in a school where the EQAO results have been low for a number of years despite all of the high yield strategies that are in place and the high degree of support our students have. So, I worked with the superintendent to track the data, but I also looked at having some hard questions that I then had to ask parents and students and he sort of coached me through it. I know the EDI (Early Development Index) is coming out, our district already started working with us on how we are going to use that, and some of the decisions but also some of the trends that that coming out.*

*Our district has provided numerous data in-services to try and help us look at our own data, whether it be quantitative data or qualitative data and how both parts play in shaping what our school improvement plan should be. And the effective ways of looking at it and the effective ways of showing it to our staff.*

*We also have release time even to just sit down and plan; when is our EQAO going to be, what are the best days for the kids, what do we need, that kind of thing. So, right down to the planning part of it, we get funding for that as long as we can justify that there is a need for those materials, they're purchased for us.*



*We often take part in EQAO training around using the website feature, the website to pull data and glean data from those grade 3 and 6 results.*

*Well we have had a lot of PD to prepare us to use data effectively. There is also a higher expectation about what evidence we share when we are asked to account for how effective we are being so that is helpful. There is a central database that the district has purchased which aims to collect as much of the assessment data as we can so that we are working on a common reference point that we access data when we go to it.*

*We have a district wide system where data input happens directly from teachers whether it is PM benchmarks or writing assessments or other reading assessment task. Those are done by staff in term of diagnostics ... We get excellent information back from our school district in terms of the that we are looking at whether it's EQAO results versus report cards and EQAO surveys, the student surveys, the teachers input and looking specifically at the reading, writing, math's there is a strong focus and a strong emphasis on our district requiring administrators and staff to really have a good look at EQAO data, use of the other classroom assessment.*

*Positive effects.* Most efforts by districts to encourage data use in schools were viewed as helpful by respondents. District efforts had increased individual respondents' capacities to understand and work effectively with data in their schools, to be more precise in determining the focus of their school improvement efforts, to be more transparent about the work of schools and to be more accountable about that work. Increased access to, and use of data, also helped school leaders justify requests that might make to their district for increased resources.

*Negative effects.* While a substantial number of respondents could not identify any negative influence on their work of their district efforts to encourage greater data use to inform decisions, a small handful of challenges surfaced. Several respondents objected to the prominence of EQAO math and language results for their schools. A few others spoke about the demoralizing effect of EQAO results on staffs in struggling schools. Additional challenges included the limited time and money for training in data use, lack of technical assistance to access and to follow through on results, as well as the time out of class for teachers involved in training.

*Summary.* Interviewees described their districts' practices related to data use as including the collaborative analysis of provincial test data across the district and in schools, extending the types of data used for school improvement, and expanding the focus of data beyond ends to means. Interviewees also reported their districts attempting to make data more accessible to schools and providing significant resources to support use of data in schools. These district efforts, according to many interviewees, had increased their capacities to understand and work effectively with data in their schools, to be more precise in determining the focus of their school improvement efforts, to be more transparent about the work of schools and to be

more accountable about that work. Increased access to, and use of data, also helped school leaders justify requests that they might make to their district for increased resources.

## **8.5 LEARNING-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES**

The introduction to questions about this district characteristic was as follows: Most districts have developed a plan for overall district improvement and often require schools to engage in their own school improvement planning and the implementation of such plans. What do such organizational improvement processes look like in your district and how much involvement have you had in these district processes?

Responses elicited by this set of questions overlapped significantly with responses to the earlier set of questions about strategic planning (Mission, Vision and Goals), whereas the intention was to learn more about what districts and schools were doing to implement their strategic plans. The data reported in this section is limited to these implementation issues - basically the processes of creating and implementing district and school improvement plans in light of district Mission, Vision and Goals.

*District and school improvement planning and implementation.* Evidence from the interviewees demonstrated remarkable similarities across districts in their approaches to organizational improvement. Virtually all districts used their strategic plans to develop annual district improvement plans; school staffs had more or less participation in developing annual district improvement plans.

Once the district improvement plan had been created, school leaders met with district leaders to review the district improvement plan and begin to consider what its implications were for their schools' own improvement plans. This meeting typically occurred between the school years. School leaders then begin the process of developing their own school improvement plans through relatively collaborative processes as, illustrated, for example, in these description by one secondary and two elementary principals:

*Now personally I take that information back and I have it all calendared so that I go to school admin that's usually on a Tuesday or Wednesday the following week, I meet with my departmental heads and instructional coaches to debrief what we talked about and one week after that I meet at a full staff meeting we have an opportunity to do some deep thinking about what we want to bring to the staff. So that's kind of how we have gone about doing it. I am in control of calendaring those dates, so I am at the mercy of senior admin schedule. That tends to work very well for our implementation of our own School improvement plan.*

*And then we go back into our buildings and with the team, develop the school improvement plan. This is where it kind of it's a very delineated process, but different schools develop it differently.*

*And so then, we usually take that work after that initial meeting in August. And through the first staff meeting in September and into the second little bit of staff meeting work that we have, we shape our school improvement plan.*

Several interviewees also described processes used by their districts to monitor progress with implementation of the school improvement plan. For example:

*The way that the district review has changed over the years has helped us improve on how we approach our school improvement planning within our own school. Because when those reviews started, it was like every one of those part of that [district improvement] framework had to be touched on and was evaluated and so we were trying to take a look at those within our schools and now what we have done we find when they came into your school they say “what were you working on” and they value that you pick a few goals and you work long and deep with those as oppose to many things that you end up being shallow with. And so I like the fact that the district reviews have become reflective of that and I think that moved it forward as well.*

*Our administrators, two years ago, had a brief in-service on the new BIP and that was the first time any of us saw it and it was 200 administrators in the room and it was just a PowerPoint showing us how to drill down to find specific information based on the overall plan. There were follow-up sessions that spring. I guess that was 2014. Going through each of the 4 quadrants of the BIP; Plan, Act, Access, Reflect cycle of school improvement planning. We were to generate focused questions that you might come up with during your school improvement meeting about each one of those parts of the school improvement plan. And then that was sent out to all administrators. The following year, there was another follow-up session about the school improvement plan check-in session so to speak. How are you doing with it now, what are you learning now, where are you stuck*

*We do have a planning cycle that we use within the district. Each year, the district improvement plan is reviewed and that helps to shape what the school improvement plans will be. At the end of the cycle/year, all schools go through a school self-assessment. So they have set their goals as a school for certain target areas and at the end of the year they are accountable for examining the results and finding out whether or not they have carried out the actions to meet those schools’ plans. I would say that they have simplified this process over the years. There used to be a lot of writing and a lot of work, [the district] has now simplified it that it’s more direct and succinct, more action oriented, and I think that has been a very positive thing.*

Respondents identified six features of their districts’ approaches to improvement that were especially helpful in their own local improvement work:

(a) Quick access to help from district staff.

*They are very easily accessible, I can get someone in the building within 3 to 4 days if need be in any one specific area in order to support what we are doing. It is not make a phone call and get someone one month later. So I think they have done a good job in letting us know who to go to and always finding ways to make them available.*

*Having the instructional coordinator is helpful and having the common message and supports for all schools has been really helpful.*

*Superintendent has been a support for the school and for me.*

(b) Clarification of district priorities and fostering ongoing dialogue in the district about those priorities

*[engagement in thinking about district priorities] gives you knowledge the priority areas...they are not just introduced once and forgotten, it is an ongoing dialogue, about it and what the priority areas are.*

*It provides coherence across schools in the district*

*... having the common message and supports for all schools has been really helpful.*

(c) Autonomy for schools in their school improvement planning

*It's important to me professionally because, things change at very local levels and sometimes, as an administrator we are moved around, this is my second school in four years as a principal and the needs of this school are very different from the needs of the last school that I was at and that's fine. And so really, that's where, as the leader of the school, I appreciate having that flexibility to look at our needs, look at our own data, look at the expertise that we have with the teaching staff that we have and then be able to build on that.*

*It made so much more sense to do our school improvement plan first and we were given the autonomy to look at what our needs were....Wonderful things happening at my schools that may have not been recognized had I not been able to describe the needs. The key thing is that staffs were formerly frustrated with the school improvement planning process. [There is] more buy-in by staff when they are able to describe what we need to focus on for our students.*

*...our superintendent is really in tune with our specific schools and our needs at our school and aligning, kind of differentiating resources, coaches for support, being able to access our technology people, our resource people or math consultants, our language consultant...there is assistance along the way to really hone in on what our school needs are.*

(d) Going deeper

*I think the thing that our district does well is we take care of people first and I think our senior team, our director and superintendent they are very conscious of supporting their staff and not putting too much from the top down. They don't give us as many directives as maybe they would have a few years ago. Basically, instead of doing things a mile wide and an inch deep, we're doing them an inch wide and a mile deep and really getting focused on fewer things and doing them better than trying to do everything. And I don't know if it's because we are small as a district but our human contact with the higher ups, our executive team makes a difference. It connects us, we feel like we're supported and it allows us to do great things. I guess the summary will be that autonomy, that they've trusted us to make decisions on our own as oppose to dictating everything on us. I think that really is the summary of it.*

(e) Broad participation in improvement efforts

*I think the most helpful has just been the idea of taking input from all levels and honestly, valuing that input and utilizing it not discarding it. Not thinking, ok here is how we see it, here is how we're going to move.*

*I think, seeking input from all stakeholders is important. I think that does matter, because you know like the school improvement plan, I can write you a very good school improvement plan all on my own. But it's not authentic, so when you ask for other stakeholders to take part in developing the*

*school improvement plan or the strategy plan or the district improvement plan, it's more inclusive of peoples' voices. That does matter.*

(f) Providing targeted support for school improvement efforts

*Setting the goal has helped and providing opportunities to speak with coordinators and making ministry personnel available to come for PLCs. Superintendent has been a support for the school and for me.*

*They provide release fund which I know sounds great but it's nice to be able to have money that doesn't come out of my budget. They provide release time based on your population you get so many days, and I use that to release my leadership team so that we can sort of write the school improvement plan.*

*I guess one of the positive things is, they have provided some release time that we can work through some of our dial processes. So, departments can book time where they can sit down and work through their ... what they are working on for the CIL. So that's quite some positive. They have provided some people to be available to help us receive some input. So that's a positive thing. Provided some information with things like with mindset, critical thinking. So getting that information to us is also helpful.*

Most respondents could not think of any negative features of their districts' approach to improvement. Several did mention, however, the time commitments associated with learning how to be instructional leaders, along with the workload and paperwork that had increased over the past few years.

*Summary.* Respondents described the processes in their districts used for creating and implementing district and school improvement plans in light of district strategic plans. These processes were viewed as especially helpful by school leaders when they: provided quick access to help from district staff; helped to clarify district priorities and fostered ongoing dialogue in the district about those priorities; and allowed considerable autonomy for schools in their school improvement efforts. District improvement processes were also valued by school leaders when they allowed for and encouraged a sustained focus on a small number for priorities, allowed for broad participation in improvement efforts and provided targeted support for those efforts.

## **8.6 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL MEMBERS**

The introduction to questions about this Strong District characteristic was as follows: How would you describe your district's primary orientation to professional development? That is, is it mostly delivered by the district, provided within the school, aimed at general capacity building or closely aligned to district/school improvement priorities? Interviewees were also asked how this orientation had influenced their work and the work of their teachers and if they had suggestions for changes to the PD offered by their districts. It was clear from the responses of most interviewees that the majority of districts placed a heavy

emphasis on building the capacity of both teachers and school leaders and that such professional development was intended to be carefully aligned with the capacities required to implement the district and school improvement plans. Noted one interviewee, “The professional development that is set out by our district is very specific and it is totally tied to district improvement priorities.”

In response to this set of questions about professional development, interviewees offered their perspectives on the sources and location of PD in their districts, roles and responsibilities for PD, and features of their districts’ approach to PD that assisted their school improvement work.

### ***Source and Location of Professional Development***

Districts differed markedly in terms of who determined the content and location of PD – centrally determined and delivered, school determined and delivered, at administrative meetings, and some balance of central and school-based provision. Some districts incorporated all or most of these sources and locations.

#### **(a) Centrally determined and provided**

*For the most part PD is done centrally. Teachers are given the opportunity to sign up for the PD they need as part of the annual learning plan. Learning about the three-part math lesson for example. Sharing that information with staff. Capacity building model is central brought back to the school. We do have a PD portal and can be offered in levels. For example, in Smart District training for beginners and can I sign up for this*

*We have times that the district has created for the principals to meet with the consultants in either Mathematics or French as a second language and we had the PD to converge as a small group and additional opportunity so far as we can support teachers. It's usually valuable. So, we come together 4 times a year to do that and that's key, I count on that a lot.*

*I would say mostly delivered by the district... If I were to go to a PD session, it might be delivered by an outside author...someone coming in, but most of the time it's people that have an expertise in that area, so you're learning from your colleagues, which is great. Not provided within the school.*

*Our district also brings in guest speakers and give us opportunities then to be released from our schools to go and listen to those guest speakers. One of the most impactful ones that we had this year, [name] did a presentation for our principals and vice principals and it was exceptional. I think that, without exception, we left that session feeling empowered to push our own envelop a little bit, to step out of our comfort zone and to really marry technology with some of the work that we are otherwise doing,, On a monthly basis, we lead from within and we use the expertise from within our district and that's great work as well. And through it all, we align it to our school improvement plans and it's great. We're constantly given the opportunity to revisit that.*

#### **(b) During administrators’ meetings**

*But largely, I guess our PD comes in our monthly meetings and that is run by one of our curriculum principals usually and our curriculum superintendent working together. So it answers*

*the question, is it done by the district? Yeah it's usually not done at the school. We do get a little bit of time to work in our principal learning teams in our school, but most of our PD would have been done at the district level. And yes, it's aligned to our strategic plan but even that it's not like precision laser focused I would say.*

(c) School-based with district support

*So, most of the professional development is delivered within the school. And, some of that is capacity building for teachers. But again, the Student Success Teacher works very closely with myself and the vice principal she is knowledgeable about our school improvement plan. So, it does have links to our school improvement plans as well.*

*Provided within the school, we will try and do a little bit of.... the only way we are allowed to do PD at a staff meeting, our monthly staff meeting, is if it is centered on our school improvement plan. PD has to be job-embedded, meaning during the school day, if we're going to be doing any PD with staff. Mostly it's within the school.*

*There's a lot that happens from the school level as opposed to from the district level, but again, they are in sync with each other. And I think it always aimed at increasing the capacity of the teachers and increasing the skill set*

*The PD is specific to the school. For example, this year, our school has had a lot of learning around the collaborative and proactive solutions with Dr. Ross Green. We had a number of ASD workshop to support our ASD students because we have a much higher than average percentage of students with diagnosed autism in our school. And the district recognized that and the autism consultant came and did a series of workshop with specific teams.*

*We're in a sort of a transition period around professional development. Most of our professional development is provided within schools, strongly aimed at capacity building, based on our school improvement plan, our district's improvement plan and the data we're receiving.*

(d) Balanced provision

*We get messaging from the district. We also have autonomy within the school. Again, with inquiry based learning cycles this year, but on top of that, there is also mandated stuff that we do on PD days, not the whole day. But there is messaging that has to be brought across. But I find that there's a pretty good balance to where we are at right now with regards to PD. And great opportunities for professional development as well.*

*I think I'm safe to say that we have a balance of professional development. I think we offer certain professional development at the district level where we come into the district office on a half-day session .... you know, just come out to go receive it.*

*This year there is a balance between one-district PD session via subject area. The others are up to us. This Friday for example we want staff input on the Growing Success administrative procedures. Part of this is because the district has updated their policy. I can address my own priorities the rest of the day. So there is a mixture of both in school and district level PD.*

*I would say that there is a fairly good balance there in that we do some withdrawal of teachers from the school and we do some learning cycles within the school. But I wouldn't say that it's either/or. But I would say in all cases that there is a very close alignment with district improvement priorities.*

*It's a balance, so there is expectation from the district that the schools deliver professional development that aligns with the district improvement plan which is aligned with the SIP. There is also a capacity building day that is delivered by the district to the school but again you just get to pick a team of one or two or three staff to go to that.*

Central to respondents' views about the value of PD from these different sources was the extent to which the district was "flexible", allowing schools to implement it at their pace and according to their needs. As one interviewee explained:

*What I like about our school district is the flexibility around professional development. Schools can say what they need to be successful and to move ahead. Once we've collected our data, we've analyzed our data, we know where our needs are, we then write an implementation plan how we want to address those needs. The school sends [this plan] off to the superintendent. Superintendent will take a look at it, may have some clarifying questions, she comes back and asks the principal about. And then as I said, would hopefully approve the funds and the resources that we feel we need to move ahead. We can do that at our pace and in our own way. So, I think the district's flexibility around PD and allowing the capacity within the school for what you need to do to move forward, I like that.*

(e) School Leadership networks

While only a few respondents identified PD being conducted in networks, the following excerpt provides particularly interesting example:

*So currently, the way our math leadership has taken place in our district, is that we have been divided up into pods, and the principals can self-select the members of their pods based on a research plan. In my pod I'm working with three other principals because we noticed that our staff were approaching math instruction from a very similar stance and that their mindset towards math was similar and we all were on the journey of moving towards enquiry-based math. So, I worked with all the intermediate teachers from the four schools. And it really helped because it got to the core of ok what are we doing as opposed to any of the sometimes negative things that can happen when you just pull a team from within a building. I now look at student achievement very differently. And have been able to have some very professionally forward conversations with teachers about practice and about what students are really doing and digging deeper on this. And it goes both ways, so teachers are now saying to me, my expectation is you're going to help me learn more on spacial reasoning. Or for my learning plan this year, I really want to go and work with so and so at another school, because, when we were talking about my kids' inability to do algebra, I heard she is really strong at that. I expect you to help me with that. So, it's really made the professional learning more reciprocal but our district worked really hard in presenting the principal as the co-learner, not the evaluator or the accessor or the supervisor. We are in a co-learning stance with our teachers.*

***Roles and Responsibilities***

Interviewees identified different PD roles played by school leaders, as well as by coaches and teachers.



*School leaders.* In many districts, school leaders are responsible for much of the professional development that occurs in their schools. This can entail the direct provision of PD, or making the arrangements for such professional development, then actually implemented by someone else (e.g., an instructional coach). As one leader explained, this can be complex work:

*And, this year, having inquiry based learning cycles, those [PD days in school] are a little bit more challenging because it's independent inquiries, so how you tie all that together is a little bit of a challenge. However, I found this year that, because of where we are in our journey in maths, in a lot of the inquiries, it's very evident that there is a lot of overlap and conversations can be had around the overlap. Just because we are individual inquiries we are very well connected throughout. So, it's not that much different from one class to the next. Teachers own that, not the district telling them this is what you're doing.*

School leaders are also expected to diffuse information as follow up to district PD or the PD that school leaders are provided through their administrative meetings with district leaders. For example:

*It's a combination delivered by the district and provided within the school. The delivery by the district is often through administrators' PD or the special assignment teachers that we then bring back to the school and we provide within the school. So, the math pod was also a part of that but that was strictly at the level, there wasn't any involvement from district at that although we could be supported by the maths SATs and the math pod.*

*Coaches.* Most interviewees who had access to staff with special expertise (coaches, consultants, coordinators) related to professional development found them to be of considerable assistance, as these excerpts indicate:

*We have 2 [educational coaches] assigned to our school and they are there on almost daily basis.*

*We have district-wide PD and we have instructional coaches which I think have been very valuable and those instructional coaches are tight to our network. And the instructional coach is coming into our building on a regular basis. They are developing authentic PD ... its teacher-driven and its student-need driven PD. The teachers are becoming a learning community and they are driving the PD that they need.*

*The use of instructional coaches has had a really big impact in our schools because coaches are able to provide very specific in-class support, whether it is professional development in math, language, providing resources, providing support within the classroom. I think those have been really big within school improvement, to improve capacity.*

Interviewees frequently noted that PD is especially well received coming from coaches who are the teachers' colleagues and that this sometimes leads to them visiting each other's classrooms.

*Teachers.* The role of teachers in PD was twofold. In most schools, teachers were expected to work collaboratively with their other teacher colleagues, often in professional learning communities, for purposes of instructional improvement. Teachers attending professional development external to the

school were often expected to “come back and teach others”. The first excerpt below offers a useful glimpse into how one schools tries to take advantage of teachers’ initiatives related to PD, while the second captures the “come back and teach others” option.

*I think the teachers, if they know that we have a certain goal on our school they would look for that PD opportunity. Our system is all online, so you have to go on and see. Sometimes we would get advanced notice and I would say, hey!!, looking for 2 people to go and attend this and just within our goals and they would sort of jump on it type of thing that way and say yes let's go. And the district's very good about saying here is the goal, so that you that have one school hugging all the spots and everything right? So, every school gets 2 spots, they open it up. But I think teachers are allowed to go on, sometimes there's things that are more suited to their annual learning plan. They might see something that they specifically targeted, which is great. Then they'll look for it themselves rather than having me to sort of say hey get out there, go there, get out there and look for that. So, they take that direction. I think they recognize that if it is a district wide thing. They need to look but also it is available if they specifically want something that they have personally identified as their professional growth.*

*There is a lot of PD that the district provides. For example, with the new French curriculum, for example the French teachers have been going out; we get a fair bit of that. But then the expectation is that when they come back in, you know if only 2 or 3 teachers are going, then they are sharing that with their colleagues on the French side*

*Individual learner control.* As with networks, very few respondents described their own personally-controlled approaches to PD likely because the interview questions were about the district. But individual efforts within a district could be intentionally encouraged and the following excerpt demonstrates how important those individual efforts can be:

*I didn't think I could engage properly in conversations with staff. I felt inadequate or..... I'm not too sure what it was. But I knew I had to make a change. So, I took professional development courses and additional qualifications and did a lot of reading with the support of our consultants and our district developed...you know books that they are recommending. And I consider myself a fairly good instructional leader now. I still have a lot to learn, I learn alongside our staff but from that, my ability to be an instructional leader has increased significantly and as a result, conversations with my staff are more engaged as well. So, I found that I have a critical role to play in our staff moving forward.*

*Summary.* Respondents identified widely varied sources of professional development sponsored by their districts. While the bulk of interviewees valued approaches that allowed for considerable autonomy and control at the school level, evidence suggests that even centrally determined and delivered PD could allow for adequate autonomy if those experiencing it take the initiative to use what they learn in their own contexts. Done well, central district sponsorship brings with it access to expertise unlikely to be available to individual schools; done poorly it can be insensitive to the needs of staff and the improvement challenges faced by schools. Done well, job-embedded PD brings with it close knowledge of local

challenges and access to peers with relevant professional know how that can be turned to solving individual problems; done poorly, it can be blind to useful ideas found outside the local group and increase resistance to change. It may be that encouragement of networks and individual responsibility for one's personal professional development are still underutilized forms of district-sponsored PD.

The generally positive assessment of district PD by interviewees, it should be noted, does not reflect the study's quantitative evidence; that evidence suggests little impact on either school, classroom and family Conditions as well as student outcomes.

## **8.7 BUDGETS, STRUCTURES, PERSONNEL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES, AND USES OF TIME ALIGNED WITH THE DISTRICT'S MISSION, VISION AND GOALS**

The introduction to questions about this district characteristic was as follows: "Evidence suggests that high performing organizations have aligned all of their key policies and practices (e.g., budgets, structures, personnel policies and procedures, uses of time) in support of their priorities". Respondents were then asked "What areas of your own district appear to be well aligned? Are there areas that still need work? and What difference does this alignment (and misalignment) make to your own School Leadership and the instructional work of your teachers?"

This section begins by reporting what interviewees considered to be the consequences of both district alignment and misalignment and is followed by a summary of those areas viewed by respondents as well-aligned and not so well aligned in their districts.

### **Consequences of Alignment**

Respondents identified seven distinct consequences or advantages of alignment across different parts of the district, alignment of those different parts with the Mission, Vision and Goals established by the district and its schools. The opposites of those consequences also capture virtually all of the evidence provided about the consequences of misalignment. For example, the first advantage described below is increased chances of meeting the goals and priorities established for the improvement work of districts and their schools; lack of alignment decreases those chance.

#### **(a) Increases chances of meeting goals**

*Alignment does well for kids because yes we have identified through evidence what the priorities are and we follow through with that and tangential thinking as good as it is at times and tangential thinking could be put aside so that we can be working on the same goal together and everybody in the system then sees the improvement as well.*

#### **(b) Reduces distractions**

*I think it makes our primary job of teaching easier. We don't have distractions. It's all to support the students in the classroom and the teachers' ability to teach the student, so the alignment only helps.*

*I think being aligned narrows the focus. And the work of a teacher and the work of an admin ... there is a lot of things we could do and you know by having a clearer focus and going deep into the work makes us get better at what we are doing.*

(c) Greater confidence

*If things are aligned then that will assist you in your daily capacity as a leader in a school. You have more confidence, you have more direction, there is more trust and support from the higher level. You know where you are going. You are not going somewhere blind folded.*

*I think everyone feels empowered and we feel valued. We see the results in our work. We are able to take better decisions on where we need to go in learning for ourselves and for our students.*

(d) Facilitates collaboration

*When there is alignment obviously it supports me in the sense that I can work with my peers because we are all doing the same thing. So that's a good thing because I am alone here, I don't have a VP anymore.*

*The alignment is helpful. What it does is it allows us to use the same vocabulary, the same language when we're talking about the effectiveness of school improvement. We are not running off in all directions..... There is a deeper level of coherence.*

(e) Clarifies accountability

*Because alignment for a school leader makes it easier for me. That's where my focus is, that's where we spend our money, you know, although all these other things belong, I know that I can feel good at doing something well. And I can measure it at the end too. I can say hey our focus is math, here is where we were, here is where we are now, here is all the learning that went on this year. You know there are so [many other things to do] ...but it is one thing that we can really measure.*

(f) Increases access to district support

*The alignment is really important because I think it does provide clarity, it does provide systems and places and structures that you can go to for different needs, different things that you may need support with. It allows for efficiency and it allows for growth and development in key areas. You can go and get the support you need for specific things and it's pretty timely and you can get moving forward.*

(g) Improves planning

*You can anticipate and expect what's coming, you are able to plan your PD days, as you know this is the goal they've said, we are doing on the PD day. You can sort of plan out your year and know that is what you're going to be district-mandated [to do] and if you're deviating a little bit from that, then it gives you some time to gather support and figure out what are some things that you could do for your staff.*

## Areas of Alignment

Interviewees identified areas of alignment in many districts that included, but extended beyond, those areas identified in the conception of district alignment in the framework for the study (alignment across the district's budget, mission, vision and goals, Structures, Personnel Policies and Procedures, and Uses of Time). This evidence indicates that, from the perspective of school leaders, alignment across many aspect of districts make important contributions to their improvement work.

### (a) Budgets Aligned with District Operations

*I would say that our district does a great job with the budget process. They are currently in the process of making some really tough decision regarding that alignment of budget and school closures and those kinds of things. That's not an easy thing to do, but they have done it with grace and, you know, keeping people in mind... that's not an easy thing to do.*

### (b) Budgets Aligned with District and School Improvement Planning

*Going back to our district's practice of PD, there's a definite strategy or focus I guess, from the top-down. We talk about our district improvement plan, we talk about our school improvement plans and [the district] provides us with release dollars to make growth happen. They provide us with a structure in terms of Student Success Teachers and instructional coaches to help facilitate that. And then they give us latitude to go outside of those resources if we can find ways to move our own school improvement planning forward to make that happen [the district] puts its money where its mouth is and that's great*

*When we are applying for extra things that's part of our budget, they have to be aligned to our school improvement plan. When teachers are looking for money from our budget, we're always making sure that it's the best in line to our school improvement plan.*

*I would say that the math strategy. A lot of budget has been aligned with that and a lot of personnel has been assigned to that. So, the district improvement plan focused on the math, as well as every school's improvement plan.. When we were working on PD in our staff meetings, we also had to focus on that as well. So, a lot of money has gone into it but also a lot of PD has gone into math too.*

### (c) District Structures and Communications Aligned with School Leaders' Needs for Information

*I think we do a really good job of communication. In terms of our budget, our director bi monthly provides information on our budget, what it looks like going forward, how we are supporting special education in term of budget. That information is provided. I think it is helpful in knowing what the big picture is in terms of budget, district wide. So that we kind of known in terms of what the plan is, what we are doing planning wise against structures is carefully laid out and we get sort of annual, semi-annual layout, what the roles are for our superintendent, what areas they support whether it is areas of school or special assignments that they have. I think the structures are clear, especially in terms of our district office, where the finance department is, where the purchasing department is, where the mail room is, all those structures are clear and organized*

*well where our human resources are what they provide, personal policies. Our policies and procedures are clear, they are available online, forms are all available. I think that allows us to be high performance because we can access information from different departments quickly.*

(d) Budgets Aligned with Professional Development Needs

*I would say, specific to literacy and numeracy, that budgets and professional support are well aligned. Sometimes it appears that the district is a little ahead of where the schools are. So sometimes it feels like initiatives, such as 21st Century learning, almost feel like entities unto themselves, as opposed to how do we embed it in what we are doing. But I think that's not a bad thing either because I think we always have to have sight of where we are going.*

*I definitely would say the budget is obviously aligned with [the district's] priorities in the sense of what they are going to be supporting and offering in the sense of professional development... From that perspective, we do, at the beginning of August when we have our system leaders conference, they do explain the multi-year plan, they identify what areas and let us know that there's going to be PDs provided at these spots. So that we sort of understand that that is the priority and that's where the money is going.*

(e) Alignment Across Policies

*The policies themselves are straight forward, they seem to be very aligned, they are working on them regularly and consult with us.*

*The district is trying really hard to work on aligning all our policies... our budget is definitely aligned with what the ministry wants and where the priorities are. I think that the district is really doing that well.*

*I think our district makes a very good attempt to have an alignment of policies and practices in all of its priorities.*

(f) Structures Aligned with Priorities

*Our school district has aligned its budget, has aligned its structures and personnel to try to help with district goals and it trickles down to each individual school, as well.*

*They keep structure in mind as far as aligning the organization and people in the buildings. They are very conscious of keeping things running in a timely fashion.*

(g) Alignment of Strategic and District Improvement Plans

*The strategic plan that provided specific areas of focus are aligned with the district improvement plan... and there is reporting on it yearly to key stakeholders and also to trustees...*

*Our new director has really emphasized the idea that whatever we do has to align with our multi-year strategic plan. "Show me your budget and I'll show you your priorities", was the strong message that has gone across-the-district. And I think she is trying to echo that at both district level and school level. If one of our main goals is to improve numeracy, great!, How are we aligning our budget and our time and our professional learning with that... She's reinforcing, that we have to align what we're doing with our multi-year strategic plan which has to align with the ministry.*

(h) Alignment of Improvement Priorities and Professional Development Resources

*[the district] professional development is all aligned, consultants are set up within every school to be able to support [school-level] professional development. I find that we do that very very strongly.*

*I would say that they very purposely plan PD for principals and vice principals when they call us into senior administrator meetings, there is a plan behind what they're doing. It's not just you know something that's strung together.*

**Areas of Misalignment**

Interviewees identified two remaining areas of misalignment, in at least some districts, that made their improvement work more difficult.

(a) Misalignment of Expectations and Available Time Arising from Lack of Systems Thinking

*I feel we have a lot of outside factors the take-up principals and vice principal's time. Things that are downloaded on to us to take away from our time with students and staff seemed to creep up very often. I don't know that, even though we are a small district, everybody is aware of the demand. One department might give us a request and another department gives us a request and at just certain times, it feels like you are bombarded by all of these things that need to be done and then you can't get into what they're always telling us to be doing, getting into classrooms, working with the teachers, working with the Student Success Teacher because we're are tied up with these other things that we have to do to.*

*The place where our district needs to move next is making sure that the departments at the central office start aligning a little bit more closely so that we've got initiatives coming from all these different departments. So Spec Ed will throw out something, ICT will throw out something, the curriculum department will throw out something. So you feel like sometimes you have all these things coming at you. They all fit within the district improvement plan but as an administrative staff we really ask for them to try to align themselves a bit more... We've been assured that that will happen next year. So, they've listened to us, saying we want alignment at the district level. And I think we're going to see that and I know they are looking at realigning how the superintendent portfolios work to try and allow that to happen more.*

(b) Misalignment of Resources with Mental Health and Wellness Priorities

*I guess I would go back to the mental health end of things because we just don't have enough resources yet. And the community resources that were given the names of, or told that these people will help with this, they themselves they are under the increasing burden of all of these new things that people are supposed to be offering. They don't have enough staff either to handle the load that we are sending them. Thinking specifically of children's mental health or parent child youth clinic, through the hospital and mental health is a bigger and bigger issue in our students... So, when it comes to the district improvement plan - ours is now called the district improvement plan for student achievement and well-being - there is a focus on mental health in it and I don't know that we are carrying that through well enough.*

*And I have spoken, on numerous occasions with regards to, ok, you expect one person to teach halftime and then try and help as the consultant for the entire district with regards to wellness and physical and emotional well-being. It doesn't make sense to me. So, I think if we're going to align our budget with our priorities and one of our priorities is wellness, then we better be putting our money where our mouth is and I don't think where there yet.*

*Well you know the way it is. There always seem to be some things that are in a silo. For example, I go back to mental health again. I really think that if we would have connected that more directly to bullying we would probably have greater bang for our buck, but let's wait and see what happens.*

Interviewees also spoke at some length about a teacher hiring policy which arose from negotiations between teacher unions and the Ministry of Education. This policy required principal staffing decisions to privilege teacher seniority and applied to the hiring of both full-time and part-time teaching staff. The policy was viewed, by a very large proportion of school leaders, as cumbersome, time consuming and an obstacle to hiring staff best suited to school priorities. Because the policy was a provincial one, however, nothing further is reported about it here.

*Summary.* Evidence reported about this district characteristic indicates that alignment across many aspects of the district organization make important contributions to the improvement work of school leaders. According to interviewees, district alignment increases chances of accomplishing goals and priorities, reduces distractions from those goals and priorities, provides staff with more confidence about the value of their work, facilitates collaboration among school leaders, clarifies accountability, increases access to district support for school goals and priorities and improves school planning. Evidence from interviewees suggests that many districts in the province had been working hard to improve alignment among different aspects of their organizations, for example, alignment across district goals, budgets, personnel policies, and allocation of professional development resources. Indeed, interviewees identified as important to their work, many more features of district alignment than the framework for the study had anticipated.

Only two areas of district functioning were cited by significant numbers of respondents as in need of more alignment effort, alignment of available time with expectations districts had for the attention of schools and the alignment of expectations for schools among different district offices which were viewed by some respondents as “silos”.

## **8.8 A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

The introduction to questions about this district characteristic was as follows: “Briefly describe how your district goes about selecting, preparing, evaluating and supporting principals and vice principals”? This question was followed up with “Which features of this approach to leadership development do you



consider especially powerful? and “Could the district add to and/or improve some parts of its overall approach to leadership development?”

This section summarizes responses to these questions as they relate to leadership recruitment, selection, initial preparation, and both the professional development and performance appraisal of incumbent leaders. Descriptions of what districts were actually doing about each of these components of leadership development are combined with interviewees’ assessments of its’ value and ideas about possible improvements.

Both the formality and complexity of two components of the leadership development process, depended significantly on both district size and anticipated school leader retirements. In small districts, interviewees claimed, senior leaders often had close knowledge of staff and access to information about their potential for future leadership thus reducing the need for more formal selection processes. In districts with a large proportion of incumbent leaders not likely to retire anytime soon, the motivation to engage in significant recruitment processes was understandably weak.

### **Recruitment Processes**

The bulk of respondents identified one or two processes being used for recruitment by their districts - the provision of experiences aimed at giving prospective leaders a good sense of what is entailed in doing the job and “tapping on the shoulder”, including encouragement by principals. Many districts allowed staff to self-identify as prospective leaders but this is not a district initiative, nor is it considered to be sufficient to attract the number of potential leaders that some districts need for several reasons. As one interviewee noted:

*Right now, people can self-identify. Now we are finding that more and more people do not want to be in leadership anymore. In our district because of the geography you could be posted over an hour away*

#### **(a) Providing a “taste” of leadership.**

*We have a program that it’s not mandatory but it’s called future leaders, 2 years program where it’s all about professional development and more understanding system perspective on what goes on. And again, it will be tied to the priorities of the district. It’s not just about principals too, it could be facilities, it could be tech, it could be anybody.*

#### **(b) “Tapping on the shoulder” including Principal Encouragement.**

*Sometimes it is just teachers in our district who’ve been tapped on the shoulder by administrators to say, “Hey, have you ever thought about being an administrator because we see in you the qualities that we want leaders to have in our district”.*

*[Principals] are asked to pay attention to who are the leaders in our schools and who might want to be the future principal or vice principal. And come together at our district level and then kind of we have a future leadership program so those staff have the opportunity to ... get some professional training in that areas and kind of say hmm I can enhance their leadership*

## **Selection Processes**

Districts were described as selecting people who had demonstrated an interest in leadership roles through one or more processes including inviting them to enroll in a formal leadership development program, by creating a “pool” which those considered potentially suitable would be placed for consideration as positions became available; several districts also provided aspirants with an application package to complete, followed by an interview and most districts took into account the recommendations of the aspirants’ principals.

### **(a) Invitation to Participate in Program**

*The district has a leadership program such that if someone is interested in leadership opportunity within the school district, there will have to sit down with the principal and have a discussion with the principal and they can forward their name to attend the two-part leadership program to become an administrator. They need to go through this leadership model - there is two parts before you become a school administrator. You need to go through this programs that is all done within the school district.*

*We have Future Leaders program in this district. And it's kind of an orientation to leadership. And then individuals can put their name forward for a process whereby candidates are visited in their schools by a team of principal and executive council. We meet with them to talk about their work in the school, we meet with their colleagues, we meet with their supervisors. We talk to them about what the candidate is working on, what they are good at, how they are doing at school. And then from that site visit, a number of candidates are selected for an interview. They are interviewed by exec council and one or two trustees. And then they go into a pool*

### **(b) Creation of a “pool” of applicants**

*Like some other districts, there is a process where people apply to the vice-principal pool. Prior to that, the superintendents are in the schools, know what hear from my friends in other districts, and so, they work with the principals to get a feel for who are some of the upcoming teacher leaders.*

*Then the selection process, you apply, there are two site visits that a team of administration and principals go in and have conversations with potential people. And if you make it through that piece of it, it'll be processed. Which consist of one district member, administrative team and president of the principal's association for the province – our EPC*

### **(c) Application Package and Interview**

*There is a package, that you need to prepare, and then based on that package they decide whether you are going on for the interview process. So usually, within the package is 3 questions, usually what you see as a priority in the next 5 years or how are you going to make sure that you have equity and diversity. ... You have to show how this has made a difference and talk about the data.*

*So it's a fairly substantial package. For a vice principal, it's more sort of on your leadership within the school and how you've worked to fulfill an initiative or something that shows that you are ready to lead.*

*Selection is done through a traditional interview process. Candidates are required to write a document which testifies to their leadership experience according to the Ontario Leadership Framework and it's called the "leadership readiness" document and candidates responsible for that are signed off by their current supervisor to go forward*

(d) Principal Recommendations

*Teachers who are demonstrating... leadership capabilities and taking on leadership within their own schools are encouraged by current administrators to seek other leadership opportunities from outside of the school. perhaps on district committees, to give them experience working with other people that they're not familiar with, to develop credibility within other areas that other people would see them. And to take opportunities to apply for things like special assignment teacher jobs, to give them experience in other schools.*

**Effective Selection Processes**

Interviewees spoke about features of selection processes that were particularly helpful to candidates in the long run including transparency, constructive feedback, multiple challenges to test the capacities of candidates and the availability of a written document to help answer questions candidates were likely to have.

(a) Transparent

*I think they do a good job at the overall approach, it's transparent. It kind of takes nepotism out of it. So, there are several bands along the way of people going on. And also, what I like is, they get feedback as well if somebody is not going through on that person and what to do so not to deter people all together. So, I kind of like what we're doing.*

(b) Provision of Constructive Feedback

*[The district] provides on-going feedback on a person's development, on those new candidates, their portfolio and they give them some guidance around the leadership framework and how they can build experiences to support their development through that leadership framework. And that's really well done, so it's done mindfully, it's done throughout the school year and they pull back to it, so that's powerful.*

*That [day-long simulation] that I talked about where they do they model PPA, they do the irate phone call, they do a leaderless discussion activity where they are looking for, sort of that quiet leader, who doesn't dominate conversations but can control it just the same. So, I really liked that [day-long simulation], in particular, and the lead up to it and follow-up from it is powerful.*

(c) Multi-dimensional Challenges

*I think the selection process of principals and vice-principals has been a lot more rigorous over the last few years with this new, many-step process. It's not just an interview and you're done. We have many levels people have to go through which is very difficult for the candidates but it is a*

*very important job that they're going into so it's good that they're very rigorous and many different things are asked of them whether it's a written assignment, a site visit where they come to your school and I mentioned of course the formal process. So the more rigorous approach is done I think a lot better.*

#### (d) Written Resources

*[The district] puts out a book every year, and it's got tons of questions in it. And it's really well done in the sense of the descriptions. like I said, not just appealing to principals and vice principals but to business personnel, to teachers, to new people, they've got crucial conversation, they've got alumni. You can really find something for everybody in there and a lot of the principal learning teams, you know different things, about the growth mindset or Maths, or this or that. They really do in that sense. The principal of staff development she does a really good job and really is trying to give us some stuff that is really relevant to work with right now., So I would say they might think they need to improve on somethings based on the surveys but I would say overall, the approach is very good.*

### Initial Preparation

According to the interviewees, districts provided successful applicants with two forms of initial preparation, on-the-job leadership opportunities and formal professional development programs.

#### 1. On-the job Leadership Opportunities

*I'll say that providing this shared leadership opportunity in school...like that progression of building leadership capacity at the school level makes them feel comfortable they become leaders in the building and then providing opportunities amongst the network how we have that instructional coaching role where you are an instructional leader to other colleagues. I like that progression. And there are some people who will not take that progression, they will just want to be a principal, vice principal. And the other way too some folks have gone through a central role where they will leave the teaching position for a central teaching role not just an instructional coach. They'll become a consultant, then they'll become an administrator that way.*

*I think our district has done a good job of identifying people and giving them opportunities to participate in PD to take on lead teacher roles or acting like principal roles. I think our district is well positioned in the number of people its prepared. So, I think that's evidence that we have a process for developing people.*

#### 2. Formal Professional Development Programs

*We do have a leadership group run by one of the principals and this is for people who are thinking of leadership or are already in leadership, or are new to leadership. So that's a good thing. We also have the Leadership Assessment program, which is a process that once people have decided that's what they want to do, they have to go through this program before they actually can be assigned to a school.*

*So I actually chair the Call to Serve program which is for principals and vice principals that are brand new out of the classroom that have gained all of their qualifications and levels of requirements, prerequisites for leadership, so that is a program you are learning daily aspects of the Ontario leadership framework, through different pillars and making yourself a better leader*

*and then mentoring, coaching continues as a foundation of our catholic leaders in terms of our catholic leaders. So I find this cycle a complete buzzle that we are not missing any pieces and it helps support everybody.*

## **Performance Appraisal**

Districts engaged in some form of periodic formal performance appraisal and when this process entailed collecting feedback from a wide range of people it was considered especially robust, as, for example:

*I think what I like about it is when [district leaders] come in and they actually talk to every staff member, it's good because then you know that the feedback you're getting is feedback from everyone in the school. It's not one or two people, its feedback from all staff; going from educational assistants, to secretaries, to custodians, to DECEs and of course the teachers in the building. As I said, the superintendent came in and spoke with a variety of people from the different staff areas in the school and provided feedback to me on that.*

However, most interviewees reported that more regular interactions with district leaders contributed more to their growth than formal appraisal processes conducted much less frequently. For example:

*I believe the on- on-one time with my superintendent to look at my goals in terms of evaluation is very helpful. I think is very collegial even though is evaluation. It is also very collegial and it is very supportive in terms of the process of selecting goals, looking through the OLF and seeing the link there. Again, being authentic and being purposeful to my growth is really key, not just for the sake of an evaluation year, but to focusing on where I want to grow and develop and continues reflection in that area.*

## **Supporting Incumbent School Leaders**

Many interviewees described what their districts were doing in support of the continuing professional development of those already in formal leadership positions. This included formal professional development programs (*The principal of staff development she does a really good job and really trying to give us some stuff that is more...that is really... topic to work with you right now and relevant*), as well as professional development provided during regularly scheduled meetings with district leaders (monthly administrator meetings).

As with appraisal processes, support seemed to be increasingly valuable as it was directed at the specific challenges facing individual school leaders and as it was available in a very timely manner. Support processes meeting these criteria included

- One-on -one relationship with a senior district leader, including regular “check ins”;
- Mentors, if they were well-prepared (*I think is important giving people that opportunity to kind of have those opportunity for the mentor and the mentee piece and the job shadowing piece*).

- “Just-in-time support (*I found that the just-in-time program was the most powerful. That program paired an experienced administrator with a less experienced administrator. There were five or six sessions where they got together to talk about different topics... sometimes things that could be difficult situations, it could be situations in school, how you will handle them.*)
- Encouragement of personal responsibility for one’s own professional development

The value attributed to most of these support efforts increased as other local leaders were involved in their provision. Provision of a network structure of some sort (Principal Learning Teams) was also considered especially useful.

Some interviewees wanted their districts to provide more support for both principals and vice-principals and to acknowledge, in such support, the continuous and evolving nature of capacity building:

*I think that they have to do a better job at realizing that support needs to go all the way through to years that you are being principals. This is a very difficult job and that support isn’t there.*

*Summary.* This section summarized responses to questions about leadership recruitment, selection, initial preparation, and both the professional development and performance appraisal of incumbent leaders.

Descriptions of what districts were actually doing about each of these components of leadership development were combined with interviewees’ assessments of its’ value and ideas about possible improvements.

The bulk of respondents identified recruitment by their districts as consisting of either or both the provision of experiences aimed at giving prospective leaders a good sense of what is entailed in doing the job and “tapping on the shoulder” (including encouragement by principals). Districts were described as selecting people who had demonstrated an interest in leadership roles by inviting them to enrol in a formal leadership development program, by creating a “pool” in which those considered potentially suitable would be placed for consideration as positions became available. Several districts also provided aspirants with an application package to complete, followed by an interview. Most districts took into account the recommendations of the aspirants’ principals.

Districts provided successful applicants with two forms of initial preparation, on-the-job leadership opportunities and formal professional development programs. Continuing professional development for those already in formal leadership positions including formal programs, as well as professional development during regularly scheduled administrator meetings. As with appraisal processes, these forms of support seemed to be increasingly valuable as they were directed at the specific challenges facing individual school leaders and as they were available in a very timely manner. Some form of periodic formal performance appraisal of school leaders was carried out by most districts. But relatively frequent

and problem-focused interactions contributed more to school leader growth than formal appraisal processes conducted much less frequently.

## 9. A POLICY-ORIENTED BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The introduction to questions about this Strong District characteristic was: “How familiar are you with the trustees’ approach to governance?” This question was followed by “What is it about their approach that influences the work of you and your teachers?” and “What is the nature of that influence?”

This section of the report is relatively brief, largely because interviewees (all principals or vice-principals) were either not very familiar with the work of trustees and/or did not view the work of trustees as having much influence on their work in schools. Most respondents understood that the role had changed and now was officially about supporting the learning efforts of schools without being directly involved in schools; focusing on policy and hiring the director were frequently mentioned functions of trustees. However, many respondents’ accounts of their relationships with trustees included much that was close to the daily running of schools, especially in smaller communities.

About equal numbers of respondents claimed to be either quite familiar or not very familiar with what their trustees did. No matter the degree of familiarity, however, perceived influence of trustees ranged across four overlapping types, as illustrated in the following comments by respondents:

- Significant direct influence on schools

*They are extremely positive to our principal groups and to all our staff. They are visible within our system. They are active within schools. Simple things as remembering peoples’ names, they are very thankful for all the work that everyone does. They respect boundaries when they are here, there is no lobbying on anything aside... It’s about students when they are in the community. I find that it’s so refreshing.*

*Trustees back-up principals when dealing with parents*

- Significant indirect influence on schools

*When [the trustee] comes for a visit he wants to know what program is working, what are our goals, what are we doing so that when the district members are looking at how they are going to decide where money is going to go and how it is going to be spent that they are aligning it with what they are hearing from the schools as well.*

*It is clear that they do have goals and ambitions for the district. And they’re very effective at communicating that. They communicate it with all stakeholders... so it’s not uncommon, because we do a lot of community building events at our school just because of where we are, for them to*

*say you know this fits with our goal of building the confidence of our school system, the image of our school system within the local region.*

- Significant influence but on policy only

*Very little [influence on the school directly]. It seems budget, I guess, or initiative support like whether to keep instructional coaches within our schools, backing from district money, not ministry money, so the trustees will have to vote on that. It seems very distanced from what we do in the schools.*

*Trustees focus on policy decisions. They don't have a lot of influence with respect to one school*

- Significant direct influence on the local community (through support and advocacy)

*They are our voice, our public voice and in our district, they are doing a good job.*

*I know that our District of Trustees, they are kind of like our biggest cheerleaders. They want to be in our schools to see what's happening in our schools, to ensure that what we're saying is happening. They want to be invited in on every possible occasion. I think we're very fortunate that we have a very diverse group. But a very collaborative group of trustees at this present time. They are there for the right reasons*

*I'd say support and celebration. And then they set direction that influences us and they approve direction at the district level but at the school level it's support and celebration.*

While all respondents had a general understanding of how the district of trustees functioned, more specific knowledge about trustees functioning typically was based on direct contact with trustees in schools. Such contact often occurred during pre-planned visits or attendance at events organized by the school, for example:

*We have quite a bit of face-to-face contact. So I would say almost every event that we've had, we have potentially three trustees that we do invite just because of where our school sits and at every event, we have a trustee. So, they are very hands-on in interacting with us. They ask teachers, how is it going, what do you need*

*Summary.* School leaders had a general understanding of the official policy-oriented role of trustees although there was wide variation among respondents in their familiarity with what that entailed. Direct contact with trustees occurred when trustees were in schools. This occurred sometimes as part of pre-planned visits but more frequently through trustees' attendance at school-sponsored events. Some respondents viewed trustees' function at these events as largely social while others understood their trustees to be digging deeper into the needs of the school and the views of parents so that their work at the district table would be better informed.



## 8.10 PRODUCTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Questions about this district characteristic concerned the productivity of relationships among key groups in the organization – district leaders, district and school leaders, districts and parents.

### Relationships Among District Leaders

Interviewees were asked what words they would use to describe the nature and quality of relationships among central office leaders in the district - and why? A large majority of respondents offered positive comments about district leader relationships. These relationships were described, for example as cohesive, strong, open, professional, respectful, supportive, and collaborative. Several respondents described these relationships as follows, for example:

*They present a united front, they seem to work very collaboratively together. Each of them has their specific area of expertise but they do work very well together in bringing a common focus to everything that we are told and shown, and everything that sent down to us from the district level of you know, what new advances or new priorities we have within the schools.*

*Central office leaders work very well together. It's a very professional environment but its professional positive too you don't get the impression that things are hidden or under the surface.*

*It seems like a team and everyone has their strengths and contributes to it and they support each other too. Almost a family.*

*Every single one of them is approachable and our district really focuses on the relationship aspect of it... The relationships are strong.*

When district leader relationships were positive, respondents typically pointed to the values and hiring decisions of the director. For example:

*That's huge thing I have seen since our last Director came in, he really recognizes the importance of relationships in all direction, in your school, with your colleagues, with parents. That's been nice to see.*

*Our directors, by and large, have done a good job of putting the right people in the right seats and creating good teams. And that's not always easy right?*

Changes in personnel, small district size and the effects of a common sense of direction resulting from the strategic planning process were also considered to be causes of positive district leader relationships:

*Sometimes it has to do with personality. When there was some change, there were people that could work better together. I think strategic planning process really helped with that.*

*We are fortunate because we are a small district so the people, we know each other really well and at the district level, they have worked with one another for many years either as VP, principals and now superintendents. So that intimacy and knowledge from years of working with one another.*

*They are cohesive because they have a strong vision about what the system should look like not that it's like oh well we all work in the same office. They do challenge each other. They do really encourage each other, so that I think they're very cohesive.*

*They're always about school improvement, that's their whole focus, it shows in the way they speak to each other, work together and you can tell that they have spent a lot of hours getting to where they are as a group because it does seem a common focus, a united front when they talk to us in the superintendent meeting.*

Not all district leadership teams were perceived to enjoy positive relationships, however. A small minority of respondents described relationships among their district leaders using such terms as inconsistent, strained, and competitive. For example:

*I do find that sometimes our central office leaders are not on the same page. Having worked with 3 different superintendents in the last 5 years, I tend to see that. It's not a terrible thing because they are all doing good things but they seem to sometimes lack of consistency about what is most important especially when it involves instructional leadership."*

*I would say that the relationships are fairly strained. We had a new director coming in who's been very good, but now they're all kind of working to establish how important they are as opposed to really working for what's important and working together.*

### **Relationships between District and School Leaders**

Interviewees were asked what words they would use to describe the nature and quality of relationships between central office leaders and most school leaders in the district – and why?

“Supportive and responsive” were the terms used most frequently by interviewees, as, for example:

*Good and supportive relationship. The ability to talk to senior admin whenever you call. I think it's because the availability of being able to talk with senior admin being able to pick up the phone or send an email knowing you will get a response. I think the relationship is good.*

*The relationships are supportive, the relationship are focused on school needs.*

*I would say that most are very supportive by our central office leaders.*

Other terms used multiple times to describe positive relationships between school and district leaders were approachable, respectful, trusting, collaborative accessible, caring and appreciative. For example:

*I think our superintendent do demonstrate care towards school leaders.*

*I think its respect. I have never had a conversation with any of our central office leaders and not had a feeling of at least being heard or respected.*

*I feel that for director ... just amazing, I feel like she is accessible, listens, she is in the school and wants to be in the school so .... Sometimes I think ... ok I think superintends are all trying to get her ears. Sometimes may be the people that she is surrounded with aren't always giving her the best advice. But I really feel like she wants to hear and she wants to do something about it.*

*I know that my superintendent, as busy as she is, if there is a crisis or if I have to send her a heads up note of a concerned parent, she will always send a quick reply, “ thank you I will get back to you”.*

*I would say we have an excellent relationship with our superintendents. I’ll say they have the right people in the role right now. It never used to be like that. I think we use to have a culture of compliance.*

The reasons interviewees gave for positive relationships between themselves and district leaders closely paralleled the reasons identified for positive relationships within district leadership teams.

Not everyone described relationships between school and district leaders as positive but, among those who perceived those relationships to be negative, there was no agreement on the nature of the negative relationships; top down, distant, reactive, strained and tense

### **District Contributions to Relationships between Schools and Parents**

Interviewees were asked “What advice, if any, does your district provide to schools about school-parent relationships? and “How has this influenced the approach taken with parents in your school?” This section does not address how schools decided to engage with parents themselves, although respondents spoke about such engagement; the section is limited to the seven messages schools received from districts about parent engagement.

#### **1. Consider relationships with parents to be important**

The advice from central office leaders identified by the largest number of respondents was simply that the relationship between parents and schools is important:

*We are regularly encouraged and directed, by the director and senior team, to keep an eye on ensuring positive relationships with our parents.*

*We spend a lot of time talking about the home, school and parish connection, that triad. It’s all about relationships. We draw our families in through school events, events through the church and it does tend to be a focus that we maintain positive relationships always. Understanding that there will be differences of opinion and differences of view as the year goes on. But when our relationship is on rocky grounds because of, say issues with a child at the school, then we have to work collaboratively to find solutions because we don’t ever write kids off, that’s not what we do.*

*Our school district is very clear and explicit in terms of the values and the importance of communication. In terms of building relationships with our parents in terms of being proactive, in terms of just giving good information about our building, what is happening on daily, weekly, monthly basis over all big picture plan. This may be more of a communication response the use of our website, the overall health of our building in terms of building relationship*

#### **2. Be sensitive to parental circumstances**

Districts also encouraged school leaders to acknowledge and respond appropriately to parents in different circumstances. Noted one interviewee:

*We talk specifically about the fact that [parents in] certain areas of our district have different levels of education, different levels of poverty, so it's our responsible to maintain dignity, integrity and respect at all times, that's very important."*

3. Keep the student at the center of the school's relationships with parents

As one interviewee noted, *Things can go south with parents and with kids and our job is to move beyond that and solve the problem and support the child and I think that directive from the district about moving forward is truly really there.*

4. Seek support from district leaders, as needed, for day-to-day problem solving

An interviewee observed that *Superintendents have been very good to give you advice on parental issues, disgruntled parents, parents with inquiries that you can't answer. Our district has been very supportive.*

5. Adhere to the districts' communication policy

*Updated websites... our district has had specific teachers at the system level who will come in when we need them to help with parent and student communication and other ways of communicating.*

*I think the one thing we hear often is that communication is the key with parents that we need to communicate often with parents, to communicate before there is a problem wherever possible and if there is a problem to communicate immediately.*

6. Include parent voices in decisions about large changes or purchases

*We are encouraged to incorporate parent voice when we are making large changes or large purchases or re-envisioning schools or re-culturing them.*

*The advice that I received is that parents just need to know that they've been heard. And so, when it comes to that relationship building, that's some of the advice that we've been given and I think that's meaningful. They advise us and they support us, they tell us make sure we value the parents voice, we need to be supportive*

7. View parents as partners in the education of their children

*Public confidence is one of our goals in our district and it's one of the pillars at the ministry level. So, we continue to emphasize that public confidence, whether it's school to parent relationship or whether it's with community partners or just the communities in general...*

A few respondents claimed that they received very little advice from their districts about parent relationships (e.g., *I don't think we get any advice on this. Parent engagement has mostly been through school councils. They invite parents to attend PD on certain topics).*

*Summary.* Most respondents believed that the relationships among district leaders and between the district leadership team and school leaders were quite positive. These positive relationships, described as open, accessible, collaborative, respectful, trusting and caring, for example, were the result of a widely shared, coherent sense of direction, good personnel choices by the director and others involved in hiring, as well as organizational size (small districts were viewed as having advantages for establishing good relationships). Most respondents did not believe their districts promoted specific initiatives with parents for schools to implement. Instead, districts more generally advised school leaders to engage parents in school decisions, acknowledge parents as partners in the education of their children, adhere to the district's communication policies with parents, and keep in mind the very different Conditions in which students and their parents found themselves. These results indicate that many districts in the province have yet to consider the emerging evidence about forms of school-parent engagement that significantly contribute to student success at school.

## 5. SUMMARY

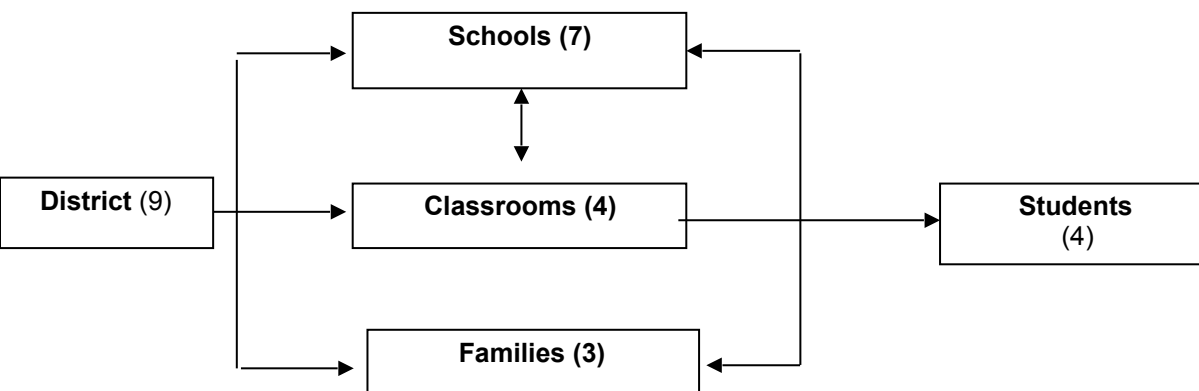
### Objectives for the Research

This mixed-methods study was the latest in a nine-year combined research and professional development project aimed at improving the contribution that school districts in Ontario make to student success in school. The current study replicated and extended a study of high performing districts carried out in the province in 2010 (Leithwood & Azah, 2011, 2016). Testing the efficacy of nine district characteristics identified in the 2010 study, as well as deepening understanding about the features of each district characteristic in its most effective state were among the primary objectives for this study. In addition, the study assessed the extent to which a selected set of school, classroom and family Conditions significantly mediate district effects on students (language and math achievement, well-being and engagement). Data collected by the study provided answers to 8 questions as a means of accomplishing the overall objectives for the study. Equity and human rights concerns are top-of-mind among educational policy makers and practitioners in Ontario and the framework for this study was built on evidence about what districts and schools do to provide equitable outcomes for all students.

### Framework Guiding the Research

The framework (Figure 1) identified both primary and secondary causal relationships between three sets of variables. Nine Characteristics of high performing districts are assumed to influence student success through 12 Conditions in the school, classroom and family. These 12 Conditions also have reciprocal effects on one another and both individual and combined effects on student outcomes – math and language achievement, student well-being and student engagement

*Figure 1. Framework for Study*



District Characteristics included Mission, vision and goals for students, Coherent instructional guidance, Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions. Learning-oriented organizational improvement processes, Professional development for all members, Alignment, Approaches to leadership development, Policy-oriented board of trustees, and Relationships between and among all stakeholders.

Conditions in the school, as a whole, included School Leadership, Academic Emphasis, Disciplinary Climate, Safe and Orderly Environments, Collaborative Structures and Cultures, Organization for Planning and Instruction. Classroom Conditions included Instruction, Uses of instructional time, Teachers' commitment, Teacher trust in others and Collective teacher efficacy. Family Conditions (family educational culture) included parent expectations for their children's success at school, forms of communication between parents and children at home, and parents' social capital related to schooling.

## **Methods**

Data for the study were collected through both interviews and surveys. Hour-long interviews about the current status of District Characteristics were collected from 44 principals and vice-principals selected from all regions of the province. Two sets of survey data were collected from district and school leaders in 45 of the province's 72 school systems. One survey for principals and vice-principals collected information about the 12 school, classroom and family Conditions serving as mediators in the study. A second survey collected data from both district and school leaders about the current status of the nine district Characteristics.

All student outcome data for each district were accessed through publicly available, provincial (EQAO), on-line sources; these were data about student achievement in math and language, student engagement, and a domain-specific concept of student well-being. These data were used to create both one-year measure, as well as five-year change measure of each of the four student outcomes; the one-year measure was based on 2016 results.

Because the district was the unit of interest in this study, the small sample size (45) placed significant constraints on the types of statistical analyses of quantitative data that could be conducted to answer causal questions; correlations and a new method - the calculation of "Power Indices" were used for this purpose.

## **Results**

Data from the study provided responses to 8 questions. Quantitative data were used to answer the first 7 of these questions while interview results were used to answer the 8th.

### **1. On average, just how “strong” are Ontario school districts?**

All nine Characteristics of Strong Districts were at least moderately well developed in the province’s school districts at the time of the study. Three of the nine Characteristics were especially well developed: Mission, Vision and Goals for Students; Budgets, Structures, Personnel Policies and Procedures and Uses of Time Aligned with the District’s Mission, Vision and Goals and; Coherent Instructional Guidance. While Elected Leadership was rated among the least well- developed of the nine characteristics, there was also more variation (a larger standard deviation) in responses to this characteristic than the others.

### **2. How well developed in Ontario schools are those Conditions in schools, classrooms and families which prior research suggests make significant contributions to student success?**

All school, classroom and family Conditions measured by the survey were at least moderately well developed in the province’s schools. Safe and Orderly Environments and Teacher Commitment were the most fully developed while Classroom Instruction and Organization of Planning and Instructional Time were least well developed. There was significant agreement among respondents about these results.

### **3. Do those Conditions in schools, classrooms and families with demonstrable effects on student success in prior research have comparable effects in Ontario?**

*Language.* Only Uses of Instructional Time and Organization and Planning for Instruction did not contribute to the one-year measure of Language Achievement but 11 of the 12 Conditions had non-significant negative relationships with the 5-year change measure of Language Achievement. The strongest effects on the one-year measure of Language achievement (in order) were Teacher Trust, Academic Emphasis, School Leadership, Classroom Instruction, Teacher Commitment, and Disciplinary Climate.

*Math.* All 12 school, classroom and family Conditions were significantly related to the one-year measure of Academic Math achievement. Similar and especially strong relationships were evident for Collective Teacher Efficacy, Safe and Orderly Environments, Teacher Trust, and Academic Emphasis. Only Uses of Instructional Time and Organization of Planning for Instruction were significantly related to five-year change measures. Four Conditions were significantly (but relatively weakly) related to the one-year measure of Applied Math achievement – Teacher Commitment, Collective Teacher Efficacy, Safe and Orderly Environment and Collaborative Cultures and Structures.



*Student Well-Being.* As a whole, the 12 Conditions were moderately related to the one-year aggregate measure of well-being but not the five-year change measure. Academic Emphasis and School Leadership stand out as the most influential of the 12, although Teacher Trust and Collective Teacher Efficacy also had significant but relatively weak relationships with well-being. The five-year aggregate measure of well-being was significantly related to Academic Emphasis and Organization and Planning for Instruction. School Leadership and Academic Emphasis were also significantly related to well-being in language, but none of the 12 Conditions was related to change-over-five-years in language well-being. As compared with well-being in language, school, classroom and family Conditions played a much more influential role with well-being in math. Ten of the 12 Conditions were significantly related to the one-year measure of this outcome and 5 of the 12 Conditions were significantly related to the change-over-five-years measure.

*Student Engagement.* Results also point to the significant role that a large handful of school, classroom and family Conditions has on student engagement. While the influence of School Leadership, Academic Emphasis and Family Educational Cultures stand out in relation to most measures of engagement, Teacher Trust, Collective Teacher Efficacy and Safe and Orderly Environments constitute a weaker but still significant set of influences.

#### **4. To what extent do each of the Characteristics of Strong Districts influence those Conditions in schools, classrooms and families with demonstrable effects on student success?**

Considering the correlations, it is reasonable to claim that at least seven of the nine District Characteristics are important influences on the majority of the 12 school, classroom and family Conditions. Most of these seven are significantly related to multiple Conditions while two district characteristic appears to influence only one: Mission, Visions and Goals for Students had a significant effect on Academic Emphasis while Coherent Instructional Guidance had a significant effect on Disciplinary Climate. None of the nine district characteristics were significantly related to School Leadership, Uses of Instructional Time. Organization and Planning for Instruction, and Family Educational Culture.

#### **5. How large are the direct and indirect effects of the nine Strong District Characteristics on student success?**

*Direct effects.* Seven of the nine district characteristics (all but Professional Development and Elected Trustees) had significant direct effects on the one-year measure of Language achievement. Two of the nine characteristics had significant effects on the one-year measure of Math achievement (Mission, Vision and

Goals for Students and Coherent Instructional Guidance. None of the nine district characteristics had significant direct effects on measures of student well-being or student engagement.

As compared with the results of the 2010 study, these results are approximately similar for the 1-year measures of achievement in math and language. However, in the 2010 study, five district characteristics had significant relationships with five-year change scores in both math and language while none of the district characteristics had such effects in the current study.

*Indirect effects.* Within the constraints of what was measured by this study, what do the results suggest are the most promising indirect paths for districts to follow in their efforts to improve their students' math achievement? Results point to three paths (with labels adopted from LSA's theory of action) districts should consider as part of their math improvement strategies.

The most powerful of these paths (the Emotions Path) includes a cluster of three teacher dispositions - Teacher Trust, Collective Teacher Efficacy, and Teacher Commitment – hence the “Emotions” label. All nine district characteristics have some influence on the cluster of Conditions defining this path. So, work toward improving any of the nine district characteristics should be done in ways likely to instill Teacher Trust, Commitment to their district's expectations for student achievement in math along with a sense of Collective Efficacy about accomplishing those expectations. High levels of trust and commitment will be promoted by transparency about existing approaches to math instruction, motivation to work with others to find more effective practices and willingness to risk trying promising new practices. Teacher Trust and Commitment will develop to the extent that teachers understand and share the district's expectations for student success in math and participate in district decision making about the most promising approaches to math instruction. Teachers sense of Collective Efficacy will develop as teachers come to believe that the professional development available to them contributes to the capacities they need to improve math achievement among their students and that the district's policies, procedures and allocation of resources are closely aligned with - and enable - their efforts to improve students' math achievement.

A second less powerful cluster of related Conditions (the Organizational Path) includes Safe and Orderly Environments and Collaborative Cultures. Six of the nine district characteristics have some influence on these two Conditions. District efforts to improve student math achievement should include explicitly embedding instructional expectations about math in districts' visions, missions and goals for students, providing coherent but flexible instructional guidance to schools about math instruction, especially guidance that is “balanced”, that is, guidance that includes both district advice about promising instructional practices and considerable local autonomy about whether and how to implement those

practices. This path relies on the use of multiple sources of evidence to (a) identify those components of the math curriculum needing focused attention (b) locate evidence about the most promising approaches to instruction related to those components and (c) monitor the challenges and successes associated with implementing improved math instruction in classrooms.

The third and least powerful, but still significant, of the three clusters of related Conditions (the Rational Path) includes Academic Emphasis and Classroom Instruction. Four of the nine district characteristics have some influence on these two Conditions. Two of these district characteristics also influence the Emotions Path and two the Rational Path. Clearly, Mission, Vision and Goals for Students, Coherent Instruction Guidance and Uses of Multiple sources of Evidence are an especially critical sub-set of the nine characteristics for districts aiming to improve their students' math achievement.

## **6. How large are the direct and indirect effects of School Leadership on student outcomes?**

All relationships between School Leadership and the other 11 school, classroom and family Conditions were moderately to highly significant. While this confirms much earlier evidence about the key role of school-level leadership, it also points to a challenge for district leaders since none of the nine District Characteristics had any appreciable effect on School Leadership. While some districts in the province are undoubtedly providing their school leaders with productive development experiences, on average, Ontario districts seem to be making very little contribution to the quality of their school leaders, as described by the practices included in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*, or they are doing so in ways not measured by this study.

## **7. Is there a significant relationship between student achievement in math and language and student well-being and engagement?**

Results concerned with well-being indicate mostly moderate to strong relationships between both one-year and change-over-five-years achievement scores in mathematics (Academic and Applied) and a significant but weak relationship between one-year well-being scores and one-year language scores. One-year engagement scores are moderately to strongly related to one-year language and one-year math achievement only.

In sum, while both well-being and engagement are positively related to some measures of achievement, well-being and math achievement are especially tightly linked.

## **8. How do school leaders understand the work of their districts and its contribution to their own school improvement efforts?**

Data used to answer this question were provided by 44 interviewees, 22 of whom were from elementary schools and 12 from secondary schools. Interviews asked about the status and value of each of the nine district Characteristics as enacted in their own districts.

*Mission, Vision and Goals for Students.* The modal process in districts for creating a widely shared Mission, Vision and Goals for Students included significant participation by most stakeholder groups, including diverse groups of parents and students. For some stakeholders this participation was direct, through membership on a strategic planning committee, for example, while others participated by responding to surveys often online.

If statements intended to capture district priorities are to be useful to school leaders, furthermore, they must be memorable and meaningful, as well as a constant part of the conversation - in principals' meetings, with trustees and other contexts about priorities. A useful district statement of directions and priorities serve as key criteria used in decision making and continue to evolve in order to remain relevant to Conditions in schools which, of course, also evolve. Useful approaches to this Strong District characteristic also entail careful alignment between ministry priorities and district improvement plans, as well as alignment between district plans and school improvement plans

*Coherent Instructional Guidance.* This Strong District characteristic encompasses efforts by districts to encourage all schools to use, either similar approaches to instruction or approaches which schools themselves could credibly justify as "effective. This district characteristic allows for centrally determined approaches ("low discretion"), as well as approaches that rely on considerably more discretion and control by school leaders, although not complete autonomy (balanced discretion). Interviewees provided examples of both approaches.

Two examples of low discretion approaches were described by interviewees. Although providing little discretion for staffs, the two examples were viewed as quite helpful. A small number of respondents, however, were concerned about loss of autonomy in local decisions about instructional improvement. The remaining interview evidence described approaches that aimed for a balance of central direction and local autonomy; central control over the priorities for improvement and considerable autonomy, with district support, for school leaders to decide how those priorities were to be enacted in individual schools. Most of these balanced discretion approaches made considerable use of district improvement plans, regularly

reviewed district priorities with school leaders, emphasized instructional forms of leadership and carefully aligned professional development with district and school priorities.

*Deliberate and Consistent use of Multiple Sources of Evidence to Inform Decisions.* Interviewees described their districts' practices as including collaborative analysis of provincial test data across the district and in schools, extending the types of data used for school improvement, and expanding the focus of data beyond ends to means. Interviewees also reported their districts attempting to make data more accessible to schools and providing significant resources to support use of data in schools. These district efforts, according to many interviewees, had increased their capacities to understand and work effectively with data in their schools, to be more precise in determining the focus of their school improvement efforts, to be more transparent about the work of schools and to be more accountable about that work. Increased access to, and use of data, also helped school leaders justify requests they might make to their district for increased resources.

*Learning-oriented Organizational Improvement Processes.* Respondents described the processes in their districts used for creating and implementing district and school improvement plans in light of district strategic plans. These processes were viewed as especially helpful by school leaders when they: provided quick access to help from district staff; helped to clarify district priorities and fostered ongoing dialogue in the district about those priorities; and allowed considerable autonomy for schools in their school improvement efforts. District improvement processes were also valued by school leaders when they allowed for and encouraged a sustained focus on a small number of priorities, broad participation in improvement efforts and targeted support for school improvement efforts.

*Professional Development for all Members.* Respondents identified widely varied sources of professional development sponsored by their districts. While the bulk of interviewees valued approaches that allowed for considerable autonomy and control at the school level, evidence suggests that even centrally determined and delivered PD could allow for adequate autonomy if those experiencing it took the initiative to use what they learned in their own contexts. Done well, central district sponsorship brings with it access to expertise unlikely to be available to individual schools; done poorly it can be insensitive to the needs of staff and the improvement challenges faced by schools. Done well, job-embedded PD brings with it close knowledge of local challenges and access to peers with relevant professional know how that can be turned to solving individual problems; done poorly, it can be blind to useful ideas found outside the local group and increase resistance to change. It may be that encouragement of networks and

individual responsibility for one's personal professional development are still underutilized forms of district-sponsored PD.

*Budgets, Structures, Personnel Policies and Procedures, and Uses of Time Aligned with the District's Mission, Vision and Goals.* Alignment across many aspects of the district organization make important contributions to the improvement work of school leaders. District alignment increases chances of accomplishing goals and priorities, reduces distractions from those goals and priorities, provides staff with more confidence about the value of their work, facilitates collaboration among school leaders, clarifies accountability, increases access to district support for school goals and priorities and improves school planning. Evidence from interviewees suggests that many districts in the province had been working hard to improve alignment among different aspects of their organizations, for example, alignment across district goals, budgets, personnel policies, and allocation of professional development resources. Indeed, interviewees identified, as important to their work, many more features of districts to be aligned than the framework for the study had anticipated.

Only two areas of district functioning were cited by significant numbers of respondents as in need of more alignment effort, alignment of available time with expectations districts had for the attention of schools, and the alignment of expectations for schools among different district offices which were viewed by some respondents as “silos”.

*A Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development.* Interviewees responded to questions about leadership recruitment, selection, initial preparation, and both the professional development and performance appraisal of incumbent leaders. The bulk of respondents identified recruitment by their districts as consisting of either or both the provision of experiences aimed at giving prospective leaders a good sense of what is entailed in doing the job and “tapping on the shoulder” (including encouragement by principals). Districts were selecting people who had demonstrated an interest in leadership roles by inviting them to enroll in a formal leadership development program, by creating a “pool” in which those considered potentially suitable would be placed for consideration as positions became available. Several districts also provided aspirants with an application package to complete, followed by an interview. Most districts took into account the recommendations of the aspirants' principals.

Districts provided successful applicants with two forms of initial preparation, on-the-job leadership opportunities and formal professional development. Continuing professional development for those already in formal leadership positions including formal programs, as well as professional development

during regularly scheduled administrator meetings. As with appraisal processes, these forms of support seemed to be increasingly valuable as they were directed at the specific challenges facing individual school leaders and as they were available in a very timely manner. (“just-in-time PD”). Some form of periodic formal performance appraisal of school leaders was carried out by most districts. But relatively frequent and problem-focused interactions contributed more to school leader growth than formal appraisal processes conducted much less frequently.

*A Policy-oriented District of Trustees.* School leaders had a general understanding of the official policy-oriented role of trustees although there was wide variation among respondents in their familiarity with what that entailed. Direct contact with trustees occurred when trustees were in schools. This occurred sometimes as part of pre-planned visits but more frequently through trustees’ attendance at school-sponsored events. Some respondents viewed trustees’ function at these events as largely social while others understood their trustees to be digging deeper into the needs of the school and the views of parents so that their work at the district table would be better informed.

*Productive Working Relationships with Staff and other Stakeholders.* Relationships among district leaders and between the district leadership team and school leaders were typically viewed as quite positive. These positive relationships, described as open, accessible, collaborative, respectful, trusting and caring, for example, were the result of a widely shared, coherent sense of direction, good personnel choices by the director and others involved in hiring, as well as organizational size (small districts were viewed as having advantages for establishing good relationships).

About relationships with parents, most respondents reported their districts to offer few specific initiatives for school engagement with parents. Instead, districts more generally advised school leaders to engage parents in school decisions, acknowledge parents as partners in the education of their children, adhere to the district’s communication policies with parents, and keep in mind the very different Conditions in which students and their parents found themselves. These results indicate that many districts in the province have yet to consider the emerging evidence about forms of school-parent engagement that significantly contribute to student success at school.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section includes ten recommendations for the consideration of district leaders and two recommendations for revising the *Ontario Leadership Framework*.

One of the overall goals of the study was to determine the extent to which the results of the 2010 study about the direct effects of the nine district characteristics on student math and language achievement could be replicated. Results of this study did replicate the results of the 2010 study for five of the nine district characteristics and provide justification, not found in the 2010 study, for Professional Leadership and Learning-oriented Improvement Processes.

1. *Results of the study add confidence about the efficacy of the nine Characteristics of Strong Districts. District leaders should continue to use these characteristics as a framework for their district improvement efforts.*

Among the most important results from this study is evidence of significant effects, on most of the student outcomes included in the study, of all 12 school, classroom and family Conditions serving as mediators of district effects. These results are entirely consistent with much evidence collected in many other contexts. The quantity and consistency of these finding overwhelms evidence available about other “levers” for change such as specific programs, for example. This evidence justifies four recommendations for district leaders to consider:

2. *Districts should set, as a priority for supporting the improvement work of their schools, learning more about how to improve the status of the 12 Conditions included in the study and developing resource material that school can use in their efforts to further develop selected Conditions as part of their school improvement efforts.*
3. *Districts should reflect the important contribution to student success of the 12 Conditions by including specific training for school leaders in how to diagnose and improve the status of each of the Conditions in their organizations.*
4. *Districts and their schools should avoid an exclusive focus on any one of the 12 Conditions on the grounds that it is some sort of “silver bullet” for all schools. All 12 Conditions have the potential to significantly help improve student success and the choice of which one or several to focus on at a given time should depend on judgements about what would be most helpful in individual school contexts.*
5. *Evidence reported in this study about the relative effect on students of each of the 12 Conditions should be reflected in the priority districts attach to improving Classroom Instruction. The effect on*



*student outcomes of Classroom Instruction is less than the effect of Teacher Trust, Academic Emphasis and School Leadership and about the same as Teacher Commitment and Disciplinary Climate.*

*Districts that have devoted considerable resources already to improving Classroom Instruction should consider the marginal effects of spending additional resources on improving Classroom Instruction, as compared with spending those resources on improving one of the other high impact Conditions that might not yet have been given much attention.*

As one of the Conditions included in the study, School Leadership made the most consistently significant contributions to student math and language achievement; it was also one of only four of the 12 school, classroom and family Conditions to have significant effects on student well-being, and had the largest effect on student engagement of any of the Conditions. These results reinforce the results of much previous research about the critical role of School Leadership in improving student success and turning around underperforming schools.

Since the study's measure of School Leadership was based on those practices included in the *Ontario Leadership Framework* (OLF) these results also provide further confirmation of OLF's validity. However, our analysis of the effects of the nine district Characteristics on the 12 Conditions revealed no significant effects on School Leadership. This does not mean, of course, that no districts are influencing the development of their school leaders in directions described by the OLF. However, it does mean that, on average, districts are having little effect on School Leadership. This warrants a recommendation closely related to the previous four:

6. *Districts should reassess what they are doing to nurture the development of their school leaders ensuring that the explicit focus of their development efforts are consistent with the practices described in the OLF and that the means they are using for leadership development are as effective as possible. There is likely no single improvement focus for a district that will make as large a difference to its performance as a focus on School Leadership development.*

None of the nine district Characteristics had a significant influence on Family Educational Culture. Interview data collected from school principals and vice-principals, furthermore, indicated that while many districts expected schools to treat relationships with parents as important and to acknowledge the diversity of family circumstances, none of their districts provided specific advice to schools about how to

engage parents in ways that evidence suggests fosters student success. However, evidence from this study indicates that Family Educational Culture makes moderately strong contributions to both language and academic math achievement. There is considerable evidence from other sources which also makes this case, including evidence collected by the LSA project in this province.

*7. In light of provincial priorities about both equity and building support for public education, districts should encourage especially schools serving children from families facing serious social and financial challenges to include, as part of their improvement work, the development of those three elements of family cultures known to matter for student success (parent expectations, communication between parents and children in the home, and parents' social capital related to schooling). A key resource for districts taking up this recommendation will be the results of a recent provincial study, sponsored by CODE and the Ministry of Education, identifying successful strategies schools and districts can use for this purpose (Leithwood & Patrician, 2015).*

Based on the calculation of Power Indices, seven of the 12 school, classroom and family Conditions had significant direct effects on student math achievement and point to three distinct paths that districts are pursuing with some success in their math improvement efforts. The most powerful of these paths includes a cluster of three teacher dispositions - Teacher Trust, Collective Efficacy and Commitment, a combination we label the Emotions Path. The impact on students' math achievement of the Emotions Path, one of the most visible and surprising results of the study, points to relatively "soft" but powerful addition to the math improvement strategies of many districts.

While professional development for teachers aimed at increasing their pedagogical content knowledge about math instruction is an example of a "hard" and no doubt valuable part of any district math improvement strategy, our findings about the contribution of the Emotions Path helps to explain why, in this study, district professional development demonstrated such weak effects. Absent a sense of trust in others, many teachers are reluctant to try new forms of instruction in their classrooms. Absent a sense of collective efficacy, many teachers lack confidence in their ability to solve the inevitable challenges they anticipate from changing their practices. Absent a sense of commitment to math as a priority, many teachers are inclined to emphasize, in their teaching, those components of the curriculum with which they are comfortable and continue to downplay components about which they are uncertain. Overlooking the power of the Emotions Path may help to explain why many districts in the province continue to experience disappointing results from their math improvement efforts.

8. *Districts should assess the extent to which all dimensions (or characteristics) of their work is carried out in ways that nurture the trust, efficacy and commitment of their teaching force.*

Evidence from this study indicates that four of the 12 Conditions have significant effects on student well-being, including (in order of strength) Academic Emphasis, School Leadership, Teacher Collective Efficacy and Teacher Trust in others. It is important to remember that the measure of well-being used in this study was “domain specific”, it was a measure of students’ sense of well-being related to the demands and successes they faced at school about their work in math and language, not a more holistic sense of well-being. These results suggest that:

9. *Schools and districts aiming to improve domain-specific conceptions of student well-being should include, as part of their improvement efforts, increasing the status in their schools of Academic Emphasis, School Leadership, Teacher Collective Efficacy and Teacher Trust in others. These are Conditions that also influence math and language achievement, suggesting that there is no need for special initiatives aimed at improving students’ domain-specific well-being. What will be effective for improving achievement will also be effective for improving well-being.*

Results of the interviews conducted, as part of the study, with 48 school leaders from most sectors of the province provide a rich source of information for assessing and revising detailed descriptors of each of the nine district characteristics included in the district portion of the Ontario Leadership Framework.

10. *Those responsible for future revisions to the district portion of the OLF should carefully mine these interview data for possible revisions, along with whatever other evidence they believe to be relevant.*

One of the study’s most consistent and striking results was the substantial contribution of school-level leadership to all four student outcomes serving as dependent variables for the study. The measure of school leadership used in the study was based directly on the leadership practices included in the school-level section of the *Ontario Leadership Framework*. Although not an initial objective for the study, these results provide remarkably compelling, original empirical support for the validity of the OLF’s leadership practices. While many national and sub-national education jurisdictions now have their own sets of

leadership standards or frameworks, to our knowledge none have provided direct empirical evidence, of the sort this study provides for OLF, to justify their standards.

11. *Those responsible for revisions to the school-level portion of the Ontario Leadership Framework should carefully weigh the evidence provided by this study before making significant changes. The integrated model of leadership reflected in OLF's leadership practices seem to make remarkable contributions to student achievement, well-being and engagement.*

## 7. POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS FOR ONTARIO'S STRONG DISTRICT INITIATIVE

Results of the research described in this report, as well as considerable feedback from district leaders in response to the Professional Development modules, suggests three sets of next steps that would be productive additions to Strong District work in the province

### Resource Documents

1. Preparation of a “handbook” for districts to use when working toward improving the knowledge of school leaders about the 12 conditions. This would include a detailed description of each Condition in its most desirable state, along with leadership practices known to be useful for improvement purposes; it would also include illustrations of what such leadership looks like in practice.

Many senior leaders have asked for assistance for their school leaders in diagnosing the status of the 12 conditions in their schools. This diagnostic assistance could also be part of a handbook.

2. Development of a book-length account of high-performing school systems largely organized around the nine characteristics but including illustrations and additional related research. This would be a “how to” book for senior school leaders and possibly a text to be used in supervisory officer certification programs.

### Professional Development

3. While attendance at the Strong Districts modules this past 12 months was quite impressive, many senior leaders we have spoken with assume the availability of this PD program will continue through another cycle. Very few senior leaders have participated in more than one or two of the modules. So

there seems to be a need and desire to provide another round of PD based on our work to date and, in the process, further improve the resources that are now part of the modules.

## **Research**

4. The Strong District study did not set out with the objective of testing the OLF but it did provide such a test, nevertheless. This test adds considerable justification for continued uses of the OLF in Ontario. Nonetheless, a study with the school, rather than the district, as the unit of analysis has the potential to add much more power to the evidence now available, as well as lead to evidence - based refinements. This is important to do given the priority the province now attaches to improving math performance and student well-being, both of which, we now know, are important outcomes of OLF-based school leadership. In addition, although the OLF has been widely adopted in Ontario, it has also received considerable positive attention in other jurisdictions internationally. New research with a more robust design would place Ontario's claims about the efficacy of its leadership framework in another league, as compared to jurisdictions elsewhere.

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## APPENDIX A

### Leading and Teaching in School Survey Results<sup>12</sup>

*Items of Domain Variables, Ontario Means, and Standard Deviation (SD)  
Based on School Leaders' Ratings*

<i>The extent to which you agree that the following statements accurately describe your school at this time (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4= Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)</i>	<b><i>Ontario Mean</i></b>	<b><i>Ontario SD</i></b>
<b>Academic Press or Emphasis</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.75</b>	<b>0.75</b>

<sup>12</sup> This result table reports the current status of each of the variables measured in the *Leading and Teaching Survey* completed by 1252 school leaders in Fall 2016.



a. My staff and I set high standards for academic success.	4.16	0.64
b. Most students respect others who get good grades.	4.06	0.69
c. Students seek extra work so that they can be successful.	3.00	0.90
d. Students try hard to improve on previous work.	3.45	0.78
e. Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the staff and I in my school.	4.11	0.73
<b>Disciplinary Climate</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.60</b>	<b>0.97</b>
a. Students start working soon after lessons begin.	3.85	0.73
b. Students are rarely absent except for good reasons.	3.20	1.07
c. Students rarely get into fights.	3.89	1.01
d. There are not many conflicts among students in my school.	3.46	1.08
<b>Teachers' Use of Instructional Time</b>		
Aggregate (all items in scale)	<b>3.59</b>	<b>0.83</b>
a. Teachers' classrooms are free from distractions to student learning.	3.36	0.96
b. Teachers minimize time lost due to student lateness and absence.	3.32	0.89
c. Students are on task.	3.79	0.66
d. Conditions in teachers' classes allow for an appropriate pace of instruction.	3.70	0.77
e. Most teachers begin classes promptly.	3.91	0.81
f. Most students are capable of taking charge of their own learning in age-appropriate ways.	3.46	0.88
<b>Classroom Instruction</b>		
Aggregate (all items in scale)	<b>3.46</b>	<b>0.85</b>
a. Teachers' instruction is explicitly guided by the goals that they intend to accomplish with their students.	3.66	0.72
b. Teachers monitor students' progress to make sure that they are actively engaged in meaningful learning.	3.68	0.71
c. Teachers provide prompt, informative feedback to students.	3.49	0.75

d. Student achievement results are carefully analyzed for differentiated instruction.	3.18	0.88
e. Instructional strategies enable students to construct their own knowledge.	3.34	0.80
f. Significant opportunities are provided for students to learn collaboratively.	3.72	0.78
g. Data are used to identify weaknesses in students' academic skills and to develop interventions to remediate or reteach.	3.50	0.85
h. Teachers supplement face-to-face instruction in schools with technology-facilitated assignments reinforcing what has been learned in class.	3.29	0.96
i. All students receive the same quality of instruction.	3.11	1.01
j. Struggling students get the attention they need.	3.36	0.98
k. Resources are allocated to support students with the greater needs.	3.70	0.92
<b>Teacher Trust in Others</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.94</b>	<b>0.77</b>
a. Most teachers trust their students to do their best work.	3.75	0.71
b. Most teachers in this school can count on each other for support.	4.26	0.76
c. Most teachers in my school trust me to provide the support they need to do their work well.	4.25	0.66
d. Teachers can count on support from most students' families.	3.51	0.94
<b>Teacher Collective Efficacy</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.81</b>	<b>0.81</b>
a. Most of my teachers believe that most of our students come to school ready to learn.	3.60	0.87
b. Most of my teachers are confident they will be able to motivate their students to learn.	3.83	0.72
c. Most of my teachers are able to get through to even the most difficult students.	3.55	0.85
d. Learning in this school is made easier because students feel safe and welcome.	4.15	0.74
e. Most of my teachers truly believe every child can learn	3.91	0.85

<b>Teacher Commitment</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.95</b>	<b>0.83</b>
a. Most teachers in my school believe very strongly in the school's values and goals.	4.17	0.73
b. Most of my teachers are willing to devote considerable effort to help accomplish the school's goals.	3.99	0.85
c. Most of my teachers are willing to adapt to changes that are aligned with school goals.	3.80	0.86
d. Most of my teachers are willing to "go the extra mile" to help students.	4.11	0.83
e. Most teachers refine their instructional strategies based on evidence.	3.56	0.90
f. Most teachers volunteer to help their school colleagues when they think they can be useful to them.	4.07	0.83
<b>Safe and Orderly Environment</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>4.06</b>	<b>0.86</b>
a. The learning environment in my school is safe and orderly.	4.27	0.72
b. Teachers in my school make serious efforts to promote an inclusive school.	4.30	0.73
c. My school emphasizes the prevention of youth violence in schools rather than suspensions.	4.22	0.78
d. My school uses threat assessment rather than violence surveys to assess the safety of the school.	3.67	1.00
e. My school provides mental health services for those students who need it.	3.88	1.10
f. School staff, parents and communities work together to promote school safety.	4.00	0.82
<b>Collaborative Cultures and Structures</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.66</b>	<b>0.83</b>
a. In my school teachers adjust instruction on the basis of feedback from other colleagues in the school.	3.37	0.87

b. Teachers in my school interact frequently with trusted colleagues outside our school in efforts to improve instructional practices.	3.34	0.94
c. Teachers in my school often challenge one another's beliefs about education.	3.11	0.93
d. Teachers in my school collaborate with one another to develop common assessment tools for measuring students' progress.	3.47	0.93
e. Teachers share instructional strategies that work.	3.90	0.77
f. Teachers and I ensure the collaborative efforts on student data analysis leads to changes in instruction in classrooms.	3.63	0.76
g. Our school celebrates the achievements of staff and students.	4.21	0.72
h. Teachers' conversations are primarily focused on teaching and learning when they meet together for professional learning.	3.83	0.85
i. Teachers in my school have sufficient autonomy to make collaborative decisions about teaching and learning.	4.06	0.68
<b>Organization of Planning and Instructional Time</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.63</b>	<b>0.98</b>
a. Teachers in my school have common planning times to discuss teaching and learning.	3.06	1.23
b. Teachers have regular opportunities to meet together for their professional learning.	3.53	1.07
c. The school's timetable maximizes instructional time for students.	4.14	0.82
d. I ensure that there are very few disruptions to student instructional time.	3.81	0.80
<b>Family Educational Culture</b>		
The extent of your efforts with your staff to engage with parents in each of the following five ways: (1 = <i>Not something we have given much thought to</i> ; 2= <i>to a small extent</i> ; 3= <i>to some extent</i> ; 4= <i>to a large extent</i> ; 5 = <i>We have been very successful with almost all parents who would benefit from our efforts</i> )		
Aggregate (All items in scale) <i>Most of my students' parents or guardians</i>	<b>3.61</b>	<b>0.83</b>
a. Help parents to develop high but realistic expectations for their children's success at school and beyond.	3.43	0.85

b. Help parents develop effective forms of communication with their children in the home about their children's academic work at school.	3.40	0.91
c. Encourage parents to participate in school events.	3.91	0.81
d. Help parents to learn how to assist their children's learning at home.	3.46	0.84
e. Encourage parents to discuss their children's progress at school with teachers.	3.87	0.76
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Leadership of the School as a Whole</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Please indicate the level of confidence you have in your own ability to effectively enact each of the leadership practices listed below: (1 = not at all confident; to a small extent; to some extent; to a large extent, 5 = very confident)</i></p>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.97</b>	<b>0.76</b>
a. Give staff a sense of overall purpose.	4.23	0.64
b. Help clarify the reasons for your school's improvement initiatives.	4.22	0.66
c. Provide useful assistance to your staff in setting short-term goals for teaching and learning.	3.97	0.70
d. Demonstrate high expectations for your staff's work with students.	4.27	0.68
e. Provide individual support to your teachers to help them improve their instructional practices.	3.84	0.80
f. Encourage your teachers to consider new ideas for their teaching.	4.15	0.72
g. Model a high level of professional practice.	4.46	0.64
h. Develop an atmosphere of caring and trust with your staff.	4.61	0.60
i. Promote leadership development among teachers.	4.17	0.75
j. Identify staff development needs and provide effective professional development accordingly.	3.91	0.75
k. Encourage collaborative work among staff.	4.20	0.72
l. Ensure carefully coordinated participation in decisions about school improvement.	3.94	0.77
m. Engage parents in the school's improvement efforts.	3.24	0.92
n. Build community support for the school's improvement efforts.	3.38	0.94

o. Help staff improve their instructional programs based on student data.	3.86	0.76
p. Ensure creative uses of appropriate technologies to achieve excellence and to maximize teaching and learning opportunities.	3.74	0.82
q. Provide resources to help staff improve their teaching.	4.06	0.70
r. Regularly observe classroom activities.	3.56	0.97
s. Work effectively with your teachers following classroom observation, to help them improve their instruction.	3.47	0.90
t. Create a relationship with your teachers that encourages them to discuss educational issues with you.	4.27	0.71
u. Encourage your teachers to use data effectively to improve their instruction.	3.84	0.77
v. Buffer your teachers from distractions to their instruction.	3.83	0.84

## APPENDIX B

## Ontario Districts Survey Results<sup>13</sup>

*Items of Domain Variables, Ontario Means, and Standard Deviation (SD),  
Based on School Leaders' Ratings*

Features and Items	Ontario Mean	Ontario SD
<i>To what extent do you agree that your school system</i> (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Agree; 4 = Strongly Agree)		
<b>Mission, Vision and Goals for Students</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.31</b>	<b>0.65</b>
a. My school system has developed a widely-shared set of beliefs and vision about student learning and well-being that falls within the parameters set by the province.	3.65	0.56
b. My school system's beliefs and vision include a focus on closing achievement gaps.	3.70	0.51
c. My school system's beliefs and vision include a focus on "raising the achievement bar".	3.66	0.54
d. My school system's beliefs and vision include a focus on nurturing student engagement and welfare.	3.58	0.60
e. The elected board has helped to mobilize parents and the wider community in developing and supporting the vision?	2.79	0.79
f. The elected board has helped to mobilize teachers and administrators in developing and supporting the vision.	2.83	0.82
g. My school system's beliefs and vision for students are understood and shared by almost all staff.	3.00	0.73
<b>Coherent Instructional Guidance System</b>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.04</b>	<b>0.74</b>

<sup>13</sup> This result table reports the current status of each of the variables measured in the *Ontario District Survey* completed by 1072 district staff in Ontario, including 36 district leaders in the district in Fall 2016.

a. Strongly supports schools' efforts to implement curricula that foster students' deep understandings about "big ideas", as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings.	3.24	0.69
b. Works effectively with schools to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.	3.08	0.72
c. Works effectively with schools to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards.	3.07	0.70
d. Has aligned all elements of school programs and resources (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment, staff, budget).	2.87	0.78
e. Instructional improvement work in my district includes teachers in a majority of schools and assists them in developing sophisticated understandings of powerful instruction for students.	2.93	0.81
<b>Multiple Sources of Evidence</b>		
Aggregate (all items in scale)	<b>2.94</b>	<b>0.78</b>
a. Have efficient information management systems?	2.87	0.80
b. Provide schools with relevant data about their performance?	3.04	0.79
c. Assist schools in using data to improve their performance?	3.00	0.78
d. Create collaborative structures and opportunities for the interpretation of data in schools?	2.90	0.77
e. Call on expertise from outside the school system for help with data interpretation when needed?	2.66	0.86
f. Use appropriate data for accounting to stakeholders?	2.97	0.73
g. Make effective use of existing research to guide policy making and planning?	3.12	0.74
<b>Professional Development for All Members</b>		
<i>How well do the following statements reflect your board's approach to professional development? (1 = Not at all; 4 = Very well)</i>		
Aggregate (all items in scale)	<b>2.90</b>	<b>0.80</b>



a. Very little time is devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and principals. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional development.	2.85	0.78
b. Most professional development is carefully aligned with board and school improvement initiatives.	3.36	0.67
c. Differentiated professional development opportunities are provided in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.	2.77	0.83
d. Extensive opportunities are provided for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.	2.82	0.82
e. Almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.	2.98	0.80
f. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.	2.64	0.85
g. All system-sponsored professional development is now closely aligned with the best evidence of how people learn.	2.88	0.80
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Professional Leadership</b></p> <p>How well do the following descriptions apply to leadership development in your school district/ system/ board? (1 = Not at all; 4 = Very well)</p>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>2.90</b>	<b>0.81</b>
a. My district has well-designed and carefully implemented procedures for identifying, recruiting, selecting and appraising school-level leaders.	2.80	0.87
b. My district implements procedures for transferring school-level leaders that does no harm and, whenever possible, adds value to improvement efforts underway in schools.	2.60	0.85
c. My board ensures that the most skilled leaders in the system are placed where they are most needed.	2.69	0.87
d. My board encourages school-level leaders, when useful, to supplement their own capacities with system-level expertise.	2.87	0.81

e. District leaders expect principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction. This is a central criterion for selecting school leaders and for their performance appraisal.	3.10	0.75
f. System leaders keep both the community and the central office staff focused on learning and they support principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure	2.96	0.77
g. Most district leaders encourage an instructional focus on the part of school leaders, provide opportunities and resources for improving the instructional leadership skills of school leaders and make this the main focus of their school visits. Instructional leadership is an explicit focus in selection and appraisal practices.	3.06	0.76
h. Our elected board expects the behavior of both system- and school-level leaders to reflect the practices and competences identified in the <i>Ontario Leadership Framework</i> , as well as such other practices as might be deemed critical for local board purposes.	3.15	0.81
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Alignment</b></p> <p><i>Which one of the statements below best captures your district's alignment of:</i></p>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	% of Ratings Ontario	
a. its financial resources with the support needed to achieve the board's goals for student learning?		
1. No effort has yet been made toward such alignment.	0.9	
2. Unsystematic attempts are being made toward such alignment.	5.1	
3. Such alignment occurs on a project by project basis but does not extend across the board's efforts as a whole.	44.2	
4. My board has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align our budget with the goals we are pursuing for students.	49.7	
b. personnel policies and procedures with the instructional expectations for staff		
1. No effort has yet been made toward such alignment.	2.6	

2. Unsystematic attempts are being made toward such alignment.	10.8	
3. Such alignment occurs on a project by project basis but does not extend across the board's efforts, as a whole.	48.7	
4. My board has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align our personnel policies and procedures with the goals we are pursuing for students.	37.9	
c. structures with the instructional improvement work required of staff		
1. No effort has yet been made toward such alignment.	1.3	
2. Unsystematic attempts are being made toward such alignment.	8.0	
3. Such alignment occurs on a project by project basis but does not extend across the board's efforts as a whole.	51.6	
4. My board has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align our organizational structures with our staff's instructional improvement work.	39.1	
d. the time and money allocated to professional development with the value of such PD to the district		
1. The board has an ambitious set of goals for improving student learning but has allocated very little time or money for preparing staff to accomplish those goals.	2.4	
2. While some time and money have been allocated for the professional development of leaders and teachers, these resources badly underestimate what will be required if staff are to accomplish the goals established by the district.	30.6	
3. Although still underestimated, there have been recent and significant increases in the time and money allocated to professional development	34.5	
4. Adequate amounts of both the time and money have been allocated for the professional development of both leaders and teachers.	32.5	

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Elected Leadership</b></p> <p><i>How well do the following statements describe the practices of the board's elected officials?</i></p> <p>(1 = Not at all; 4 = Very well)</p>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>2.88</b>	<b>0.81</b>
a. Trustees use the board's beliefs and vision for student learning and well-being as the foundation for strategic planning and ongoing board evaluation.	3.00	0.77
b. Trustees focus most policy making on the improvement of student learning and well-being consistent with the beliefs and vision.	2.96	0.78
c. Trustees identify and fund policies and programs that provide rich curricula and engaging forms of instruction for all students and eliminate those that do not.	2.79	0.80
d. Trustees maintain productive relationships with senior staff, school staffs, community stakeholders and provincial education officials.	2.95	0.86
e. Trustees provide systematic orientation opportunities for new members and ongoing training for existing members.	2.72	0.79
f. Individual trustees support and act in accordance with decisions made by the board of trustees, as a whole.	2.96	0.78
g. Almost all trustees avoid becoming involved in school system administration.	2.82	0.89
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Organizational Improvement Processes</b></p> <p><i>How well do the following descriptions capture your school system's approach to improvement?</i></p> <p>(1 = Not at all; 4 = Very well)</p>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>2.67</b>	<b>0.82</b>
a. My district pursues only a small number of improvement goals at the same time.	2.69	0.85
b. We usually proceed in manageable stages and use the early stages as learning opportunities.	2.78	0.79

c. My district's approach to improvement is relatively coherent. A small number of key improvement goals are consistently pursued over sustained periods of time.	2.84	0.80
d. Schools are not overloaded with excessive numbers of initiatives.	2.25	0.91
e. Considerable effort is made to build the capacities needed by school staffs for successful school improvement.	2.77	0.81
f. Board improvement efforts typically focus on one portion of the system at a time (e.g., elementary schools then secondary schools; literacy improvement then numeracy improvement) and a schedule is created to ensure improvement in all parts of the school system over the long term.	2.53	0.85
g. Improvement efforts in schools are guided by explicit and well-tested frameworks, policies and practices, as well as widely shared goals that permit local adaptation. All stakeholders have clearly defined roles to play in this approach to school improvement.	2.67	0.82
h. The board integrates new initiatives into existing routines and practices. Established structures and procedures are maintained and built on. Care is taken to ensure continuity and extension of core values.	2.69	0.85
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Relationships</b></p> <p><i>Pick the one statement below which best describes</i></p>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	% of Ratings Ontario	
<p><b>Central Office Staff Relations</b></p> <p>the relationships among staff in your school system's central office</p>		
1. Central office staff work in isolation with only minimal communication and no sense of shared purpose.	3.2	
2. There is no evidence of shared purpose, but there is some connection among some roles and a limited amount of communication, although it is sometimes a bit strained.	24.1	

3. Roles are often interconnected and collaboration is common in response to a shared sense of purpose. Communication among staff is positive and occurs regularly.	54.0	
4. Roles are interconnected, work is undertaken collaboratively in the service of a widely shared set of purposes. Communication among staff is frequent and cordial.	18.7	
<b>District and School Staff Relationships</b> your district's support for networks or professional learning communities (PLCs)		
1. There is little awareness of the need for, or value of, professional networks or communities for either central office or school staffs.	2.0	
2. Networks and professional communities are evident in some schools and central office staff may participate occasionally in their own PLCs, but they are rarely viewed as effective instruments for staff learning or decision making.	20.1	
3. PLCs or networks are established at both school and system levels. While central office staff have come to value participation in their own PLCs or networks, they do not insist on such participation by teachers or administrators in schools.	39.7	
4. Networks and PLCs are well established at both school and system levels and have become the established way of solving problems and taking care of other business.	38.2	
<b>Relationships with Parents</b> a. your school system's efforts to help teachers and administrators develop the capacities they need to foster productive parent engagement <i>in the school</i> .		
1. We are expected to figure this out for ourselves.	8.3	
2. My board has provided some help in the past but no such help has been provided in the past year.	9.6	
3. School system staff often talk about the importance of parent engagement in schools but they have provided very limited opportunities for us to develop the knowledge and skills we require to do that part of our jobs better.	58.2	

4. My school system provides us with very helpful opportunities to acquire the insights and skills we need to productively engage our parents in school.	24.0	
b. your district's efforts to help teachers and administrators develop the capacities they need to assist parents in creating <i>Conditions in the home</i> which support the success of their children at school.		
1. We are expected to figure this out for ourselves.	13.4	
2. My board has provided some help in the past but no such help has been provided in the past year.	11.0	
3. Central office staff often talk about the importance of helping parents create such Conditions in the home but they have provided very limited opportunities for us to develop the knowledge and skills we require to do that part of our jobs better.	56.2	
4. My school system provides us with very helpful opportunities to acquire the insights and skills we need to productively assist our parents in creating Conditions at home for supporting the success of their children at school.	19.5	
c. how your district holds schools accountable for productively engaging parents.		
1. My school system makes no effort to hold schools accountable for parent engagement.	7.3	
2. My school system's efforts are limited to occasional encouragement and informal questions from some district staff about what we are doing in my school.	43.4	
3. The performance appraisal of principals in my school system includes assessment of the nature and success of their school's parent engagement strategies.	40.7	
4. In addition to being part of our principal appraisal system, our school system has a formal policy on parent engagement and conducts periodic audits across the schools about the extent to which that policy is being implemented. School staffs and parents are asked for evidence as part of these audits	8.6	
d. How extensive is your school system's efforts - <i>independent of what schools do</i> - to provide programs and other opportunities aimed at helping parents ensure the success of their children at school? (1 = Schools initiate all parent engagement; 4 = System's efforts quite extensive)	2.45	0.80

<b>Relationships with Local Community Groups</b> the nature of your school system's ties with local community groups		
1. Potential contributions of community groups are unrecognized and these groups have no involvement in the school system.	1.9	
2. Potential contributions of community groups are sporadically recognized, as are consultations with these groups and their involvement in school system decisions.	35.5	
3. Community groups are often recognized for their contribution and support; they are consulted on many decisions affecting the community. School system staff are often members of these groups, themselves.	47.7	
4. Community groups are routinely recognized for their contribution and support and consulted on almost all decisions affecting the community. School system staff are regularly members of these groups themselves.	15.0	
<b>Ministry of Education Relations</b>  <i>To what extent do you agree that the following statements describe your school district's relationship with the Ministry of Education: (1 = Strongly disagree; 4 = Strongly agree)</i>		
Aggregate (All items in scale)	<b>3.13</b>	<b>0.73</b>
a. My district communicates regularly with the Ministry, both formally and informally, about board goals and directions;	3.24	0.68
b. My district clarifies with the Ministry how it can be of most help to the board;	3.03	0.73
c. My district encourages Ministry collaboration in achieving board goals and directions;	3.11	0.73
d. My district provides feedback to the Ministry about the relevance of its initiatives to board goals and directions.	3.14	0.77
Which one of the following statements best describes	% of Ratings Ontario	
e. how your school system typically responds to the province's initiatives		



1. Central office staff and some school staff are made aware of new provincial initiatives.	2.9	
2. Central office staff share information about provincial initiatives with principals and principals relay this information to their teaching colleagues.	27.9	
3. Principals are assigned responsibility for implementing provincial initiatives. Procedures are established for schools to gain access to the resources they require for implementation.	37.3	
4. The province's initiatives are awarded priority in the district, systematic analysis of changes required in the district are carried out, and progress toward implementing these initiatives is reported regularly (e.g., at principals' meetings).	32.0	
f. your system's current approach to supplementing government initiatives in order to increase their local impact		
1. There are no clear links between provincial initiatives and activities in schools.	2.2	
2. Personnel are assigned responsibility for implementing provincial initiatives and discussions are held about what implementation might consist of in schools.	38.9	
3. The school allocates the resources (time, money, expertise) required to build the capacities staff need to implement provincial initiatives effectively.	45.4	
4. Problem-solving groups in schools consider how to implement provincial initiatives in order to get the best results for the school and its students.	13.5	
g. your district's attempt to leverage the province's initiatives in the interest of the board's priorities		
1. There has been little or no effort to integrate board and provincial priorities.	1.4	
2. District staff has recently indicated the need for efforts to integrate board and provincial priorities.	17.7	
3. A process is now underway for the first time to determine how to integrate provincial and district priorities.	18.1	
4. The district has a multi-year plan that explicitly integrates provincial and district priorities.	62.8	



## PART THREE

### REPORT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRAND

KENNETH LEITHWOOD AND CATHERINE MCCULLOUGH

AUGUST 2017

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# INTRODUCTION

The professional development modules described in this report are part of a nine-year combined research and professional development project aimed at improving the contribution that school districts in Ontario make to student success in school.<sup>14</sup> Supported by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Institute for Educational Leadership, the results of this nine-year effort have, by now, been widely disseminated and used by districts across the province.

The professional development material described in this report is informed by the results of the research on high performing or “strong” districts carried out as part of the nine-year effort. These materials are a substantial refinement of, and addition to, professional development materials initially developed and partially field tested during the 2015- 16 academic year<sup>15</sup>.

Subsequent sections of this report describe, in some detail, each of 8 modules aligned to characteristics of Strong Districts identified through the related research program. Although there is some variation, for the most part each module includes:

- An agenda including a description of the main features of the focal district characteristic
- An indication of the impact on student outcomes of the focal district characteristics
- Samples of selected evidence elaborating on the nature of the focal district characteristics in the form of a series of slides to support a presentation by the module instructor
- One or several case studies of the work undertaken by Ontario districts to improve the condition of the focal characteristic
- Guidelines for implementing the module
- A summary of the qualitative assessments of the module’s value by participants
- Summary and comments about selected issues raised during the implementation of the module.

In addition to the eight modules, this report also includes a summative (quantitative) assessment of the modules as a whole, as well as 8 video-clip presentations to be used in lieu of, or in addition to, the slide presentations of selected evidence for each module.

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<sup>14</sup> For a brief summary of this work, see Leithwood, K., McCullough, C. (2015). De-mystifying effective district leadership, Register Report,

<sup>15</sup> Leithwood, K., McCullough, C. (2015). Professional development modules in support of Strong Districts and Their Leadership. Toronto: Final Report to the Institute for Educational Leadership

The district characteristics for which modules have been developed include:

- Broadly shared mission, vision and goals
- Coherent instructional guidance systems
- Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions
- Learning-oriented organizational improvement processes
- Professional development for all members
- A comprehensive approach to leadership development
- A policy-oriented board of trustees
- Productive working relationships with staff and other stakeholders

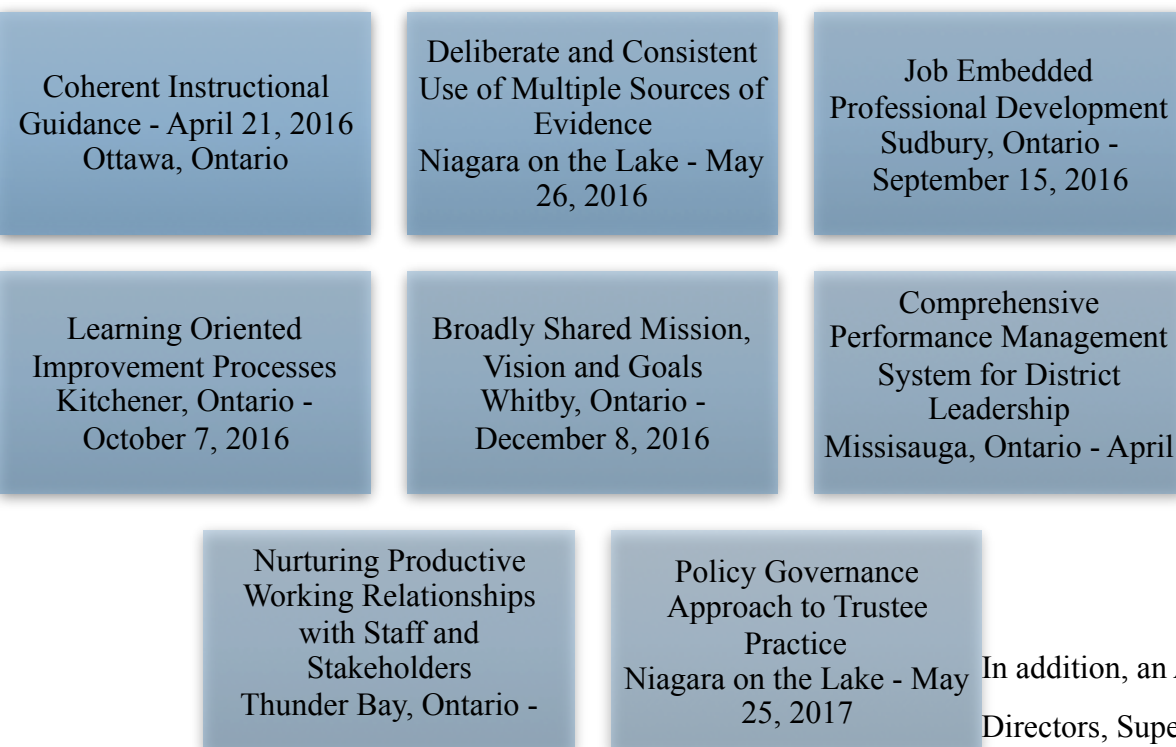
A ninth important characteristic of strong districts is alignment. The nature and importance of aligning, for example, budgets, policies and operating procedures with the district's vision, mission and goals is embedded as an integral part of the other 8 modules.

Between the fall of 2016 and the late spring of 2017 each of the eight modules was field tested in locations chosen with ease of attendance by district leaders across the province in mind and where local districts were prepared to act as hosts.

A valuable component of this work is the level of professional development that the project has continued to develop and foster. Our goal was to urge school districts to de-privatize their practices and share their approaches during the learning modules, through the provision of case studies, the presentation of the most current research and discussion of the application to their work.

For district senior leadership teams, developing the nine characteristics of strong districts in their organizations should be a priority for their work, with student learning and well-being being the long-term goals. These nine characteristics enable a district's schools and classrooms to do their improvement work effectively.

## LEARNING MODULES



In addition, an Advisory committee of Directors, Superintendents and Ministry staff provided insight and direction at regular scheduled milestones that guided this next phase approach.

To document and share the work, a learning hub (website) was created as a repository for the learning modules inclusive of case studies and a compilation of the related research that coincided with the module topic.



# MODULE ONE

## COHERENT INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE

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# A COHERENT INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE SYSTEM MODULE

## MODULE DESCRIPTION

When a district’s curriculum standards and frameworks, instructional practices, professional development emphases and assessment tools are all focused on achieving the district’s mission, vision and goals, the district is providing “**coherent instructional guidance**” to its schools, an important part of what strong districts do.

Within such a coherent system, strong districts encourage their staffs to be innovative and support to schools is differentiated in response to variability in student performance. The coherent system is intended to establish some legitimate boundaries around what can be done without stifling the innovative efforts of staffs to improve their practices and the achievement of students. This feature of strong districts reflects evidence about the importance of focusing “on the core function of the organization as the primary driver of success.”

Strong districts encourage their staffs to be innovative and support to schools is differentiated in response to variability in student performance.

This module explored, through the use of case studies, discussion and a sharing of the most recent research, how school districts were striving to achieve the following characteristics.

To achieve a coherent instructional guidance strong districts:

- support schools’ efforts to implement curricula that foster students’ deep understandings about “big ideas”, as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings.
- work together with their school staffs to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.
- work together, district and school staff, to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards.
- include teachers in instructional improvement work, and assist them in developing sophisticated understandings of powerful instruction for students; collaboration for this work is extensive, ongoing and involves all key stakeholders.
- demonstrate “in-classroom” leadership. District and school level leaders are frequently in classrooms acting as instructional leaders and providing “just-in-time” or job embedded professional development.

# AGENDA

## MORNING (8:45 – 12:00)

### 1. Welcome and Overview

### 2. Objectives for Module

As a result of participating in this module, district leaders will improve their capacities to:

- Ensure that the school system strongly supports schools' efforts to implement curricula that foster students' deep understandings about "big ideas," as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings.
- Help system staff work effectively with schools to establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards and to provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.
- Design the board's work with schools to align curriculum, instruction, assessment and teaching resources so that it is extensive, ongoing and involves most stakeholders.

### 3. Overview of Relevant Research (Presentation)

### 4. Case Study: Hamilton Wentworth District School Board

*What can be learned from this case about how to create a coherent instructional guidance system?*

- Overview of case from HWDSB senior leaders (video)
- Discussion of written case (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case by each team
- Synthesis of key findings from written case

### 5. Case Study: Halton District School Board

*What can be learned from this case about how to create a coherent instructional guidance system?*

- Overview of case from Halton senior staff (video)
- Discussion of written case (in teams of four or five people)

- Debriefing of what was learned from the case by each team
- Synthesis of key findings from written case

**6. Compare and Contrast the Learning from Halton District School Board and Hamilton Wentworth District School Board.**

- Full group discussion
- Consider relationship to relevant research and to the approach currently being taken by one's own district

**7. Synthesis about how to build a coherent instructional guidance system**

- Highlight key lessons (what to do for sure, what not to do at any cost); full group discussion making as many links as possible to the cases and readings

**AFTERNOON (12:45 – 2:30)**

**8. Focus group interviews** (Principal groups, Senior leader groups)

**9. Key insights from module and focus groups**

## SAMPLES OF RELEVANT RESEARCH

- Ben Jaffer, S. (2006). "An alternative approach to measuring opportunity to learn in high school classes." *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 52, 2.
- Bransford, J., et al (2000). *How people learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Bryk, A. & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in Schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*.
- Miller, R. (2001). Greater expectations to improve student learning. Association of American Colleges and Universities [[www.greaterexpectations.org/briefing\\_papers/improvestudentlearning.html](http://www.greaterexpectations.org/briefing_papers/improvestudentlearning.html)]
- Murphy, J. F., & And Others. (1982). Academic press: Translating high expectations into school policies and classroom practices. *Educational Leadership*, 40(3), 22-26.
- Goddard, R. D., Sweetland, S. R., & Hoy, W. K. (2000). Academic emphasis of urban elementary schools and student achievement in reading and mathematics: A multilevel analysis. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36(5), 683-702.
- Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to student achievement*. New York: Routledge.
- Joyce, B., Weil, M. (2008). *Models of Teaching (8<sup>th</sup> edition)*. New York: Pearson.
- Leithwood, K. (2011). *Leading Student Achievement: Networks for Learning Supplement to Final Evaluation Report for the 2010 –11 Project Cycle: Analysis of Student Achievement Data*.
- Leithwood, K., Patten, S., Jantzi, D. (2010). Testing a conception of how leadership influences student learning, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46, 5, 671-706.
- Scardamalia, M. (ND). *The 12 Principals of Knowledge building*. Toronto: OISE/University of Toronto.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Barr, M. (2004). Fostering student learning: The relationship of collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 3(3), 189-209.
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- Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research*, 68(2), 202-248.
- Willms, J. D., & Ma, X. (2004). School disciplinary climate: characteristics and effects on eighth grade achievement [Electronic version]. *Alberta Journal of Educational research*, 50 (2), 1-27.
- Zeiser, K., Taylor, J., Rickles, J., Garret, M., Segeritz, M. (2014) Findings From the Study of Deeper



# APPENDIX A: HAMILTON-WENTWORTH DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD CASE STUDY

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

Hamilton Wentworth's approach, since 2010, to developing a coherent instructional guidance system has emphasized collaborative inquiry, shifted resource, and changed meeting formats to allow for multiple points for engagement. The case illustrates a number of approaches to create coherent instructional guidance.

1. *Identify (3) approaches that you currently are utilizing in your district to ensure that the right conditions and supports are in place for coherent instructional guidance to occur.*

Building principals' instructional leadership capacity is inherent to success in your district. Hamilton began the use of a critical friend as a strategy in moving forward and developed a protocol to ensure a consistent approach to the relationship

2. *What did you find most helpful about Hamilton's approach and what approach have you used in your district to develop your principal's instructional leadership capacity?*

Hamilton created a number of conditions to support collaborative inquiry including the role of the Supervisory Officer in this process.

3. *What conditions do you create in your district for collaborative inquiry and what role does the Supervisory Officer play in such inquiry?*
4. *What is the number one "take away" for you from reading this case?*



# THE CASE

## BACKGROUND

This case study describes our approach to developing two strong district characteristics. These were characteristics in which we are making gains but also where we are stuck. These two areas are *a coherent instructional guidance system* and *job-embedded professional development for all members*. As the concepts overlap, they have been treated jointly in the case study below. This opportunity provided us with a chance to reflect internally on our work and share these insights with colleagues beyond our board. This brief case study shares our thinking to date.

In 2010, the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board began engaging both service and academic staff in professional learning that focused on collaborative inquiry. We shifted resources, changed meetings to give them a learning orientation, provided multiple entry points for engagement and aligned this with our system's direction. We aspired then, and still aspire, to grow a responsive, intelligent system—one that is coherent but also allows for contextual and creative problem solving at the local level. Leithwood emphasizes the importance of this:

“The coherent system is intended to establish some legitimate boundaries around what can be done without stifling the innovative efforts of staff to improve their practices and the achievement of students. This feature of strong districts reflects evidence about the importance of focusing on the core function of the organization as the primary driver of success.”

Providing a coherent instructional-guidance system and situated, job-embedded professional development for all members will help us realize this vision and they serve as the focus of this case study. Over time, our learning has evolved from establishing a level of common understanding and building coherent processes that could enable the system to be effectively and collaboratively responsive to one where we are applying concepts to daily practices and problems. In short, this thinking has become habitual among leaders. However, as you will read below, we still have work to do.

The HWDSB has shifted its focus from being a top-down driver of the school improvement process to one where school teams are collaboratively engaged in instructional improvement work. Principals are steadily gaining instructional leadership expertise, and student work, student voice and achievement are used to help inform our direction and assess our efforts. Schools are recognizing the importance of facilitating high order thinking for students, and they are in varied states of optimizing this goal. Instructional coaches and consultants provide job-imbedded support to teachers in an intelligent-



responsive way. As well, superintendents play a visible partnering and supportive role with schools on their monthly visits during which the discussion is focused on school improvement but also “drills down” to the individual student achievement (and intervention) level.

As the HWDSB becomes more of a coherent learning organization, we are able to provide a greater range of professional development opportunities to our employees while directing most of our resources to school-based teacher release time. Increasingly, when system-led in-services are facilitated, the learning is integrated and facilitated by many departments. We have worked with our partners to reduce the amount of time dedicated to compliance and operational issues, which has freed up time for more professional learning. Even with fewer dollars available for professional learning, we have offered more opportunities outside of the instructional day and this seems to be met with some increased enthusiasm. For example, attendance at after-school and summer institute learning sessions has increased. We have just introduced a Master’s of Education program and additional qualifications courses in partnership with universities. We are also seeing wider take-up with our leadership programming.

Indeed, at the heart of this programming is a shift in the way we support learning: our leaders, managers and teachers are participating in intensive coaching and facilitation, which helps to support learning in context. Because we see learning through an inquiry and developmental lens, we are able to engage in conversations that support the transfer of ideas into action. Increasingly, we see principals asking open-ended questions and explicitly creating safe conditions for learning conversations. They are recognizing the value in allowing teachers to process the work collaboratively and are deliberately limiting the amount of time they talk at staff.

Since our efforts began in 2010, our theory of action has been to build the capacity of our principals’ instructional leadership capacity so that they in turn can build the instructional leadership capacity of their teachers. Steven Katz has served as a critical friend and helped us to refine our thinking and the support that we provide to principals. The primary vehicle for principal capacity building has been the Principal Learning Team, and over the years the learning has become more focused. This may be explained by continual development of our “intelligent components” or system expectations. Most recently, we have introduced a system-wide learning conversation protocol, which has led to greater precision and deeper learning. (The protocol is attached in Appendix A). We are beginning to recognize that teacher-inquiry based learning has not been examined with the same rigor. Before 2010, the inquiry cycle was a compliance driven rigid structure, reliant on release time and did not allow for deep collaborative assessment and reflection that generates professional learning. While we are glad that we jettisoned the

pre-2010 model, we still need to explore the function of teacher collaborative teams and consider how we can create greater clarity, optimize the use of time and employ clearer protocols without stifling the voice, efficacy and creative thinking of our teachers.

What our teacher, leader and service leader survey data tells us is that the conditions in which our employees work are increasingly conducive to learning; people report being able to share their thinking and feel comfortable “not knowing” or making mistakes. While change in staff approaches to learning is shifting, we have yet to see a measurable and direct relationship between improved achievement results and our efforts with collaborative inquiry. As well, we need to find ways to work with more precision; for example, we need to regularly examine quality evidence while engaging in collaborative inquiry processes.

Creating conditions that enable collaborative inquiry for staff have been somewhat easy; creating those similar conditions that allow students to thrive this way within their classrooms represents a seismic shift for our teaching staff. To that end, we are asking our students about their impressions of learning. Student voice is collected through system-led and school-initiated surveys. Students are telling us they want to be more engaged in the learning and more connected to their teachers. So, where once we were encouraging staff to participate in collaborative inquiry, we are now reaching beyond staff and including students in this approach to learning. This has led to the next step in our journey: We are creating “personalized, collaborative, inquiry-based learning environments” for each student from kindergarten to grade 12 and recognize that technology plays a key role in this work. We call this evolution “Transforming Learning Everywhere (TLE).” Fullan and Langworthy’s *A Rich Seam*<sup>16</sup> has helped to clarify the development of our ideas. We acknowledge the critical role of technology and are emphasizing the foundational role played by meaningful pedagogy and supportive learning conditions. We have recognized that we need to set our expectations high for student learning and engagement so we have settled on three broad learning outcomes for schools to focus on. They are: critical literacy, higher order thinking and problem solving.

We deliberately have not used the word “program” or “initiative” as we describe TLE; we believe this *is* the work. We are imbedding TLE into our school improvement practices and other structures to reinforce that this is central to our practice. And, importantly, we are recognizing the power of messaging to simplify this work and thus the steering team has synthesized TLE into three (3) key

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<sup>16</sup> Fullan, M & Langworthy, M (2014) *A Rich Seam*.

messages:

1. Transforming Classrooms
2. Transforming Relationships
3. Transforming Learning Opportunities

In the 2013-2014 year, we put a pause on our district-led School Effectiveness process while we were working to make the school improvement process more consistent and meaningful across the system. We also needed to consider how to dovetail this TLE work with our school improvement work. Our goal is always to generate an intelligent/responsive solution. To tackle implementation, we gathered a diverse range of system and school-based leaders to map out a path for optimizing the use of professional development days to engage all schools in a continuous school improvement process. This process stresses that school improvement and capacity building planning should be informed by the student needs.

Essentially, teachers are using a marker-student approach to inform the school's learning direction. Student work is on the table and the focus of an individual teacher's collaborative inquiry and also contributes to staff-wide learning; trailing indicator data such as EQAO also help to inform the planning but they do not take center stage as they once did. When teachers participate in this type of collaborative problem solving, they are identifying what might be their next best move to support the student's learning. The teachers return to their next staff-meeting ready to share their learning. At the same time, they are identifying what they need to learn in order to support the students. The principal and direction teams are using teacher-learning needs to chart out the next step in the school's staff learning and continuous school improvement plan.

Our hope is that this systematic approach will reach more teachers. We have previously relied on release time to build capacity, but too few teachers are impacted. In our current approach, release time is allocated in an iterative way to meet the learning needs that emerge within a school. The role of the superintendent is to engage in monthly visits to coach principals and monitor progress and use of the release time. This leads to a differentiated, responsive support model; not all schools get the same amount of support. Importantly, the school superintendents check in with each other weekly to discuss how this process and the continuous school improvement work is going. This does not lend itself to true consistency but provides greater coherence.

All of the critical pieces are beginning to fit into place across the system. For example, system-wide

inquiry drives professional growth plans are beginning to align. Essentially, the learning plans focus on those we serve. The teachers are examining student work collaboratively to consider what learning needs to occur, and this informs the school-learning plan. The school-learning plan reflects teachers' needs by division, department or grade. The teachers' learning needs inform the principals' learning plan, and the principals' learning needs inform the superintendents' learning plan. However, the provincial Principals' Performance Appraisal system does not align with this model. So, to promote coherence, we have changed the format of the leader's annual learning plan and adopted the inquiry framework to make it directly relevant to the principal's and superintendent's learning work. Leaders are now using an inquiry framework to support their learning plan rather than an irrelevant template. What we have not fully explored is whether we can do the same with the teacher's annual plan to dovetail with the inquiry framework; in this way, student-learning needs would officially inform the learning of the teacher.

However, as we actualize this plan, we are encountering some issues. For example, as we dug into the work, we began to question whether the three broad learning outcomes (higher order thinking, critical literacy, and problem solving) were the best choice: how did we land on these? Did we settle too quickly without fully exploring what they each meant and how they differed? As educators, we often speak in cloudy language, assuming that we all share an understanding of what is meant by these concepts. To address this, we quickly assembled some of our system's best thinkers (consultants, principals and superintendents) to look to the research and create some accessible "one pagers" for each of these three broad learning outcomes, fully recognizing that the definitions may evolve as we evolve.

We also know that this continuous school improvement approach represents a shift for our system and if we are not careful, it may lead to confusion or worse, attributions that we are retreating back to a top-down leadership approach. While many leaders are co-constructing this school improvement model with us, currently, the only teacher representation on the system committee are consultants; we need to tap classroom-based teacher voice to ensure we are heading in a direction that responds to their needs and speaks in a language they can relate to.

In addition, we believe in providing boundaries without stifling our professionals. However, with precious little professional development time for each teacher, we fit a lot of content into the professional development day and reduce the processing time that leads to shared problem solving and shared ownership. We all know this does not reflect how people learn. So, we need to clarify our "learning goals" so that staffs can construct their own understanding and ultimately their own "success criteria." Going slow to go fast may be the strategy we need to adopt to allow structured discussion time for teachers to

deeply process this thinking.

If we know and communicate our own learning goals, we will be able to collect relevant teacher voice and student achievement data that informs the quality of this effort. This may help us to find a way to gather meaningful system-wide evidence while complying with ministry expectations regarding data collection.

Furthermore, we are wondering whether in our enthusiasm for creating conditions to promote inquiry, we may have lost sight of focused instruction. This is causing us to revive the thinking of Hattie's *Visible Learning*, a powerful resource that we had put aside recently. We need to return to focused instruction and be clearer about how and when to use direct and constructive approaches and support the teacher in understanding one's role as activator in either.

Another dilemma is with our secondary schools. The EQAO results in grade 3 and 6 have been steadily improving. However, our secondary literacy and math results still need attention. We wonder whether we dedicate enough problem solving energy to our secondary schools. Perhaps we need to actively question whether what works for one panel, will work for the other. For example, across the system we have moved to relying on leading indicator data more than trailing indicator data to support school improvement. However, we know that secondary schools have a lot of trailing indicator data (such as pass rates, mark distribution) that is worth our focus. We have used it before but are we using it in a way that generates precise reflection to action? Perhaps we need to reconsider how SMART goals or the use of targets can help us with this secondary dilemma.

While it is still early, there may be nuggets of learning emerging from a project occurring in one area of the board. Sixteen schools, from both the secondary and elementary panels, are participating in the "New Pedagogies for Deep Learning" globalized project facilitated by Michael Fullan. The project provides rubrics (learning progressions) teeming with meaningful language in the areas of school conditions, learning tasks and student outcomes. To minimize the sentiment that this is "an add-on" (or worse, "an initiative") this work is imbedded into existing school improvement structures such as monthly superintendent visits, continuous school improvement planning, Principal Learning Team work, teacher networks, directions team planning and teacher collaborative learning time (formerly TLCP). The tools and protocols are providing structure and precision to the learning conversations; they explicitly communicate what student learning looks like. The "evidence" brought to the learning conversations provide richness for learning but also may tell us whether TLE is having an impact on student learning. These rubrics are helping us to move from a dualistic discussion about whether the learning is evident or

not to a richer discussion about quality of the learning by using performance standards that recognize learning as developmental. The NPDL dovetails so neatly with our ambitions regarding TLE that we have begun to consider how we can move beyond the sixteen schools and engage other schools within the system.

The HWDSB has been engaged in continuous rigorous inquiry for four years, and as this paper suggests, we are encountering gains and challenges. This case study that narrowed in on the challenges associated with coherent instructional guidance system and job-embedded professional development has provided a lens for us to pause, reflect and assess our actions, to be courageous in exposing our blind spots and consider next steps. We have questioned small and large issues, potential implications and opportunities for growth. It has been a meta-inquiry of sorts, an inquiry about our inquiry work. And if Leithwood is correct when he says, “strong districts do add significant value to the learning of students beyond the contribution of schools and classrooms,” it has all been worthwhile.

## COHERENT INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE SYSTEM:

### UPDATE OF PROGRESS IN THE HAMILTON WENTWORTH SCHOOL BOARD

Case Study Year 2014	Current Year 2015-2016
<b>Teachers collaborating with an instructional focus.</b>	Teachers have begun networking beyond their schools.
<b>Principals taking the role of instructional leaders.</b>	Principals now jointly collaborating and championing instructional issues that impact the system.
<b>Principals taking the role of instructional leaders.</b>	Principals now jointly collaborating and championing instructional issues that impact the system.
<b>Instructional coaches being responsive to teachers' needs.</b>	Instructional coaches are now working with small groups of teachers (sometimes teachers from different schools) while responding to their needs.
<b>Deliberate move toward school-based release time for teachers. Release time budget not always spent by year's end.</b>	Demand for release time outstrips available dollars. By spring, few release dollars available.
<b>Compliance/operational issues positioned to optimize time for instruction.</b>	Still happening at the school level. However, the principals have needed more operational learning at the monthly meetings so we have needed to dedicate time to this.
<b>Learning offered outside of the school day.</b>	A lot more diverse learning offered outside of the school day (including weekends). Most of our programs "sell out."
<b>Teachers show greater enthusiasm/open to learning.</b>	Teachers are now taking a leading role in professional learning and it is quite common for them to lead the learning of administrators.
<b>Masters of Education introduced.</b>	That cohort is almost finished; perfect retention. We will likely introduce another join OISE/HWSDB cohort within a couple of years
<b>Steven Katz acted as a critical friend to the development of Principal Learning Teams and their learning. We established "intelligent components" to guide system behaviors.</b>	Steven Katz continues to act as our critical friend and we continue to refine the intelligent components; greater precision is evident in the principal learning
<b>Teachers report being comfortable "not knowing."</b>	This is more widespread. Teachers are encouraging the same openness in their classrooms and has impact at the student level, especially as we engage students with inquiry



<b>We were trying to make sure the pieces were all coherent.</b>	The Transforming Learning Everywhere direction has provided greater clarity and opportunities for integration of the professional learning. We provided a clear “expectations” document that speaks to the importance of pedagogy with digital as the accelerator. In each professional learning session, we show how the learning fits in this TLE direction.
<b>We wondered whether we were losing sight of focused instruction.</b>	New Pedagogies for Deep Learning has been a huge success and this has led to a slow but steady board-wide introduction. This framework helps to bring precision to the conditions (at every level) that support meaningful learning.
<b>We wanted to leverage more focus on instruction with secondary.</b>	This year with the EDU School Support Initiative, we asked all of our schools to participate in focusing on higher order thinking in the Applied classroom. This has led to coaching support, the introduction of Integrative Thinking (Rotman) and increased networking. Secondary is really taking off.

## APPENDIX B: HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD CASE STUDY

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

Halton District School Board is a high achieving board, which has developed over time a very targeted professional development model. The board identified a concern they had with the percentage of students who were being left behind. Their professional development was premised on the goal of

differentiating support to their lower performing schools.

1. *What do you do in your district to raise the standards in your neediest schools? Do you differentiate support to your schools and if so how?*

Over the years, Halton Board identified that they collected data with little or no follow-up in terms of intervention. Halton put in place an approach that would ensure the effective use of data (example: PM benchmarks) in a more targeted approach.

2. *How in your district do you ensure that there is an effective approach to the sharing of data and approach aligned to what the data is telling you?*
3. *As a result of the discussion around this case, what changes have you made in your approach to sharing and using data in a meaningful way?*

Successful student achievement in Mathematics continues to be a concern in the province of Ontario. As described on page 6 of this case, Halton adopted a number of intervention strategies as outlined.

4. *What about Halton's approach resonates with you and what additional approaches have you taken to improve your student's success in Mathematics?*
5. *Halton has defined their job-embedded strategies. What have you learned in your experience about the dos and don'ts of job-embedded professional development?*

# THE CASE

## BACKGROUND

The Halton District School Board (HDSB) is sharing this case study with the intent of demonstrating how a high achieving board has turned its attention to students who are often left behind—left behind because we, as educators, don’t see the disengaged students who are not the norm in our board. Our Halton journey over the last few years indicated to our senior leadership team that, despite having been near the top of provincial results for numerous years, we have continued to have students who do not succeed in the ways in which all parents want their children to succeed. This was initially drawn to our attention when our superintendent of program pointed out to us that our reading achievement levels for primary students significantly lagged behind our EQAO results. An analysis of data from the research of Doug Willms illustrated to the senior team that the odds for the success of these students would be an uphill battle throughout their education and throughout their lives. Thus, we began to look deeper into the system supports for our low achieving students.

This paper will address how we utilized component 2 (provision of coherent instructional guidance) and component 5 (provision of job-embedded professional development) to address this issue. It will illustrate how the creation and use of our “learning needs model – *the egg*” (created in 2010 as a principal professional development model) has guided senior leaders in a systematic approach to address gaps in teacher and leader knowledge of content and effective pedagogy in literacy and mathematics instruction and assessment.

When we initially turned our eyes and minds towards students who were not succeeding, Family of Schools superintendents did an analysis of school/community data for all of our elementary schools. Through an examination of the following data, we ranked the schools from those requiring greatest support to those requiring lesser support. (This strategy was new to us as we have always resisted “ranking” our schools, given the impact this can have across our communities.) The data we used included: EQAO trend data, PM Benchmark (PMB) data, socio-economic data drawn from the census, the Halton School Needs Index, the type of Ministry support/resources currently provided to each school, suspension data, Individual Education Plan (IEP) data, school size and single principal schools.

Sharing this data at the senior administrative council meetings gave rise to many questions:

- *What were we doing to raise the standards in some of our neediest schools?*
- *Why was there an apparent disconnect between our EQAO results (particularly Grades 3 and 6,*

*as well as Grade 9 Applied Mathematics) with our report card data and our system PMB and Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) data?*

These questions gave rise to our team beginning to question whether we should be differentiating our support to schools. Perhaps treating every school the same, as was the Halton tradition, was not addressing equity. As a senior team, we did not understand why so many students remained “unsuccessful.” While having 75% to 90% of our students achieving standard in provincial results, we grappled with two questions:

1. Why were some students continually unsuccessful (the 10 to 25% who did not meet provincial standard)?
2. Were we, as a Board, providing the right balance of learning for our principals and teachers to ensure that our schools had strong instructional leaders and effective teachers who could meet the needs of all our students?

With that concept in mind, our senior team began to implement differentiation of supports to our schools with low EQAO results, with low PM Benchmark results and that were located in needier socio-economic areas of the board. Our initial action was to provide up to \$10,000 to a few schools. This money was to be used by the principal to provide opportunities for their “needy” students to more deeply engage in schoolwork and school life. A small start, but a huge step! We then began to differentiate technology support based upon this data; using the data to differentiate central staff support as well soon followed this. It was this initiative that opened us to questioning other areas of success for students.

While the senior team was looking at this data, some school principals and superintendents with strong curriculum background were expressing concern that literacy in our primary classrooms was not addressing the needs of the 20 to 25% of students who were not reading at standard. Observation of comprehensive literacy practice evidenced a wide variance in teacher understanding of what constituted “guided reading.” A similar concern about mathematics instruction in the junior and primary grades began to arise from a few of our mathematically strong elementary principals – our EQAO results, particularly for junior, followed the provincial pattern of a downward trend.

As the program department and the Family of Schools superintendents began to dig into questioning the literacy approaches in our primary classrooms, not all principals saw the need to increase their instructional leadership: *why do I need to do things differently if my school is achieving well?* (It is important to note that this was not apathy, but rather, a positive outlook in schools that were achieving

well, that had a happy staff and contented community. Principals were not seeing the system overview of all students.)

Concurrent with this, the program department had embarked upon a review of the early literacy strategies and the capacity of our primary teachers to support our weakest readers. With a firm belief that “Every Student Can Learn to Read,” our program superintendent and staff implemented a specific plan to provide training to our primary teachers to increase their capacity to use reading data (running records) to target struggling readers and bring them up to grade standard. This required the Family of Schools superintendents to support a system-wide message that the systematic collection and use of PM Data, twice a year, was a required task of all K-3 teachers. (As was the case with the required focus of principals on instructional leadership, many primary teachers resisted a greater focus on teaching reading; they believed their students were doing fine. In some cases, teachers believed they could not help the two to four students per class (20-25%) who were not reading, or who were not reading at expected level.) While our Board had collected this system data for a number of years, there was little or no follow up on its use.

The superintendent of program partnered with our research department, and the monitoring of the PM data entry, and its use, became a priority. Data was shared with all Family of Schools superintendents. Praise was given as often as possible to schools that were using the data. The monitoring of the system data drew attention to our comparatively low PM results. This brought forth the need to embed a primary reading goal into our Multi-Year Plan—something we had never done before.

The supports, messaging and the monitoring that accompanied this focus on the use of PM data included:

- We developed/published a four page glossy pamphlet *Every Student Can Learn to Read* that articulated the system messaging for instructional and assessment strategies in all literacy classrooms and released it at our August 2012 Leadership conference. All primary teachers received a copy; this desktop pamphlet focused teacher attention on instructional reading strategies to address individual student need.
- Program staff offered running Records Institutes. This multi-session series occurred after school and provided multiple three-hour sessions of learning for primary teachers who chose to sign up. Sessions were offered every second week and involved an application task that participants had to use with their students in the in-between week. Program staff put this in place in response to a perceived system learning need. The day that the Running Records Institute sign-up opened

using strategic promotion and marketing, 100 spots at the institute were filled. The teacher learning need was there! (A second Running Record Institute was immediately released in a different geographic area of the board; this too filled up.) Principals were encouraged to attend the institutes with their teacher teams.

- Central program staff was provided with the list of Institute participants who taught in their schools. The central staff was required to provide on-going and subsequent support.
- An intensive reading intervention program was introduced in 15 schools. Staff was dedicated to supporting targeted struggling readers every day for thirty minutes for sixteen weeks. The Literacy Resource Teachers who were dedicated to this initiative became experts in reading instruction and were subsequently used to help train all grade one teachers and some grade two teachers.
- A principal learning team, led by a knowledgeable principal, focused principal learning on the structures and supports needed in schools for effective literacy instruction. This was framed around the published resources *The 13 Parameters*, Sharratt and Fullan, 2005 as well as *Putting Faces on the Data What Great Leaders Do!* Sharratt and Fullan 2012. (Copies were later provided to every principal in the system).
- A principal learning team focused on learning more about guided reading. This was an area of diverse practice across our schools. We sought to clarify what guided reading was/was not, how data should be used, how often data was to be collected, and how principals could support and monitor their teachers to improve/implement this practice.
- A primary reading goal was included in our Multi Year Plan: *Every Kindergarten to Grade 3 student will receive intensive guided instruction in reading. Students who do not demonstrate movement toward their grade level target will be assessed and supported by a second tier of support.* The multi-year plan also included the following strategy: *100% of elementary principals and teachers will use a comprehensive literacy program incorporating phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.*
- A requirement of every elementary school to have a Data Wall in a teacher accessible location and a requirement of the school principal to facilitate/coordinate monthly data wall conversations was messaged and monitored across the system. Family of Schools learning time

was utilized to support principal knowledge of actions to facilitate this.

- A deeper Program/FDK partnership was forged to engage teachers and ECEs in a deeper understanding of the need for guided reading/practice and use of data in FDK. (The initial implementation of FDK had focused so intently on the play-based learning environment that teachers and ECEs needed to be trained in how to address literacy, and later, mathematics, in the FDK environment.)
- We included an FDK goal in our 2013-2014 Board Improvement Plan. *60% of Senior Kindergarten students will reach reading level 5 on PM Benchmarks through a balanced, play-based, guided and explicit instruction program.* We then provided release time with a requirement that every FDK teacher complete targeted instruction plans for up to five of their students who were “not yet reading.”
- We inserted an innovation goal into the Multi Year Plan and dedicated budget dollars to this. The Multi Year Plan goal of *Halton will optimize the resources and learning environments through innovative program delivery models and partnerships. HDSB will develop and implement a system innovation strategy.* This plan enabled teacher leaders to submit applications for money to lead innovative projects in their schools. These projects tended to focus on literacy, mathematics and technology. Teachers were connecting their inquiries to align their practice and improve pedagogy.

Each of these actions involved the careful and consistent monitoring of data: number of institute participants, schools the participants came from, whether or not the principal/vice principal accompanied staff at the institute learning, a principal survey on the status and use of data walls, sharing of literacy pedagogy at Family of Schools, sharing of the reading intervention student data and parent feedback with trustees and senior administration.

Over the past two years, we have seen considerable change in classroom literacy practice, and the PM Benchmark data across the system shows outstanding growth in the reading skills of our students. Little by little, the classroom teachers delved into guided reading, embedding the use of running records on a regular basis; they were astounded by the growth in student abilities! This growth looked the same in our schools, both our neediest and our larger, more affluent schools.

While we believe we have leveled the playing field for all our students, we also believe we have changed the mindset of our classroom teachers, our principals and our superintendents. They now appear to

believe *Every Student Can Learn to Read*. This belief is a result of learning of research-based practices in reading instruction at all levels of the system. We have a strong belief in the foundations of reading instruction, and we see that providing resources to schools on a needs basis has helped to enable all our students to reach their goals.

We now have an enthused and committed team of 84 elementary principals who know what they need to do to “get kids reading” and who have become quite strong in their instructional guidance to staff. Superintendents and program staff have ample feedback from school principals, which evidences their commitment to and excitement about the changes they are seeing in their staff and in student reading achievement. One principal expressed it in communication to the superintendent of program:

*The level of excellence and school support (i.e., resources, programs and information) has been truly amazing. Administrators, teachers and support staff are becoming more aligned horizontally and vertically. The level of resources and data driven best practices that are now being shared and used in schools is simply amazing!!! I am seeing and hearing educators use consistent language (in both Numeracy and Literacy), assessment tools and teaching practices that are not only engaging students but pushing achievement levels to higher levels of comprehension. In particular, reading intervention program has changed the manner through which my teachers, students and parents approach and develop in Literacy. It is one of my greatest rewards as a Principal to see how my struggling readers complete the lessons/cycle being able to read. So simply- Thank you. You are making a HUGE difference in the lives of our students. You had the vision and determination to raise the bar in the instructional practices of our school board. Thank you for what you do.*

The actions we utilized to address student literacy needs have been repeated in our actions to address the mathematics needs of our system. While we recognize the greatest student learning need is in the area of junior mathematics, as evidenced by the provincial EQAO results, we see the foundational skills acquired by students in the primary years (K – Grade 3) as contributing factors to success, or lack of it, in junior mathematics.

This year, we devised a mathematics plan to address the declining math results in EQAO. Our math plan is focused on the learning needs of our students, classroom teachers, principals and superintendents. We believe that by addressing these needs, student results will increase. The math plan has three areas of focus:

1. Student needs: mental math, deepening understanding of the mathematics
2. Teacher needs: capacity building in content knowledge for learning and teaching mathematics, strategies to make student thinking visible and diagnostics



3. Principal/superintendent needs: capacity building in recognizing and monitoring effective instruction and assessment in mathematics

The key elements of our math plan revolve around professional development for classroom teachers. Our model for teacher professional development mimics the model for teacher literacy professional development:

- Clear and precise messaging from the senior team that “we are all going to address the math discrepancy.” A strategy we used this year is to devote seven of the nine Family of Schools meetings to mathematics leadership, monitoring, and understanding of the strategies teachers are expected to be using in their classrooms.
- Provision of mathematics K-12 principal learning teams.
- Five part primary and junior mathematics institutes for teacher learning with modules two weeks apart so teachers can do their “classroom task” and bring back observations and evidence of student work and student’s at work.
- Mental Math inquiries.
- Board wide Grade 3 and Grade 6 math teacher training to deepen knowledge of for effective math learning for all students.
- Staffing dedicated to math coaches in almost half of our elementary schools.
- Central program staffs are assigned to provide in-school support for the mathematics learning.
- The implementation of adaptive learning technology, Dream Box, in the majority of our schools. This program enables students to work at their level and move to the next level based upon how they respond versus the correctness of answer. Teachers can track the student data and the program has a home component. (The use of Dream Box has significantly deepened student engagement and teachers are expressing surprise at how much their students are capable of)
- Funding support for additional qualifications in mathematics.
- Family of Schools co-learning sessions to deepen principal instructional leadership in order to facilitate professional learning and dialogue around effective practice in identifying and monitoring best practice in mathematics.

- A commitment of the Family of Schools superintendents to one hour of monthly math training at their School Operations meetings. (While we were only able to do four sessions, we see this as a great opportunity for superintendents to more effectively monitor the work when they visit their schools.)

All professional development sessions gather feedback data from the participants. As an example, at every session of a mathematics institute, mental math inquiry, etc., feedback on how the learning from previous sessions was applied in their classrooms is gathered, as well as teacher reflection on their confidence in continuing to implement the strategies. Program and research staff analyze and share the feedback with participants, and the feedback is used in planning for subsequent learning. Feedback from teachers and data on student performance is showing us that the confidence level (and hence engagement) of our teachers is increasing at the same time as student performance is rising. For example, at the conclusion of a Mental Math collaborative inquiry series on teaching Multiplication and Division in grades 4 to 6, three out of four teacher participants reported they were highly confident. Our Primary Mental Math Inquiry's data for student pre- and post-tests show significant improvement in student ability to explain their thinking and perform math tasks. Sample feedback is below:

*Thanks to all of you for the "ah ha" moments of this course. I taught for 6 years... have discovered what could be another passion--teaching Math. I often wish that Math was presented to me as a child in the way and with the concrete materials and schema that I have experienced through this>course. Now I have the opportunity to teach Math in a way that honors and supports students' thinking and prior knowledge and experience-- empowering!*

*Thanks for the wonderful opportunity to participate in the Math AQ. I realize this was a huge investment for the Board and I am truly grateful. The learning was incredible. As an FDK teacher I have been challenged! The instructor's passion for math was contagious and I was always inspired to be a better Math teacher when I left her class!*

*It has been some of the best PD I have ever done and I am far more confident about math and what it can look like in Halton than when the course started. I look forward to being able to 'talk the talk' with my colleagues, apply what I have learned wherever I can and support my teachers as they work through it all too.*

Much of the research will tell us that change requires clarity of message, provision of resources and training, and time for practice. In looking at the Halton instructional guidance provided for elementary literacy and mathematics change, and at the job-embedded professional development strategy, we are seeing change happen. It began very slowly with a renewed clarity of the expectation that all children would learn to read and that all children can do mathematics. The work of the system was to ensure this message was heard across the board, training was provided, resources were put in schools and the

principals and superintendents monitored what was happening. In the past, Halton has done some work with Steven Katz, through their leadership conference. Katz's perspective on the need for prescription preceding professional judgment when implementing change that would be sustainable is descriptive of the pathway Halton has taken with its focus on staff and student learning in literacy and mathematics. As stated near the beginning of this case study, many teachers and principals did not see the need for a change in instructional and assessment strategies, particularly in literacy. In the words of one teacher as expressed to a superintendent visiting an FDK classroom:

*Are you the superintendent that sent that system message about FDK teachers doing guided reading? Do you know how much that has frustrated me, I do not believe I should be doing that, you are ruining my program.*

This was at a time when over 53% of our senior kindergarten students had just entered grade 1 below reading level. Today, after much prescription, support, training, resources and high levels of expectation, 70% of our FDK seniors have improved their reading level, with 61% of them reaching the expected level as of June 2014. One doubts that would have been possible without ambitious, aligned goals, clear expectations and supports to classroom teachers and principals, and an expectation that teachers serve students—this we do to ensure students have a pathway to travel rather than a series of insurmountable obstacles throughout their educational journey.

Suffice it to say, on that same school visit, two doors down the hallway, another teacher said to the same superintendent:

*Are you the superintendent who sent that message about us ensuring we provide guided reading to our students – I want to thank you for the clarity because it enabled me to dig deeper with my colleagues and my students. You made my job easier!*

In closing, while *the Ontario Leadership Framework* and the *Strong Districts and Their Leadership* document do not often appear on our senior team agendas, over the years, these documents have provided our principals and our superintendents with clear expectations on our actions to ensure student achievement advances. Without a firm belief in the ability of all of our students to achieve, it is difficult to activate a growth mindset in all staff. Using the data and focusing on every student almost always gets the buy in from the classroom teacher. Teachers want what is best for their students. Beliefs only change when teachers see that a strategy has moved a student forward. Hence, the critical importance of using data on student achievement, data that is as close to the classroom as possible.

For us, it has been the use of data that has enabled us to activate a different way of looking at how we meet the needs of students who are not succeeding. How do we connect those needs to what we need to provide teachers with, be it learning, resources and/or clarity of expectation? And for the senior team, how do we ensure that we remain focused on student achievement? We do it through the data, knowledge of research in evidence-based practices to support student learning, achievement and engagement and a firm belief in student ability.

## HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD 2016 CASE STUDY UPDATE

### **Do you still use the learning needs model – the egg to guide your systematic approach?**

The model has been used and we are looking at identifying student need and teacher needs and aligning leadership needs to this. We are not using the visual as much anymore and with the sanctions we are just jump-starting the use of the model again post-work sanctions. We spent time with principals last year to further their understanding of good instructional practice.

In addition, we are right now working with trustees to develop our multi year plan for the next five (5) years.

We are in a new phase as we have a new team.

New Director, New Associate Directors and of the fourteen (14) members of our senior team six (6) have less than two years as Superintendent. Many portfolio changes as well.

Recently at our leadership retreat we took the nine (9) characteristics of Strong Districts and did a reflective exercise of what we are doing well and what we need to further develop. This will inform the multi-year plan and our work moving forward.

We do have a collaborative team, and we want to make sure this continues.

### **Do you still provide differentiated supports to schools as the case illustrated?**

We continue to provide targeted supports to schools in terms of additional staff and professional development resources, such as math coaches and learning resource teachers. We also put money aside to give larger amounts of funds to schools that need it most, and they are accountable for it.

This year, we looked at the centralized budget process and factored in a needs index so that specific

schools in higher need communities received additional dollars.

**Have there been any changes to how you approach the analysis of data this year?**

That has been very different due to sanctions. Last year, teachers did not submit PM benchmarks and there were not monthly meetings as outlined with data walls.

Post-sanctions, many schools have gotten on track. Some schools have engaged more than others. We work hard at maintaining these good practices, and we are hopeful that the previous practices will return.

The practice at schools hasn't changed. Teachers continue to do running records, and I do believe we have come to a place that teachers believe in the practices despite not having been able to collect the system data.

**Has the message to staff about practice and expectations evolved in any way in updating this case?**

When I look at the clear messages we provided in the past, it was prescriptive. We are simply going to stay the course.

Our principals have told us please don't add more. We like what we are seeing and give us time to implement what is in place.

The professional judgment of teachers is respected and we are focusing on building teacher leadership more. Teachers have much to offer, so we are trying to be less top-down and continue to build teacher capacity.

## APPENDIX C: LOCAL EVIDENCE

### RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GRADE 6 STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT & KEY LEARNING CONDITIONS

Key Learning Conditions	Reading	Writing	Math	Mean
<i>Rational Path</i>				
Academic Emphasis	.41**	.37**	.46**	.45**
Disciplinary Climate	.49**	.40**	.50**	.51**
Collaborative Inquiry Processes	-.01	.07	-.02	.01
<i>Emotional Path</i>				
Individual teacher efficacy	.33**	.31**	.33**	.35**
Teacher Trust in parents, students, colleagues	.32**	.30**	.35**	.35**
Teacher Trust in Leader	.06	.01	.03	.01
<i>Organizational Path</i>				
Uses of Instructional Time	.23**	.23**	.15	.21**
Professional Learning Communities	.11	.14	.12	.13

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

[From Leithwood, K. (2011). *Leading Student Achievement: Networks for Learning Supplement to Final Evaluation Report for the 2010–11 Project Cycle: Analysis of Student Achievement Data*]

# STRONG DISTRICTS FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## DISTRICT LEADER INTERVIEW

### A COHERENT INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE SYSTEM

The seminar or module you have worked through today identified and illustrated, with one or two case stories, one of nine key features of high performing or “strong” districts. These features have been identified through empirical research conducted in Ontario school systems, as well as research carried out in other contexts.

To help you recall what was outlined and illustrated during the module, a summary of what is included in this key feature of district work appears in the box below.

Strong districts:

- support schools’ efforts to implement curricula that foster students’ deep understanding about “big ideas,” as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understanding
- work together with their school staffs to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction
- work together, district and school staff, to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards
- include teachers in instructional improvement work and assist them in developing sophisticated understanding of powerful instruction for students (collaboration for this work is extensive, ongoing and involves all key stakeholders)

### QUESTIONS

1. Your district may or may not do what you consider a good job in this area of its work. When it does (or if it did), however, how do you build on or take advantage of your district’s efforts in this area?
2. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that are (or could be) especially helpful to you? If so, what are they and why do they matter?
3. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that have negative consequences for your school leadership efforts? If so, what are they and how do they matter?



## DISTRICT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Available evidence suggests that district leaders increase their success in developing broadly shared mission, vision and goals in their districts by enacting the six leadership practices in the box below.

- Adopts a service orientation toward schools
- Aligns curricular goals, assessment instruments, instructional practices and teaching resources
- Insists on ambitious goals for teaching and learning
- Advocates for attention to the best available evidence to inform instructional improvement decisions
- Expects schools to focus on needs of individual as well as groups of students

## QUESTIONS

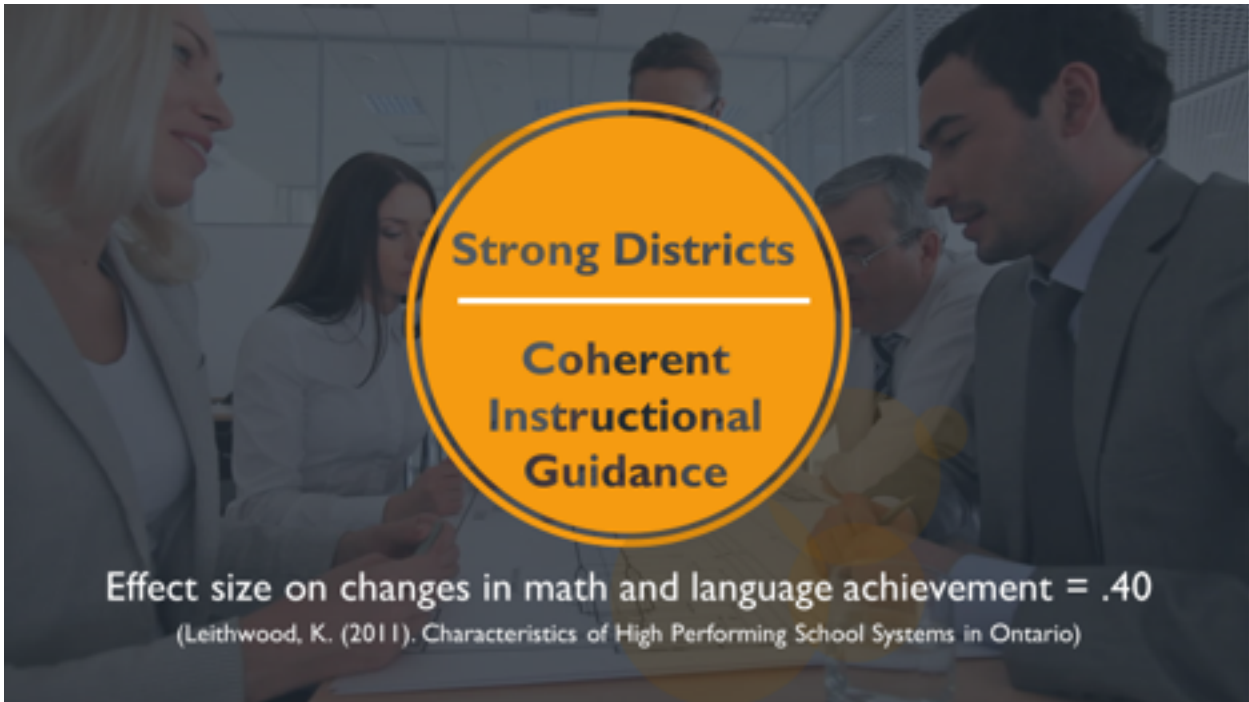
1. Does this list overlook any district leadership practices that you consider particularly helpful in developing a broadly shared mission, vision and goals for the district? If yes, what are they? What makes them important?
2. Are any of these six district leadership practices especially crucial in your experience? If so, why? What makes them especially important?

## COHERENT INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDANCE

**If your participation in this module has caused you to consider doing something different in your own system, please describe what that is.**

- Appreciate research to anchor the day's discussion. Value the case studies (in different formats) to generate thinking.
- Our table time was well used to apply these ideas to evaluate our practice as a district and to plan forward with the ideas that we will follow up on.
- Quality time to meet with member of the senior team. Importance of monitoring more intentionally.
- Senior team planning two-day summary retreat to collaboratively develop frameworks to ensure departmental efforts are integrated and monitored regularly by the group throughout the year.
- A continued reflection on coherence and what are the concrete steps we could take. Liked having the two case studies to compare our practice to. Very concrete steps to be reflected on.
- Yes, to ensure we continue to move in the direction of putting resources closer to schools to be more intelligently responsive.
- Refocus and Reflect on current practice. We need to introduce revisions to better align system messages with principal and teacher practice.
- We need to break down silos. How to differentiate support of schools.
- This module has definitely helped me reflect on the “paradigm wars” taking place, the session has also helped me think through departmental collaboration to a greater extent, moving forward.
- Dialogue between and about other boards has provided with some opportunity to reflect. Will focus on different paradigms for different purposes and an integrated approach.
- Devote more time to helping teachers understand contemporary learning theory. I think we take this for granted.
- Our singular focus must be academic achievement – everything we do in a district/school should reflect this focus. Explicit connections between PD and academic achievement should always be made
- This has been an excellent learning opportunity to learn from current research, dialogue with our team, and reflect on our practice around ‘Coherent Instructional Guidance’. We will revisit our current practice in our BIPSA and SIPSA around setting performance targets.
- We now want to consider integrating learning theories into our professional learning.

- I definitely need to refocus on knowledge building. Spend time considering the 2 paradigms and where my school fits and what shifts need to be made.
- Investigate within my school the idea of how often we shift to the first paradigm with students who are struggling and how we can change the thinking and practice
- “We spend a great deal of time in the what and how, and we need to spend more time in the why which will drive the what and how in a more urgent way.”
- We need to be more explicit about our goals to the system and we need to get feedback from the system.
- Great discussion about paradigm one and paradigm two. It may change our approach to our superintendent visits to school and school placements.
- Really will reflect on the information presented this morning. The non-cognitive skills are still a question and so is the amount of time on learning tasks. Why haven’t we thought about focusing on contemporary learning theory?
- Consider approaches with school leaders and how to actively engage them in systems thinking, build relational trust and plan ahead. Always intentionally and explicitly make connections the shared mission and vision and goals of the system. We will be re-visiting some existing structures to align with instructional coherence in our system.
- We need to add more time for further senior team discussion and support of instructional coherence in our system. Specifically, the core purpose of the system, which is improving academic achievement for our students.



**Strong Districts**

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**Coherent  
Instructional  
Guidance**

Effect size on changes in math and language achievement = .40  
(Leithwood, K. (2011). Characteristics of High Performing School Systems in Ontario)

### from Strong Districts...



Support schools' efforts to implement curricula that foster students' deep understandings about "big ideas", as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings



Work together with their school staffs to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction

## from Strong Districts...



District and school staffs work together to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards



Include teachers in instructional improvement work, and assist them in developing sophisticated understandings of powerful instruction for students.

Collaboration for this work is extensive, ongoing and involves all key stakeholders

3

## from Strong Districts....

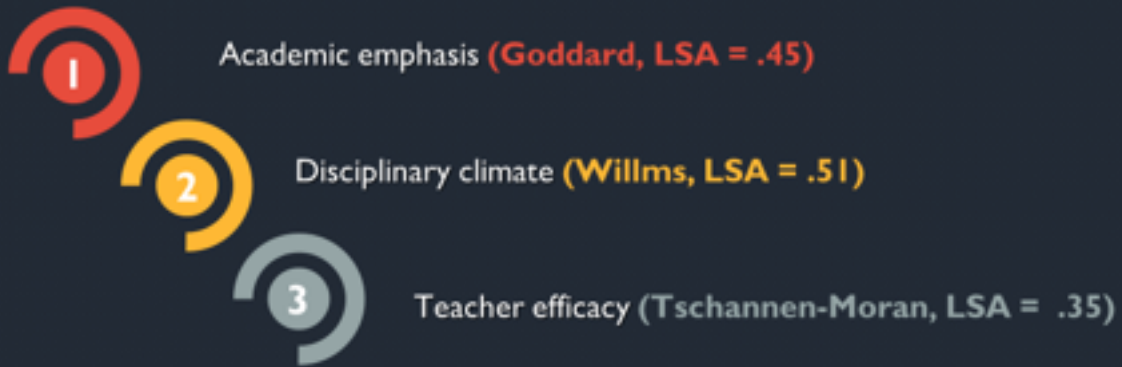
Demonstrate “in-classroom” leadership.



District and school level leaders are frequently in classrooms acting as instructional leaders and providing “just-in-time” or job-embedded professional development.

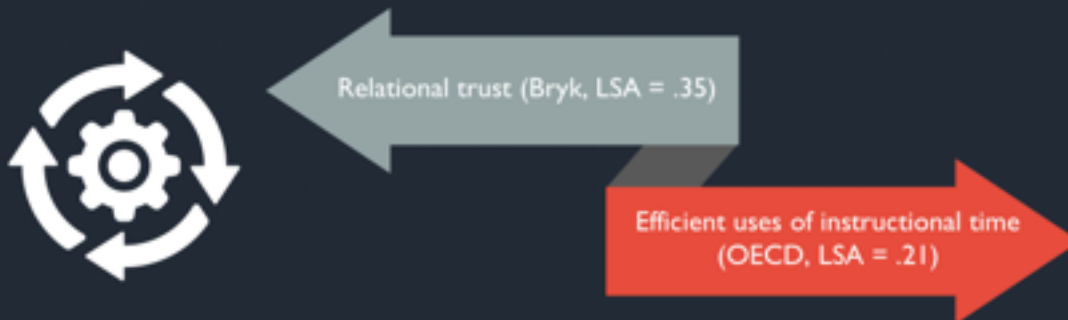
4

Ensures that all **schools** strive continuously to develop...



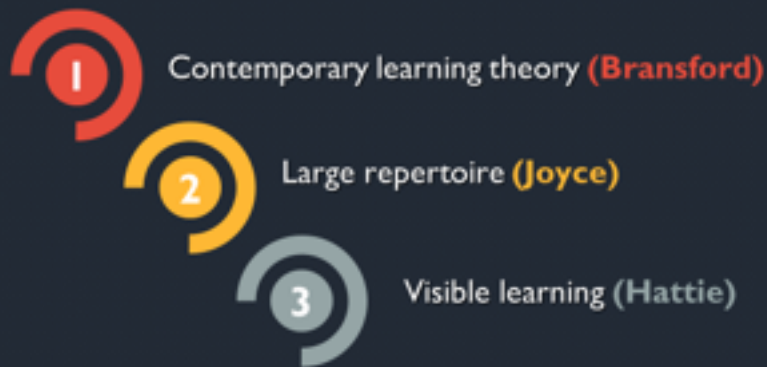
5

...strive continuously to develop...



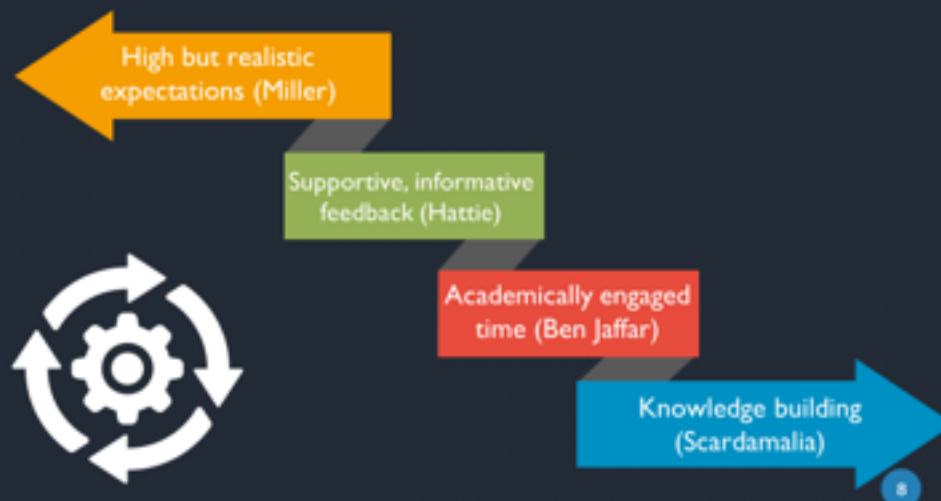
6

Ensures that all **teachers** strive to continuously....



7

...teachers strive continuously to...



8



## Knowledge-building principles



**Strong Districts**

**Coherent  
Instructional  
Guidance**

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## MODULE TWO

### MULTIPLE SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

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## DELIBERATE AND CONSISTENT USE OF MULTIPLE SOURCES OF EVIDENCE TO INFORM DECISIONS

### MODULE DESCRIPTION

Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions

Encouraging the use of systematically collected evidence in district and school-level decision making has been at the center of all accountability-oriented policies introduced in Ontario and elsewhere over the past 15 years.

In this module through the use of case studies, exposure to the most recent research and collaborative discussion participants explored what strong districts do to encourage effective data use in schools

In sum, they:

- Provide schools with relevant and accessible evidence about their performance in a timely manner
- Make effective use of existing research to guide policy making and planning; insist on a careful reading of relevant research evidence as the starting point for decisions about what to do to improve student performance
- Assist schools in using evidence to improve their performance, including frequent, job-embedded opportunities to learn about productive evidence use and the provision of time to interpret and act on what is learned through those opportunities
- Create collaborative structures and opportunities for the interpretation and use of evidence in schools
- Call on expertise from outside the school system for help with data interpretation when needed
- Implement computerized information management systems that are easily used by school and district staffs and that allow for the integration of all or most of the information available within the district
- Use appropriate evidence for accounting to stakeholders

## AGENDA

### 1. **Objective**

To better understand the types of evidence needed and the ways that evidence can best be used, at district and school levels, to improve decisions influencing student learning.

### 2. **Overview of Relevant Research** (presentation)

### 3. **Full Group Discussion**

Participants identify other promising approaches to district and school uses of evidence to better inform decisions (similarities and differences with case approach)

#### 4. **Case Study: Rainbow District School Board** (Appendix A)

*What can be learned from this case about how to use evidence to better inform decisions?*

- Overview of case by RDSB team (video interview also available)
- Discussion of written case
- Debriefing of what was learned from the case by each team

#### 5. **Case study: District School Board of Niagara** (Appendix B)

*What can be learned from this case about how to use evidence to better inform decisions?*

- Overview of the case by the DSBN team
- Discussion of written case
- Debriefing of what was learned from the case by each team

#### 6. **Full Group Discussion**

Identification of key lessons from the research and the two cases. (Additional case study to compare and contrast at a later date with your team)

#### 7. **Case Study: Conseil du Centre-Est** (Appendix C)

*What can be learned from this case about how to use evidence to better inform decisions?*

- Overview of case by Conseil du Centre-Est senior leaders (video interview also available)
- Discussion of written case
- Debriefing of what was learned from the case by each group

## SAMPLES OF RELEVANT RESEARCH

- Anderson, S., Leithwood, K., Strauss, T. (2010). Leading data use in schools: organizational conditions and practices at the school and district levels, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 9, 292-327.
- Daly, A. (2012). Data, dyads, and dynamics: exploring data use and social networks in educational improvement, *Teachers College Record*, 114.
- Datnow, A., Park, V., Wohlstetter, P. (2007). *Achieving with data: how high performing school systems use data to improve instruction for elementary students*. Los Angeles, CA: Center on Educational Governance, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California.
- Earl, L., Katz, S. (2002). Leading schools in a data-rich world, In K. Leithwood & P. Hallinger (Eds.). *Second International Handbook of Leadership and Administration*, Volume 8, pages 1003-1024. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer.
- Finnegan, K., Daly, A., Che, J. (2013). System wide reform in districts under pressure: the role of social networks in defining, acquiring, using and diffusing research evidence, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 51, 4, 476-497.
- Honig, M., Venkateswaran, N. (2012). School–central office relationships in evidence use: understanding evidence use as a systems problem, *American Journal of Education*, 118.
- Leithwood, K. (2011). *Characteristics of high performing districts in Ontario (Part 1)*. Toronto: Final report of research for the Institute for Educational Leadership.

## APPENDIX A

### RAINBOW DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

#### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. This district used “learning cycles” as a vehicle for school improvement.

What is a “learning cycle” and how does it compare with your district’s approach to school improvement?

2. As part of the work taking place in learning cycles, staff in this district have access to and make use of a wide range of data. What are those data and how do they compare with the data used in your schools?
3. How did this district align its efforts at data use with its professional development initiatives?

### THE CASE

#### BACKGROUND

Rainbow District School Board covers a geographic area of more than 14,757 square kilometers in the heart of Rainbow Country. The Board provides quality programs and character education to students in Sudbury, Espanola, Manitoulin and Shining Tree in 35 elementary schools and 10 secondary schools. The Board also operates educational programs at the Ruth MacMillan Centre, Frank Flowers School and Cecil Facer Secondary School.

Our vision statement is: We are leaders in learning inspiring success for all students by reaching minds and touching hearts. Our mission statement is:

**We bring learning to life, enabling students to fulfill their aspirations.**

This case describes how the district has gone about enhancing the condition of two of the nine characteristics of strong districts: *building district and school staff’s capacities and commitments to seek out and use multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions* and *providing job-embedded professional development*.

## **Why These Characteristics?**

The district's Strategic Directions, 2011-2015, were created in the fall of 2011. As these directions come up for renewal, we want to continue to emphasize the importance of our principals and vice-principals as "learning leaders" in their schools. As well, the number of Rainbow students reaching level three on EQAO tests of reading and writing has steadily increased over the past five years, at a rate slightly better than the provincial average. Pass rates have also increased. We want to continue to enhance learning opportunities for students in reading and writing as well as in other areas of the curriculum.

## **What We Did**

For the past seven (7) years, we have allocated Ministry and district funds to each elementary and secondary school so they can engage in "learning cycles." Learning cycles provide opportunities for teachers, administrators and program staff to come together at the school level to work on improving learning opportunities for students. The district's learning cycle work is the most likely cause of the improved student achievement results mentioned above.

For purposes of this case, we focused on "learning cycles" in four schools undertaken with two goals in mind: to increase student pass rates as well as EQAO achievement results, to increase the roles of principal and vice-principal as learning leaders and to encourage teachers to play a more significant role in learning leadership.

To pursue these two goals, senior district leaders enacted those practices described as part of characteristics 3 and 5 in *Strong Districts and Their Leadership*. Characteristic 3 recommends that senior leaders build district and school staff's capacities and commitments to seek out and use multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions by:

- Using data from all available to assist decisions making in the central office
- Insisting on the use of the best available research and other systematically collected evidence to inform decisions wherever possible
- Encouraging collaboration in the interpretation and use of data
- Providing training for principals and staff on the use of data and research literature to sustain decision-making; and

- Modeling evidence-informed decision

In all four schools, literacy was the focus for the learning cycles. Data was provided by the central office, as well as EQAO, to make informed decisions. The secondary literacy coordinator worked to ensure that the best available research was available to staffs for improving literacy opportunities for students. Staff at all four schools became very adept at interpreting student data and student work to further inform instructional decisions.

Learning cycles provided wonderful opportunities for evidence-informed decision making and for ensuring that all teachers engaged with one another and their administrators in deciding on the next best steps to take to improve student learning.

Characteristic 5 encourages senior leaders to “provide job-embedded professional development for staff” by:

Providing extensive PD opportunities for both teachers and school-level leaders, most of it through some form of learning community of on-the-job context

- Using internal system networks as central mechanism for the professional development of school-level leaders
- Aligning the content of professional development with the capacities needs for the district and school improvement
- Requiring individual staff growth plans to be aligned with district and school improvement priorities
- Holding staff accountable for applying new capacities by monitoring the implementation for school improvement plans

Not only were the learning cycles in our four schools driven by data, they were also based on job-embedded professional learning. Teams met approximately six to eight half days to further explore literacy strategies in a variety of content areas. Teachers, principals and vice-principals created their annual learning plans and growth plans based on literacy instructional and assessment strategies.

## **Outcomes**

Principals and teachers met and discussed the importance of the classroom library and its relationship to reading achievement, looked at how often the students chose the classroom library and worked together with the rest of the staff to develop guidelines for a quality classroom library. Staff involved in the learning cycles worked to select books from the school library to supplement their classroom libraries that matched the Learning Cycle target goals.

Books were organized according to genres and curriculum focus and high interest books were gathered specifically to engage non-readers. Grade-level curriculum expectations were listed on the exterior of book bins and the school library was reorganized to make it more user-friendly for teachers.

All the teachers and administrators involved in the learning cycles spoke highly of the opportunity to come together in a focused way to collaborate with one another.

### **Current Status**

Rainbow continues to provide funds for school-based learning cycles. In the past, only certain elementary schools received program support whereas all secondary schools received such support. We have become much more strategic about which schools, elementary and secondary, receive program support (i.e., consultant attached to the learning cycles) based on student needs, staff needs and the focus of the school. For example, we have twenty-two elementary schools focused on math and are able to provide a program consultant for each of these schools for their school-based learning cycles, which include co-teaching in a math classroom each time.

### **Advice for Others**

Our advice to others, based on our experiences to date is to (a) find ways to eliminate barriers for principals and vice-principals to engage in school-based professional learning and (b) respond to the needs of specific schools by providing differentiated levels of support (e.g., funding and program staff).

## **APPENDIX B**

### **DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF NIAGARA**

#### **BACKGROUND**

This case study describes how the District School Board of Niagara has focused specifically on two of the nine practices of strong district leaders, namely, provide *coherent instructional guidance* and *build school capacities and commitments to seek out and use multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions*. For



purpose of this case, we will focus on the role of the Elementary Superintendent and our work in our area of schools related to improving both teaching practice and student achievement related to mathematics.

### **Restructure in Superintendent Roles and Responsibilities**

Three years ago, our Director restructured the Superintendent portfolios to allow for maximum increased time and focus in the schools by relieving Elementary Area Superintendents of responsibilities related to operations or committees that would take time away from their commitments to schools.

A second key aspect of this restructure was to identify three or four “focus schools” within their compliment of approximately 20 schools. These focus schools would be selected based on a variety of factors, including the analysis of school achievement data over time. We reviewed student achievement data (both standardized and school-based) from multiple years. Other sources of data include a review of attendance and discipline data, information about the level of parent engagement and caseloads related to students with either ELL or Special Education needs. Youth Counsellor and Social worker involvement was also reviewed. Input from Principals was a key source of information used to help determine the level of instructional capacity and leadership in the schools. Staff willingness to collaborate and share their practice was another key factor that needed to be assessed. Once these schools were identified, we were responsible for working directly with the Principal/Vice Principal in these schools to collaborate on a school improvement plan. The priority was to narrow the focus, set fewer goals and regularly monitor and review data related to the school improvement planning process. This included supporting the Principals in biweekly school-based meetings to gather and analyze data, determining the obstacles and barriers and creating professional development opportunities connected to both teacher and student need.

Beyond the focus schools, each Area Superintendent worked with their Area Principals to develop templates, frameworks for schools to consider when documenting their learning journey. While there were a variety of samples, they all contained ways to measure and monitor the impact on teacher practice and student achievement; however, the goals were extremely varied.

### **Our Learning in Year One**

Following our first year of this approach, we dedicated the time needed to work with our principals in the focus schools. In fact, our time in all our schools significantly increased due to the restructuring of portfolios. In working closely with all of our school administrators, it became evident that a consistent platform for all schools to work from in our area was needed. In each area, the Principals determined this

was important to build collaboration and capacity because they, as leaders, would support one another and their respective teams throughout this school improvement process. This common framework became the foundation for Principal network meetings, school visits, school- based PLCs, and area meetings.

The next step was to take the DSBN Math Plan developed by School Support Services that included ten pages of research-based knowledge of content and instructional strategies for K – 12 and narrowing the options. The goal was to create a menu of manageable items for schools. This Area Math strategy was developed by principals, instructional coaches, superintendents, teachers, and school support services staff. The menu included both easy-to-implement and more complex instructional and assessment practices that supported teachers in intentionally planning their instruction for all students using curriculum expectations, process skills and big ideas to engage in problem-based strategies that supported students' conceptual understanding and procedural fluency. It was also important to support students in seeing themselves as mathematicians who have the confidence and perseverance to take risks in their learning.

While each school could enter at a different place in the strategy, the overall strategies were consistent. The key turning point here was the area goal developed from school-based data rather than solely system wide or provincial data. Our data included student achievement data as well as teacher input related to their need for professional development. A key success with this approach was staff ownership and engagement in the school improvement plan. They created the plan based on their student needs and contributed authentically to it throughout the year—rather than the Principal solely authoring the year-end goal outcomes. Also, they measured the outcome of their work and revised their goals and actions throughout the year rather than waiting for year data to determine the effectiveness of their work.

This was a great first step, especially the shift in school involvement. However, as Superintendents, we felt we could be more effective in our work with the schools. We determined that a challenge with the learning agenda being led from a system wide approach was an inability to meet the more specific needs of schools or provide “just in time” support as schools needed it. The Central team were doing their best work to support everyone, but as we were becoming more knowledgeable about our schools and specifically the profiles of our focus schools, it was deemed ineffective to continue with solely centralized allocation of supports and resources.

To achieve our desired outcome, Superintendents were allocated PLC and CIL funds to support their area of schools as well as a compliment of Instructional Coaches to assign to schools to support the school

improvement goals. This meant hiring of Coaches and determining the allocation of their time to schools; their collective work was the responsibility of the Superintendent. Superintendents were responsible for allocation of release time to support school-embedded PD as well as the criteria established for schools to access funds.

## **Year Two – Movement to Area and School Specific Distribution of Supports**

With the new compliment of resources, funds, and Instructional Coaching support, we were able to differentiate support to schools related to their school improvement goals. As we moved into this new model, we were initially cautious with the degree of our differentiation. Mainly, we wanted to offer support to all of our schools; therefore, coaching time and release funds for PLC/CILs were mainly distributed based on school size and number of teachers. Without considering more information, this seemed to be the best way at the time to support the schools in a “fair” manner as well as a gradual transition to this newer “area concentrated” rather than “system wide” distribution model.

Focus schools did, however, receive more support as we were working closer with them to achieve their goals and monitor their progress. We had much more specific data to inform our allocation of funds and staffing. As an example, a non-focus school would receive release funds to support one of their CILs related to a math goal they selected from the collective area goal. They would also receive access to .33 or .25 FTE of coaching time. A focus school could receive release for an entire Junior Division to meet once in a ten-day cycle to co-plan, assess, and learn new strategies to support their students who were struggling in mathematics. They would also have at least a .5 FTE of an Instructional Coach to work with teachers and students in achieving their goals.

Another key change was the Area Superintendents having a compliment of instructional coaches to support the learning agenda and goals. This went beyond the allocation of their time and included monthly PLCs where they worked together to create support materials for all the schools. Their work was guided by teacher voice in schools and the support of the Superintendent and lead Principals to transfer their knowledge of the content and curriculum to a tool kit that supported the instructional leaders in the school as well as resources that were practical for the classroom teacher. There was an efficiency in this new delivery model that allowed for quick response to teacher need while the regularly scheduled meetings with the coaches supported consistency with area focus on the math strategy.

At the conclusion of year two, we were able to identify the progress and level of achievement at our schools by meeting with the Principals, Instructional Coaches, and Teachers to review the goals, assess the

outcomes, and determine the next steps. Each stakeholder provided a very important perspective when reflecting on the effectiveness of the school improvement planning process that year.

At this time, we realized that progress in teacher learning and student achievement were not always directly linked to our allocation of funds, the coaching compliment, or the established goals. There were other sources of data to analyze before determining how effective we were being as an area with our math strategy. One example of this was a school with minimal allocation of coaching time and release funds that had made significant gains in refining their teaching practice. This was because 75% of the staff had taken the board-initiated and fully funded Math Additional Qualification courses. Their learning and change in practice was directly related to their participation in this after school but 100% board-funded professional development opportunity. The Principal also allocated funds for their CIL to allow these teachers time to collaborate on their assignments and co-teach new learnings as a result of this course. The success of this strategy and the participation in these AQ courses continues to be one of the most effective ways to improve math instruction and to build capacity in schools to lead their own learning rather than requiring an itinerant support such as Instructional Coach to lead the learning agenda.

Another example of improvement in two schools was the placement of Vice Principals who had previously been Instructional Coaches. Their knowledge of the Math Curriculum combined with their toolkit in facilitating meaningful PLCs accelerated the work in these two schools. They also had excellent insight into how to work effectively with an Instructional Coach and could share these insights at an Area meeting so all Administrators could consider their knowledge and experience related to instructional leadership.

### **Current school year and looking ahead**

While there have been obstacles with the learning agenda this year due to job action, we also felt there was significant evidence to gather to help us further evaluate our area math strategy. Namely, what teaching and assessment practices were sustainable? What continued when we were not able to lead a learning agenda? Our Principals used this time to observe practices, seeking to understand why some practices “stuck” and others “faded”. They supported teacher-initiated requests to continue collaboration with coaches during job action but also observed if the coach wasn’t being accessed by staff. This time period in many ways provided us the perfect opportunity to measure the effectiveness of our work to date.

As we transitioned out of Job Action, Principals and Instructional Coaches collaborated on a survey that was intended to get teacher input on our next steps. Many schools also ensured student voice was included

by gathering feedback on math instruction, the availability of supports when struggling, and their overall attitudes towards math. Which strategies, resources worked? Did teachers need more time learning to use them independently? If they could pick the next step as we moved back into collaborative learning, which of our area goals did they want to revisit or tackle next?

As we look forward to 2016/2017, as an Area, we are creating a “Math Profile” template for each school. The purpose of this profile is to gather multiple sources of data from the past two years related to our area goals, school-based goals, and system wide central supports that have been offered, such as sessions to support Grade 3 and 6 teachers both before and after the Mid-Year Math Assessment offered by our School Support Services team.

This Math Profile is not intended to be a portfolio of only the effective strategies and celebration of the successes. Its purpose is to give us a snapshot of each school by looking at similar data.

Most importantly in collaborating on the completion of the profile, the Superintendent, Principal, Instructional Coach, and teachers can further reflect on work to date and determine the following:

- Strategies that still require further evidence to measure our effectiveness.
- Instructional practices that are sustainable and should be less of a focus so we can move on to the next goals.
- Specific school goals and strategies with evidence to support their effectiveness can be shared with other schools in the area. This allows for efficiency when tackling the next goal and is a powerful way to demonstrate a collective responsibility in the work.
- We will learn just as much by sharing the time and effort put into goals that did not produce the outcomes we had expected.
- Areas where we have little to no evidence of improved student achievement will help us be specific with the support we need from our School Support Services team as their contributions are essential to our work.

**Multiple sources of data/evidence in our Math Profile will include but are not limited to:**

- Student achievement data - year end assessment data by grade, EQAO results, assessment data directly related to targeted intervention strategies and small group instruction

- Mid -year Assessment for grade 3 and 6, action plan goals and follow up assessments leading up to EQAO
- Dreambox data related to lessons completed, time on task and progress made by each class/student
- Teacher utilization of resources such as DSBN Scope and Sequence, Fosnot Units, Building a Math Community unit, Math Manipulatives, Monthly Math Newsletters from SSS
- Outcome of school specific goals or PLCs
- Staff participation in DSBN Math AQ course
- School Support Services supports, math in-services and resources

## **Summary**

The next steps in this journey can and should be even greater differentiation in the support provided to each school as they work towards the same overall goals in improving achievement in mathematics.

There are schools that are ready to innovate and inquire while others continue to work from a prescriptive approach to improving instruction. There will be schools with a capacity to provide their own school-based coaching model while others will continue to use the support of an Area Instructional Coach. While we collectively work on and contribute to the same overall goals related to improving math instruction and student achievement in the District School Board of Niagara, the more we know about where each school, each teacher, and each student is on this journey, the more precise we can be with providing them the exact support and resources they need to be successful.

## APPENDIX C

### DATA USAGE AT THE CONSEIL DES ÉCOLES CATHOLIQUES DU CENTRE-EST

#### GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. stages beginning in 1989. What have been the main sources of motivation for increased reliance of systematically collected data in your district?
2. As compared with this district's efforts, how have you attempted to increase data use at the school level?
3. What challenges to effective data-informed decision making by schools remain and how are you planning to address those challenges?

#### THE CASE

This case study details the evolution of data usage by the Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est (hereinafter Conseil du Centre-Est). As mentioned in Leithwood's 2013 study entitled "Strong Districts and their Leadership," districts that use data from diverse sources in a systematic way perform better than the provincial average with regard to student achievement and well-being. This is why he identified data usage as one of the nine characteristics of strong districts.

Data usage by the Conseil du Centre-Est goes back more than 25 years. It has gone through an evolution with four periods, each of which had its own characteristics and teachings. It is this story we will try to summarize here.

#### **1989-1994: Emerging Needs**

For decades, Franco-Ontarians have been demanding full and complete control over their schools. The creation of the Conseil scolaire de langue française d'Ottawa-Carleton in 1989, with both Catholic and public sections, gave the Francophone community high hopes.

Administrators of the Catholic section had carte blanche to design a modern organization using leading-edge school management methods. And so, in 1989, administrators set up a Research section and a Program Implementation Assessment Service. Similar services already existed in both English-language

boards in the Ottawa area, as well as in some Toronto-area boards. But for Francophones, it was a first, an innovation.

The Research service was tasked with conducting research, studies and analyses on requirements identified by members of senior management, e.g. master plan, organizational environment, new initiative assessment (e.g. full time junior-kindergarten), educational projects and school mission plans, etc.

As for the Program Implementation Assessment Service, it developed tests in two subject matters (French and Science) that it administered every year, systematically, to test grades (e.g. 6th and 8th grades). The results of these tests were meant to gauge the efficiency of program implementation for school principals and superintendents and help them to make improvements. It should be noted that there were no individual results for these tests, only aggregate results, and that they were never communicated to school Trustees.

After less than four years in existence, the Conseil scolaire de langue française d'Ottawa- Carleton was abolished by the Government because of deficient financing and a dysfunctional governance model.

### Lessons Learned

The fact that Conseil du Centre-Est managers decided to develop an analysis capacity in 1989 was considered, at the time, very innovative. The few Ontario boards with such a capacity were considered educational leaders (e.g. Toronto, Ottawa, York). It was thought, at the time, that if those in positions of authority (e.g. senior management) based their decisions on concrete data, the results would be better and school boards would be all the better for it. It was considered the way to go to improve organizations.

Without drawing any conclusions regarding the experiences of other school boards, what were the advantages for the Conseil du Centre-Est? Even though the Board produced a significant amount of data, the evidence to support a conclusion of a very positive “return on investment” was insufficient. In fact, the data produced was not used in any significant way, and here are the reasons for this:

- The analyses and research conducted were more often than not in response to the needs of a single manager, not a team; there was thus little mobilization or change in senior management as a result of the reports, nor was there any follow-through with the recommendations. The results



were interesting but had little impact on decision-making (in English they would have been considered simply “nice to know”).

- The test results had little credibility in schools regarding program assessment; program expectations at the time were rather vague. What’s more, since the results were only known the following year, the student cohort in the grade was no longer the same, which greatly reduced their relevance in the field.
- And finally, there was, at the time, very little talk in schools and among managers about the importance of student achievement, about a data-based process of continuous improvement, or about accountability with respect to results—all important reasons for using data.

It was nonetheless an important period in the history of the Conseil du Centre-Est as it gave rise to an internal data analysis capacity, whose efficiency would only increase over time.

### **1994-1997: Data on Governance**

In September 1994, the Conseil du Centre-Est began anew as an independent Catholic school board—but with very limited services. As with other support services, the research and evaluation programs were abolished for lack of funds.

Many of the newly-elected Trustees were somewhat aware of upcoming changes in governance and other management methods, as with other types of organizations. At the Board table, talk began to circulate about:

- Increasing the director of education’s liable for results
- Gathering more data to better govern and manage the Board, such as common tests for students, surveys for parents, annual school reports, etc.
- Making political and administrative decisions based on evidence-based data, studies, analyses, etc.

At the time, the director of education no longer had any capacity for internal research or analysis because of budget reductions. There was difficulty then in meeting Board expectations regarding data availability. In 1995, the Board nonetheless adopted a series of recommendations asking the director of education to make significant changes, many of which required data collection, analysis, and research.

The director of education then hired a Director of Special Projects to implement many of the Board's recommendations.

Moreover, the Royal Commission on Education tabled its report, entitled "For the Love of Learning," in December 1994. It contained many recommendations that would have a significant impact on the use of data in school boards during subsequent years:

- That the Ministry of Education set expected results with respect to learning French, mathematics, sciences, computer science, group learning, interpersonal relationships, and values, from kindergarten to the end of high-school
- That a common provincial report card aligned with the results and standards of the current year be developed
- That an organization independent of the Ministry of Education and Training be set up to administer and communicate standardized provincial test results
- That this organization (temporarily named the Office of Learning Assessment and Accountability) also be tasked with setting education system performance indicators to be used by school boards and other pertinent provincial entities

### Lessons Learned

During this time, the impetus to utilize data at the Conseil du Centre-Est came from the political leadership of Trustees. Paradoxically, this push for using data came at a time when the administration's capacity to produce and use it had been decimated compared to the previous period, when the capacity was great, but the political need for it was absent.

Simultaneously, the Royal Commission on Education also recommended the collection of data, through provincial exams, to evaluate the education system's performance. These exams would be managed by a provincial organization established to support accountability at the school board and Ministry of Education level.

Clearly, a new accountability was developing in education from 1994 to 1997: accountability, defined as giving accounts with respect to expected results. This need for accountability was expressed both at the Conseil du Centre-Est and at the Commission. It would lead to a second need: the need for standardized

expectations with respect to student learning in the province. Thorough methods for an evidence-based evaluation of the education system's performance would also need to be adopted.

### **1998-2004: Accountability Framework and “Business Intelligence”**

In 1998, Francophones were handed complete control of their school boards throughout the province, with a much more effective financing model. It was then that the Conseil du Centre-Est adopted Policy Governance. This approach was recommended by the Education Improvement Commission. It was very much a results-, evidence-, and accountability-based approach—the three expectations of the previous school board.

In the summer of 1998, the Board hired a director of education familiar with Policy Governance and who was recognized for their leadership and comfort with accountability to the Board regarding expected results. This director made four important and innovative decisions with regards to data usage:

- Naming a senior manager in charge of supporting accountability to the Board (and Policy Governance)
- Developing an Accountability and Improvement Framework, including various performance indicators
- Creating a middle management position (chief) with expertise in measure and evaluation that would be tasked with data collection and analysis in support of accountability to the Board and school improvement
- Asking for the implementation of a computerized business intelligence system

This time, the Board leadership was in sync with the director of education. The accountability sought by the Board was to be supported by a capacity to produce and use data at the administrative level, but a capacity with an approach and objectives very different than during the period 1989-1994 when there also existed such a capacity.

Since then, for the sake of accountability, the Board has (among other things):

- Developed or perfected tools and performance indicators (surveys for parents and students, survey of staff on organizational climate, study of catholicity, graduation and drop-out rates, etc.)
- Produced monitoring reports to meet the Board's accountability requirements

- Provided schools with various student achievement reports (e.g. boys vs. girls, ALF students)
- Drawn from report cards to support improvement plans
- Provided schools a profile of their results compared to the results set by the Board to identify improvement priorities
- Trained school principals and teaching staff in the correct use of data, particularly those of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)
- Performed various ad-hoc analyses for senior management, such as producing data for setting annual priorities, program assessment, etc.
- Evaluated and coordinated data collection requests from external organizations (e.g., universities)

At the beginning of the 2000s, information technology made huge leaps forward. The Conseil du Centre-Est implemented a large network between schools and the Board, a standardized computer report card, a centralized student database (Trillium), etc. The director of education saw in these elements the favourable conditions necessary for the Board to adopt computerized business intelligence (BI) tools to help stimulate and improve performance in private and public enterprises.

Such tools allowed users, who were not programmers, to compile bulk data from various sources and incorporate them into tailor-made reports that were easy to understand and analyse. These reports could guide decision-making at various levels of the organization. The tools could also produce management dashboards showing various performance indicators.

In the early 2000s, the Accountability Office was tasked with the implementation of a business intelligence system. In 2006, within the framework of the provincial initiative entitled Managing Information for Student Achievement (MISA), the Ministry of Education asked all Ontario school boards to acquire such systems. Thanks to the leadership of its director of education, the Conseil du Centre-Est had had such a system for several years already.

### Lessons Learned

Through the leadership of the organization, that is to say Trustees and the director of education, the Conseil du Centre-Est acquired during this period great capacity for gathering and using data from

various sources. This capacity was necessary to respond to two new requirements: the need for accountability from the director of education to the Board and the need for continuous improvement in student achievement in schools. Consequently, in 1998, the Conseil du Centre-Est adopted a new, clearer direction that it has maintained ever since: governance and management decisions must be supported by evidence from multiple sources.

### **Since 2004: Cooperating for Success, Using Data**

In 2003, a new director of education was hired. The senior management team took the opportunity to take stock of the previous years in order for the Conseil du Centre-Est to continue performing well over the long haul. Here are the main conclusions:

- The data gathered was often used by the Board and senior management in taking systemic decisions and it was very much appreciated
- Few schools used it however, even though the Accountability Office provided them with large quantities of data (e.g. EQAO, surveys of parents and students, etc.)
- Teaching staff had little knowledge of the objectives set by the Board and did not feel responsible/accountable for attaining them
- Teaching staff mostly worked in isolation and did not use the data on their own students' learning to improve their performance

We can summarize the situation with a metaphor: the “head” of the Conseil du Centre-Est was very well organized, with expected results and a strong use of data, but it was out of touch with the “body” that was operating on a quasi-independent basis. In order for the Board to show strong performance over the long term, the head had to be more closely linked to the body. This gave rise to the Vision 2008 project that sought to significantly alter the way in which Conseil du Centre-Est staff worked: its organizational culture. This project had three main axes of change:

- Professional accountability: staff is responsible for the achievement of each student
- Results-based management: staff must set measurable objectives (e.g. SMART objectives) and follow through using relevant data
- Cooperation: staff must work in teams with common objective

The Vision 2008 project brought forward the concept of professional accountability, which was strengthened through the systemic implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in all schools, communities where staff was asked to work in small cooperation teams, using their students' learning data, in order to improve their performance on priorities set by the school<sup>17</sup>.

Additional resources were brought in to give staff the time to meet as a team, to train in effective cooperation, to support school principals in setting limited improvement priorities, to learn how to mobilize their staff and support the implementation of cooperation teams, etc.

This new way for staff to work on improving their students' performance, implemented gradually starting in 2004, proved successful, as evidenced by the constant improvement in results since.

### Lessons learned

The Conseil du Centre-Est acknowledged, as early as 1998, the benefits of a school board using data to support decision-making and manager performance. But it was also wise enough to recognize, by 2004, that there were limits to the way it could use data to improve performance. An environment rich in data from multiple sources does not, by itself, produce the climate or the desire necessary to improve student achievement. The management of such a significant change was slightly more complex—as Joan Green, then director of the EQAO, aptly put it with a bit of wry humour: “the simple fact of weighing a cow does not mean we'll be successful in fattening it up.”

Senior management, under the leadership of the director of education, was able, starting in 2004, to bring the necessary resources and personnel to bring about profound cultural change in the way individual Conseil du Centre-Est schools worked:

- Accountability for students' achievement
- Work as a team, not in isolation, on measurable common objectives
- Use of a variety of data, particularly students' “real-time” learning data

### **In the background: Data from research on education**

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<sup>17</sup> To find out more about the successes and challenges of the first two years of this period, read the case study (40 pages) on the Conseil du Centre-Est published in September 2006, as part of the Unlocking Potential for Learning series directed by Michael Fullan. The Conseil du Centre-Est was one of eight (8) school boards selected for analysis because of its noted improvement in EQAO tests. This change is still ongoing today, with greater challenges, particularly in secondary schools. In terms of effort required, they are much greater than the ones faced when acquiring the “technical” capacity to produce and use data. It was necessary to develop strategies to change beliefs, traditions, values, etc. that were deeply ingrained in the education system. The Conseil du Centre-Est committed to a sustained, planned and long-term change management effort in order to insure the success of each one of its students.

One potentially important source of data for improving district performance is research in education. Since 1989, through various studies and analyses, the Conseil du Centre-Est has often wanted to make its decisions based on data derived from research in education or from its own research and program evaluations (secondary school organization, the teaching of reading, special education, teaching of French, etc.). But the results have been rather mitigated. The Conseil du Centre-Est is not the only District to have had difficulty translating research into classroom practice. This is a well-known and generalized challenge in education. In 2006, the Ministry of Education even established the Ontario Education Research Panel to promote research-based school practices, among other things. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat also published several excellent research-based educational documents.

Nevertheless, the Conseil du Centre-Est continues in its efforts to implement effective, research-based practices. For example, an “Effective Practices Framework” was developed to support collaboration teams. While data analysis is effective, if not necessary, to determine whether change has occurred, it often provides precious few leads to improvement strategies. We must rely on the professional judgement of staff to find better approaches, but this judgement will be all the more sound if it is guided by the teachings of the last 25 years of education research (e.g., John Hattie). Thus, the Conseil du Centre-Est is putting more and more effort into promoting and encouraging the adoption of practices based on data derived from education research.

### **In Conclusion**

The Conseil du Centre-Est has had to rely on solid leadership, politically, and at the senior management and school levels, to progressively implement a culture of improvement, based on data from various sources, at all levels of the organization, from governance to the classroom. This leadership allowed the Conseil du Centre-Est to recognize, very early on, the significant value of the use of data. Decision-makers were then able to prioritize the financial and human resources necessary to develop this capacity at various levels.

The benefits are clear: The Conseil du Centre-Est is one of the strongest districts in the province. And the story doesn't end there, as the District continues to improve the use of data to foster the success of each and every one of its students.

## STRONG DISTRICTS FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

### DELIBERATE AND CONSISTENT USE OF MULTIPLE SOURCES OF EVIDENCE TO INFORM DECISIONS

The seminar or module you have worked through today identified and illustrated, with one or two case stories, one of nine key features of high performing or “strong” districts. These features have been identified through empirical research conducted in Ontario school systems, as well as research carried out in other contexts.

To help you recall what was outlined and illustrated during the module, a summary of what is included in this key feature of district work appears in the box below.

#### Strong districts:

- Provide schools with relevant and accessible evidence about their performance in a timely manner
- Make effective use of existing research to guide policy making and planning; insist on a careful reading of relevant research evidence as the starting point for decisions about what to do to improve student performance
- Assist schools in using evidence to improve their performance, including frequent, job-embedded opportunities to learn about productive evidence use and the provision of time to interpret and act on what is learned through those opportunities
- Create collaborative structures and opportunities for the interpretation and use of evidence in schools
- Call on expertise from outside the school system for help with data interpretation when needed
- Implement computerized information management systems that are easily used by school and district staffs and that allow for the integration of all or most of the information available within the district
- Use appropriate evidence for accounting to stakeholders



## QUESTIONS

1. Your district may or may not do what you consider a good job in this area of its work. When it does (or if it did), however, how do you build on or take advantage of your district's efforts in this area?
2. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that are (or could be) especially helpful to you? If so, what are they and why do they matter?
3. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that have negative consequences for your school leadership efforts? If so, what are they and how do they matter?

### District Leadership Practices

Available evidence suggests that district leaders increase their success in developing broadly shared mission, vision and goals in their districts by enacting the seven leadership practices in the box below.

- Uses data from all available sources to assist decision-making in the central office
- Insists on the use of the best available research and other systematically collected evidence to inform decisions wherever possible
- Encourages collaboration in the interpretation and uses of data
- Builds system's capacity and disposition for using systematically-collected data to inform as many decisions as possible.
- Provides training for principals and staff on the use of data and research literature to sustain decision-making;
- Models evidence-informed decision making to school staffs

## QUESTIONS

1. Does this list overlook any district leadership practices that you consider particularly helpful in developing a broadly shared mission, vision and goals for the district? If yes, what are they? What makes them important?
2. Are any of these seven district leadership practices especially crucial in your experience? If so, why? What makes them especially important?

# FINAL COMMENTS BY DR. KENNETH LEITHWOOD

## MODULE TWO

### **DELIBERATE AND CONSISTENT USE OF MULTIPLE FORMS OF EVIDENCE TO INFORM DECISION**

It is clear from conversations among members of the District teams that many types and sources of evidence needed to inform district improvement efforts are not the quantitative and systematically collected types favored by the policy community and by evaluation specialists. In fact, the dominance of such evidence, especially in the form of student achievement results, serves to narrow the scope of attention to the disadvantage of many district efforts. Such evidence is unquestionably necessary but by no means sufficient. You can stare at your achievement results endlessly and they still won't tell you what to do.

The reliance on evidence, we need to remind ourselves, is part of choosing to move forward with an “evidence-based” rather than an “expertise based” approach to improvement. The two are by no means mutually exclusive. But naming them begins to acknowledge that our staffs don't always need some form of external evidence to figure out what needs fixing and how to fix it. To the extent those staffs have been well trained to begin with, the expertise and experience they bring to their classrooms and schools provides substantial guidance about what to do. This is particularly the case among those staff members who are continually striving to do a better job for their students. Armed with a sense of where things are not working well - developed through the day to day, or even moment to moment, responses of students to their effort - many staff members will find a way forward that is at least as robust as the insights that might be provided in more formal ways. There are, in other words, trade-offs to be made in the use of more or less formally collected evidence, trade-offs, for example, between reliability and sensitivity.

On the province-wide angst about declining math scores, we should remind ourselves that underperformance in schools has many potential causes. This is especially well explained in the literature on school turnaround. School underperformance can be the result of changing student populations, excessive principal turnover, family transience, lack of district support for interpreting student achievement evidence, poor instruction, low expectations for student learning, etc. My point is that the dominant explanation assumed by most districts is that the problem is poor instruction, or at least

instruction not up to the task at hand. But surely that cannot be the same source of the problem in every district as we seem to be assuming at the moment. One cause of the same problem across the entire province just does not pass the ‘smell test’. But I heard almost nothing during our discussions today about actually diagnosing the causes of the problem in one’s own districts.

The need for careful diagnosis aside, improvements in the quality of math instruction and student math achievement reported by one district following a district-wide effort to have most teachers of math complete AQ courses in math reminds us that the most potent source of improvement in math instruction is greater pedagogical content knowledge on the part of teachers of math.

We know that schools are influenced to use the best available evidence for their decisions by the example provided by district leaders. Modeling good data use- or an ‘evaluation habit of mind’ was nicely illustrated in the story told by one NDSB superintendent about what transpires in their weekly senior leadership team meetings. In response to otherwise persuasive explanations of things that seem to be working well in their schools, the director is often heard to say ‘That’s a nice story but where is the evidence?’

## EVALUATION

### MODULE TWO (MAY 26<sup>TH</sup>, 2016)

#### DELIBERATE AND CONSISTENT USE OF MULTIPLE SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

**If your participation in this module has caused you to consider doing something different in your own system please describe what it is?**

- Loved the format: info/lots of time to talk with a focus. Will model the same with small groups of principals, using multiple sources of data to inform decisions. Very productive sharing model as well and loved it.
- This was a powerful session for me personally. Theory of action- series of if then statements.
- This module reinforced having an inquiry mindset and now I can’t stop thinking about questions like “Do we have data on why our math scores have gone down?”
- As a senior team, we need to continue questioning our data and ask for evidence that our decisions and actions are giving positive results.

- I will look at culture/safety versus instructional leadership differently
- Re-focused my attention to the importance of using data thoughtfully in our decisions
- Look for a district level template for data
- Conduct simple instructional conversations to engage all employees in vision and strategic plan.
- We are going to share this with our principal group and the rest of our senior team.
- Great case studies shared.
- Ministry – Consider how our regional team currently networks with one another and what series of theory of action statements would enhance the collaborative focus of our work and impact in the region.

Consider these questions.

How does our regional team model effective data use?

What will be our norms of data use and decision-making?

What data and data analysis needs to be conducted for each theory of action statement?

Ministry – Field Services

At the provincial level are we having the right conversations in boards and how do we know. Is our own theory of action sufficiently precise and are we testing it at enough points.

Are we sufficiently aware of the various research viewpoints?

- Consolidate and combine SO portfolios to create one level of concentrated support or use student portfolios or profiles as the tool to trigger the above.
- We are re-visiting some of the assumptions that underlie current practices intended to improve student learning.
- I am thinking of how to build the capacity of principals in effectively using data and making evidence informed decisions.
- Need to be more explicit in sharing modeling to the system how we use evidence and research to inform our decision-making.

- For Superintendents who are monitoring in their schools I am curious as what this looks like. What is the intentional focus of this work?
- Focus on learning conditions.
- Take time to pause and reflect, how are we effectively communicating the boards vision, mission and values to the degree that they inform the plans of school administrators.

**Please identify any changes or refinements that could be made to this module to improve the participants learning.**

- Change nothing – It was fantastic and I really enjoyed it. Thank you
- Well done – loose /tight but focused. New to this work so thanks for pointing out the website resources.
- The module was well received. An excellent opportunity to learn more about effective districts through dialogue and hear challenges too.
- Use the same process – It works
- Want more time to engage within our own team.
- Could we sit in different district teams next time versus staying in our own districts? Perhaps engage in an activity that we bring back to our own senior teams.
- Opportunity to make thinking visible (e.g. Twitter) during the session
- Nice balance of presentation and talk time at the tables. (4 times)
- Add Google docs for submitting input.
- I would have liked more detail on the districts case study and approach (one hour for e.g.)
- Videos of students, Student voice

**How might this project work be effectively used in the future?**

- Help to create frameworks for districts to better collect, analyze and act upon data.
- A one-page summary of key ideas
- Great that this info is available digitally to share with curriculum teams and principals etc.
- Helps us to review our district practices

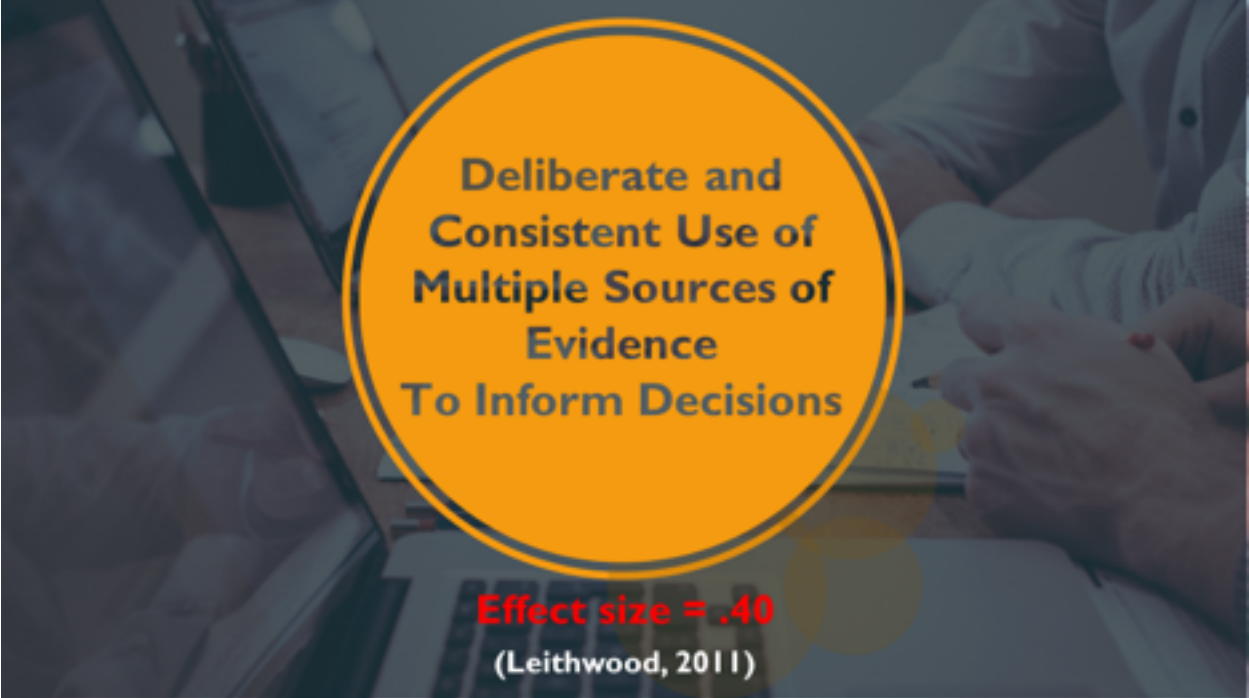
- Could you share your findings with the ministry?
- Great tips to take back to teams
- *(Ministry participants).*

*It is a deeper understanding about the research and learning about the characteristics of strong districts. This will deepen my understanding and ability to include this in my conversations with boards about their work. Could hopefully and will inform the senior leadership teams as they set their directions and ways to achieve them.*

- I think this presentation and sharing will give us more direction to move forward.
- Provide for more de-privatization of districts and school boards.
- The research material on the HUB will make excellent sharing reading and learning with my principals to use as they reflect about the data that under pins their school improvement plans
- Will share with the wider senior team
- Module format is good. Consider facilitated on line web conference materials.
- We want to share this with our district team to identify what challenges we continue to have that we need to address in addition to our successes.
- Invite everyone and use the same format. We all need to hear the message on strong districts.
- The analysis of each module is a model that could be a support in the development of our BIPSA.
- The contributions by other boards have deepened our learning.
- Going to use the HUB with my principals and look forward to some great discussions.
- We are going to use the research and strong district leader modules to inform the work we do and to build the capacity of our principals at monthly academic administrator meetings.
- Want more detail on the district stories and how the monitoring conditions were established and conducted at the district level.
- Love the boards sharing of practices and gave us food for thought

- Would like to interact with other boards and have some mixed discussion groups.
- Keep as it is. Loved the 2 case studies and loved the chat time and opportunity to collaborate

## PRESENTATION



**Deliberate and  
Consistent Use of  
Multiple Sources of  
Evidence  
To Inform Decisions**

**Effect size = .40**  
(Leithwood, 2011)

**Does “evidence-informed decision making”  
result in better decisions?**

**It depends....**the claim has not been justified  
with much empirical evidence

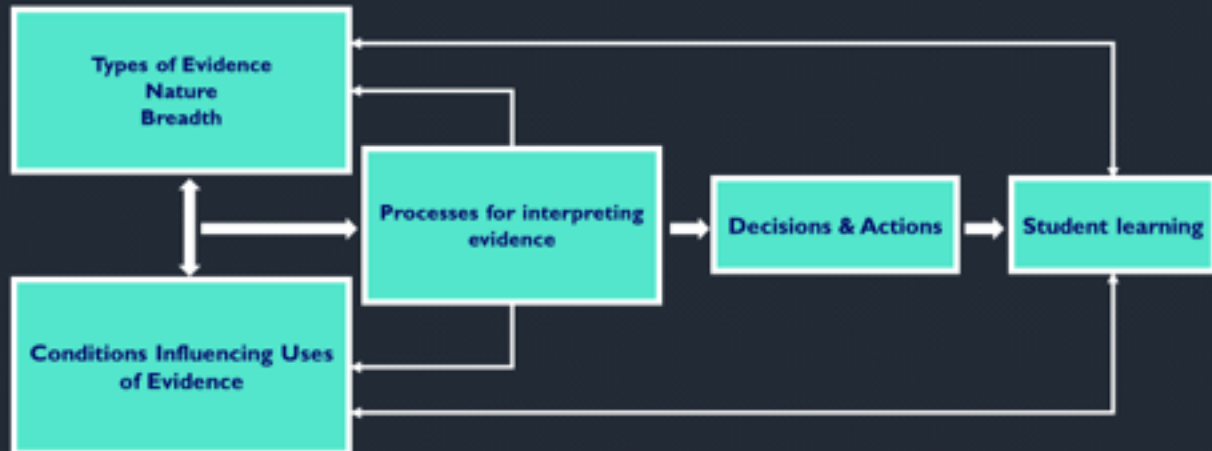


**What does it depend on?**

2



## Data Use Framework



(Anderson, Leithwood & Strauss, 2010)

3

## types of evidence

No "evidence-free" decisions in schools—ever!!

but



vs



Policy context favors the latter, but there are tradeoffs and the contributions of the latter are not well documented

Are you sensitive to the tradeoffs being made in your district?

4

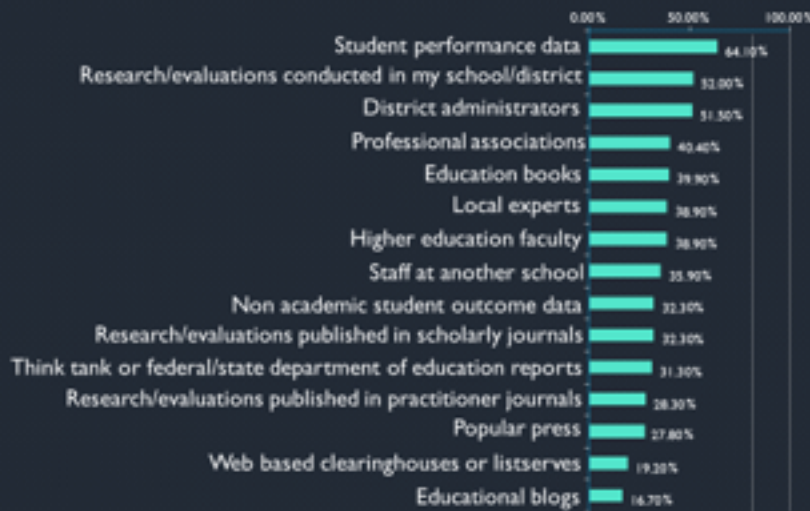


Figure 1.  
Most frequently consulted  
evidence types/sources  
before school makes  
improvement decision

(Finnegan et al, 2012)

5

## Breadth of Evidence

A high proportion is limited to the status of current student achievement  
which is crucial but narrow



Status of conditions or variables that mediate the  
teacher's and administrator's influence on students



Formal research evidence about effective practice

How broad is the evidence typically used in your district?

6

## Conditions Influencing Uses of Evidence in Schools



What is the status of these conditions in your schools?  
(Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007)

7

## and district support...



Providing data in  
easily accessible  
forms



Creating opportunities for  
networking and sharing between  
schools about data, its' interpretation  
and how it might be used



Modeling effective  
data use

(Daly, 2012)

8

## District support (cont.)...



Providing incentives for data use



Establishing norms of data use  
and continuous improvement  
("an evaluation habit of mind")

What is your district doing about these things?

(Datnow et al, 2008; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Earl & Katz, 2002)

9

## Processes for Interpreting Evidence

Effectiveness depends on:



10

## Decisions and Actions



How does data get used in your district?

(Finnegan et al, 2012)

11

## A Theory of Action



What would be the implications for data-informed decision making in a district guided by an explicit theory of action?

12



## Create community membership for beginning on a small scale to....

Identify the problem of practice

Develop a theory of action for solving the problem

From the theory of action, deduce a series of testable hypotheses

Collect evidence to test each hypothesis

Interpret and share the results

13

**Deliberate and  
Consistent Use of  
Multiple Sources of  
Evidence  
To Inform Decisions**

**For more information**



**[www.strongdistrictleaders.com](http://www.strongdistrictleaders.com)**

## MODULE THREE

### JOB EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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# JOB EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## MODULE DESCRIPTION

This learning module focused on how to provide evidenced based job embedded professional development.

Strong districts approach professional development as an important function towards their improvement efforts and where PD is an integral part of school and system improvement planning processes. They develop forms of professional development that is reflective of the best available evidence on the components of effective professional development. Strong Districts closely monitor the progress toward improvement goals and hold staff accountable to apply the learning towards improving their practice

### **Characteristics of Job-Embedded Professional Development in Strong Districts**

- Devote very little time to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and principals. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional development.
- Most professional development is carefully aligned with board and school improvement initiatives.
- Differentiated professional development opportunities are provided in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.
- Extensive opportunities are provided for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.
- Almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.
- All system-sponsored professional development is closely aligned with the best evidence about how people learn.
- A key function of their improvement efforts and craft forms of professional development for both teachers.

This module explored through exposure to the most current research, case studies and focused conversation the characteristics of exemplary professional development.



# AGENDA

## 1. Introduction and Module Objectives

As a result of participating in this module, district leaders will be more likely to:

- Restructure the use of meeting time with teachers and principals so that very little is devoted to routine administrative matters. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is devoted almost entirely to professional development.
- Design most professional development so that it is carefully aligned with board and school improvement initiatives and reflects the best available evidence about how people learn.
- Ensure that almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.

## 2. Review of relevant theory and research (presentation) Ken Leithwood and Catherine McCullough

## 3. Appendix A: Hamilton Wentworth District School Board

What can be learned from this case about how to provide effective job-embedded professional development for all members?

- Presentation and discussion
- Discussion of written case (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case by each team
- Synthesis of key findings from written case and interviews

## 4. Appendix B: Algoma District School Board

What can be learned from this case about how to provide effective job-embedded professional development for all members?

- Discussion of written case (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case by each team

## 5. Compare and contrast what you have learned from the two cases (Hamilton and Algoma) and the summary of research

- Full group discussion
- Consider relationship to relevant research and to the approach currently being taken by one's own district
- Highlight key lessons
- What to do for sure, what not to do at any cost
- Make as many links as possible to the cases and research

## SAMPLES OF RELEVANT RESEARCH

Bransford, J., Brown, A., Cocking, R. (Eds.) (2000). Brain, mind, experience and school. Washington: National Research Council.

Mangin, M., Dunsmore, K. (2015). How the framing of instructional coaching as a lever for systematic or individual reform influences the enactment of coaching, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 51, 2, 179-213

Perkins, D., Salomon, G. (1992). Transfer of leaning – Metacognitive strategies. In N. Postelthwaite & T. Husen (Eds.). *International Encyclopedia of Education* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

Sun, M. et al (2013). Shaping professional development to promote diffusion of instructional expertise among teachers, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 35, 3, 344-369.

## APPENDIX A

### THE HAMILTON-WENTWORTH DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD CASE STUDY

For the purpose of this case study, we have picked two characteristics in areas where we are making gains but also where we are stuck. These two areas are a *coherent instructional guidance system* and *job-embedded professional development for all members*. As the concepts overlap, they have been treated jointly in the case study below. This opportunity provided us with a chance to reflect internally on our work and share these insights with colleagues beyond our board. This brief case study shares our thinking to date.

In 2010, the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board began engaging both service and academic staff in professional learning that focused on collaborative inquiry. We shifted resources, changed meetings to give them a learning orientation, provided multiple entry points for engagement, and aligned this with our system's direction. We aspired then, and still aspire, to grow a responsive, intelligent system—one that is coherent but also allows for contextual and creative problem solving at the local level. Leithwood emphasizes the importance of this: “The coherent system is intended to establish some legitimate boundaries around what can be done without stifling the innovative efforts of staff to improve their practices and the achievement of students. This feature of strong districts reflects evidence about the importance of focusing on the core function of the organization as the primary driver of success.” Providing a coherent instructional-guidance system and situated, job-embedded professional development for all members will help us realize this vision, and they serve as the focus of this case study. Over time, our learning has evolved from establishing a level of common understanding and building coherent processes that could enable the system to be effectively and collaboratively responsive to one where we are applying concepts to daily practices and problems. In short, this thinking has become habitual among leaders. However, as you will read below, we still have work to do.

The HWDSB has shifted its focus from being a top-down driver of the school improvement process to one where school teams are collaboratively engaged in instructional improvement work. Principals are steadily gaining instructional leadership expertise and student work, and student voice and achievement are used to help inform our direction and assess our efforts. Schools are recognizing the importance of facilitating high order thinking for students, and they are in varied states of optimizing this goal. Instructional coaches and consultants provide job-imbedded support to teachers in an intelligent-responsive way. As well, superintendents play a visible partnering and supportive role with schools on

their monthly visits during which the discussion is focused on school improvement but also “drills down” to the individual student achievement (and intervention) level.

As the HWDSB becomes more of a coherent learning organization, we are able to provide a greater range of professional development opportunities to our employees while directing most of our resources to school-based teacher release time. Increasingly, when system-led inservices are facilitated, the learning is integrated and facilitated by many departments. We have worked with our partners to reduce the amount of time dedicated to compliance and operational issues, which has freed up time for more professional learning. Even with fewer dollars available for professional learning, we have offered more opportunities outside of the instructional day and this seems to be met with some increased enthusiasm.

For example, attendance at after-school and summer institute learning sessions has increased. We have just introduced a Master’s of Education program and additional qualifications courses in partnership with universities. We are also seeing wider take-up with our leadership programming. Indeed, at the heart of this programming is a shift in the way we support learning: our leaders, managers and teachers are participating in intensive coaching and facilitation, which helps to support learning in context. Because we see learning through an inquiry and developmental lens, we are able to engage in conversations that support the transfer of ideas into action. Increasingly, we see principals asking open-ended questions and explicitly creating safe conditions for learning conversations. They are recognizing the value in allowing teachers to process the work collaboratively and are deliberately limiting the amount of time they talk at staff.

Since our efforts began in 2010, our theory of action has been to build the capacity of our principals’ instructional leadership capacity so that they in turn can build the instructional leadership capacity of their teachers. Steven Katz has served as a critical friend and helped us to refine our thinking and the support that we provide to principals. The primary vehicle for principal capacity building has been the Principal Learning Team and over the years the learning has become more focused. This may be explained by continual development of our “intelligent components” or system expectations. Most recently we have introduced a system-wide learning conversation protocol which has led to greater precision and deeper learning. (The protocol is attached in Appendix A).

We are beginning to recognize that teacher-inquiry based learning, has not been examined with the same rigour. Before 2010, the inquiry cycle was a compliance driven rigid structure, reliant on release time and did not allow for deep collaborative assessment and reflection that generates professional learning. While

we are glad that we jettisoned the pre-2010 model, we still need to explore the function of teacher collaborative teams and consider how we can create greater clarity, optimize the use of time and employ clearer protocols without stifling the voice, efficacy and creative thinking of our teachers.

What our teacher, leader and service leader survey data tells us is that the conditions in which our employees work are increasingly conducive to learning; people report being able to share their thinking and feel comfortable “not knowing” or making mistakes. While change in staff approaches to learning are shifting, we have yet to see a measurable and direct relationship between improved achievement results and our efforts with collaborative inquiry. As well, we need to find ways to work with more precision; for example, we need to regularly examine quality evidence while engaging in collaborative inquiry processes.

Creating conditions that enable collaborative inquiry for staff have been somewhat easy; creating those similar conditions that allow students to thrive this way within their classrooms represents a seismic shift for our teaching staff. To that end, we are asking our students about their impressions of learning. Student voice is collected through system-led and school-initiated surveys. Students are telling us they want to be more engaged in the learning and more connected to their teachers.

So, where once we were encouraging staff to participate in collaborative inquiry, we are now reaching beyond staff and including students in this approach to learning. This has led to the next step in our journey: We are creating “personalized, collaborative, inquiry-based learning environments” for each student from kindergarten to grade 12 and recognize that technology plays a key role in this work. We call this evolution, “Transforming Learning Everywhere (TLE).” Fullan and Langworthy’s *A Rich Seam*<sup>18</sup> has helped to clarify the development of our ideas. We acknowledge the critical role of technology and we are emphasizing the foundational role played by meaningful pedagogy and supportive learning conditions. We have recognized that we need to set our expectations high for student learning and engagement so we have settled on three broad learning outcomes for schools to focus on. They are: critical literacy, higher order thinking and problem solving.

We deliberately have not used the word “program” or “initiative” as we describe TLE because we believe this is the work. We are imbedding TLE into our school improvement practices and other structures to reinforce that this is central to our practice. And, importantly, we are recognizing the power of messaging to simplify this work and thus the steering team has synthesized TLE into 3 key messages.

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<sup>18</sup> Fullan, M & Langworthy, M (2014) *A Rich Seam*.

## **Transforming Classrooms Transforming Relationships Transforming Learning Opportunities**

In the 2013-2014 year, we put a pause on our district-led School Effectiveness process while we were working to make the school improvement process more consistent and meaningful across the system. We also needed to consider how to dovetail this TLE work with our school improvement work. Our goal is always to generate an intelligent/responsive solution. To tackle implementation, we gathered a diverse range of system and school-based leaders to map out a path for optimizing the use of professional development days to engage all schools in a continuous school improvement process. This process stresses that school improvement and capacity building planning should be informed by the student needs. Essentially, teachers are using a marker-student approach to inform the school's learning direction. Student work is on the table and the focus of an individual teacher's collaborative inquiry and contributes to staff-wide learning; trailing indicator data such as EQAO also help to inform the planning but they do not take center stage as they once did. When teachers participate in this type of collaborative problem solving, they are identifying what might be their next best move to support the student's learning. The teachers return to their next staff meeting ready to share their learning. At the same time, they are identifying what they need to learn to support the students. The principal and direction teams are using teacher learning needs to chart out the next step in the school's staff learning and continuous school improvement plan.

Our hope is that this systematic approach will reach more teachers. We have previously relied on release time to build capacity but too few teachers are impacted. In our current approach, release time is allocated in an iterative way to meet the learning needs that emerge within a school. The role of the superintendent is to engage in monthly visits to coach principals and monitor progress and use of the release time. This leads to a differentiated, responsive support model; not all schools get the same amount of support. Importantly, the school superintendents check in with each other weekly to discuss how this process and the continuous school improvement work is going. This does not lend itself to true consistency but provides greater coherence.

All of the critical pieces are beginning to fit into place across the system. For example, system-wide inquiry drive professional growth plans are beginning to align. Essentially, the learning plans focus on those we serve. The teachers are examining student work collaboratively to consider what learning needs to occur and this informs the school learning plan. The school learning plan reflects teachers' needs by division, department or grade. The teachers' learning needs inform the principals' learning plan, and the principals' learning needs inform the superintendents' learning plan. However, the provincial Principals'

Performance Appraisal system does not align with this model. So, to promote coherence, we have changed the format of the leaders' annual learning plan and adopted the inquiry framework to make it directly relevant to the principal's and superintendent's learning work. Leaders are now using an inquiry framework to support their learning plan rather than an irrelevant template. What we have not fully explored is whether we can do the same with the teacher's annual plan to dovetail with the inquiry framework; in this way, student learning needs would officially inform the learning of the teacher.

However, as we actualize this plan, we are encountering some issues. For example, as we dug into the work, we began to question whether the three broad learning outcomes (higher order thinking, critical literacy and problem solving) were the best choice: how did we land on these? Did we settle too quickly without fully exploring what they each meant and how they differed? As educators, we often speak in cloudy language, assuming that we all share an understanding what is meant by these concepts. To address this, we quickly assembled some of our system's best thinkers (consultants, principals and superintendents) to look to the research and create some accessible "one pagers" for each of these three broad learning outcomes, fully recognizing that the definitions may evolve as we evolve.

We also know that this continuous school improvement approach represents a shift for our system and if we are not careful, it may lead to confusion or worse, attributions that we are retreating back to a top-down leadership approach. While many leaders are co-constructing this school improvement model with us, currently, the only teacher representation on the system committee are consultants; we need to tap classroom-based teacher voice to ensure we are heading in a direction that responds to their needs and speaks in a language they can relate to.

In addition, we believe in providing boundaries without stifling our professionals. However, with precious little professional development time for each teacher, we fit a lot of content into the professional development day and reduce the processing time that leads to shared problem solving and shared ownership. We all know this does not reflect how people learn. So, we need to clarify our "learning goals" so that staffs can construct their own understanding and ultimately their own "success criteria." Going slow to go fast may be the strategy we need to adopt to allow structured discussion time for teachers to deeply process this thinking. And if we know and communicate our own learning goals, we will be able to collect relevant teacher voice and student achievement data that informs the quality of this effort. This may help us to find a way to gather meaningful system-wide evidence while complying with ministry expectations regarding data collection.



Furthermore, we are wondering whether in our enthusiasm for creating conditions to promote inquiry, we may have lost sight of focused instruction. This is causing us to revive the thinking of Hattie's Visible Learning, a powerful resource that we had put aside recently. We need to return to focused instruction and be clearer about how and when to use direct and constructive approaches and support the teacher in understanding one's role as activator in either.

Another dilemma is with our secondary schools. The EQAO results in grade 3 and 6 have been steadily improving. However, our secondary literacy and Math results still need attention. We wonder whether we dedicate enough problem-solving energy to our secondary schools. Perhaps we need to actively question whether what works for one panel will work for the other. For example, across the system we have moved to relying on leading indicator data more than trailing indicator data to support school improvement. However, we know that secondary schools have a lot of trailing indicator data (such as pass rates, mark distribution) that is worth our focus. We have used it before but are we using it in a way that generates precise reflection to action? Perhaps we need to reconsider how SMART goals or the use of targets can help us with this secondary dilemma.

While it is still early, there may be nuggets of learning emerging from a project occurring in one area of the board. Sixteen schools, from both the secondary and elementary panels, are participating in the "New Pedagogies for Deep Learning" globalized project facilitated by Michael Fullan. The project provides rubrics (learning progressions) teeming with meaningful language in the areas of school conditions, learning tasks and student outcomes.

To minimize the sentiment that this is "an add-on" or worse, "an initiative," this work is imbedded into existing school improvement structures, such as monthly superintendent visits, continuous school improvement planning, Principal Learning Team work, teacher networks, directions team planning and teacher collaborative learning time (formerly TLCP). The tools and protocols are providing structure and precision to the learning conversations; they explicitly communicate what student learning looks like. The "evidence" brought to the learning conversations provide richness for learning but also may tell us whether TLE is having an impact on student learning. These rubrics are helping us to move from a dualistic discussion about whether the learning is evident or not to a richer discussion about quality of the learning by using performance standards that recognize learning as developmental. The NPDL dovetails so neatly with our ambitions regarding TLE that we have begun to consider how we can move beyond the sixteen schools and engage other schools within the system.

The HWDSB has been engaged in continuous rigorous inquiry for four years and as this paper suggests we are encountering gains and challenges. This case study that narrowed in on the challenges associated with coherent instructional guidance system and job embedded professional development has provided a lens for us to pause, reflect and assess our actions, to be courageous in exposing our blind spots and consider next steps. We have questioned small and large issues, potential implications and opportunities for growth. It has been a meta-inquiry of sorts, an inquiry about our inquiry work. And if Leithwood is correct when he says, “strong districts do add significant value to the learning of students beyond the contribution of schools and classrooms,” it has all been worthwhile.

## APPENDIX B

### ALGOMA DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD CASE STUDY

Our thinking was that we wanted to be able to support our teachers with their use of technology in a way that was non-threatening and would allow them to feel safe in experimenting with new applications, devices and programs. We did not want to take teachers out of their schools as we've learned from feedback that teachers like working in smaller groups and being able to have support at their school site. Thus, we decided to experiment with job-embedded learning by having and developing a support person at every school.

#### THE “WHAT” ... HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROJECT

##### **Educational Technology Lead**

Teachers at the Algoma District School Board are engaging students in innovative experiences that maximize achievement, build confidence and develop responsible citizens while utilizing technology in purposeful and responsible ways to support their learning. They are focused on preparing our students for success in a collaborative, dynamic, technology-intensive and increasingly connected world. An Educational Technology Lead role has been created to support teachers with technology integration and to provide the necessary training and one-on-one support. Every school in our system has a teacher who courageously stepped forward to accept the Educational Technology Lead role. These teachers have approached the role with an “open to learning” approach and a willingness to engage in co-learning to continually refine and extend their repertoire of technology based teaching strategies

The Educational Technology Leads are building positive relationships and establishing respect and trust while assisting teachers with the integration of technology into the curriculum and effectively using technology as a learning and teaching tool. They are engaged in co-planning with teachers to create deep learning tasks that incorporate the use of technology. They are also showcasing and demonstrating current technology to colleagues and students and are providing school-based technology in-service, small group training and one-on-one support. The Educational Technology Leads nurture teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-student and student-to-student learning partnerships at the schools.

The Educational Technology Leads participate in on-going professional learning as a collaborative group to explore new technologies and deepen their understanding and efficacy with technology-enabled

learning and teaching. They are provided with release time to collaborate with colleagues in job-embedded professional learning at their schools to support the integration of technology into real-world, authentic learning tasks enabled by technology, the planning of deep learning tasks and assessment practices.

Educational Technology Leads are supporting a shift in innovative practices and continuous improvement. The job-embedded support provided by the Educational Technology Leads is empowering teachers to confidently take ownership of and improve efficacy with technology-enabled learning and teaching leading to a shift in classroom practice. As a system, ETLs are the sustainability we need to ensure consistency and support is site based to support technology changes within the learning environment.

### **Algoma District School Board's "Standards for Digital Learning"**

The Educational Technology Leads utilize the Algoma District School Board's "Standards for Digital Learning" and the Board's Technology Plan to support a culture of inquiry and reflection to continue innovative practices and continuous improvement through technology-enabled learning and teaching practices. The "Standards for Digital Learning" document is a framework for students, educators and administrators to utilize technology as a tool for learning and teaching for K to 12 students. With the overall goal of improving student achievement, this "Standards" document is a guide to help teachers integrate technology and digital learning into The Ontario Curriculum, into teaching practice and into our students' repertoire of skills to support and enhance continuous learning. The "Standards for Digital Learning" document supports teachers in this rapidly changing digital landscape, offers multiple entry points to accommodate teachers in their digital learning skills continuum journey and suggests various technology experiences to prepare our students for the future.

Feedback from our teachers has been overwhelmingly positive. Teachers liked being able to access support at school and having someone in the building who can "pace" their learning, answer questions, provide support and encourage them to take risks. Providing "just in time" support fosters a culture of learning and an environment where staff can take risks and experiment with new ideas while being supported by colleagues.

# STRONG DISTRICTS FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

## JOB-EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL MEMBERS

The seminar or module you have worked through today identified and illustrated, with one or two case stories, one of nine key features of high performing or “strong” districts. These features have been identified through empirical research conducted in Ontario school systems, as well as research carried out in other contexts.

To help you recall what was outlined and illustrated during the module, a summary of what is included in this key feature of district work appears in the box below.

Strong districts:

- devote very little time to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and principals. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional development.
- most professional development is carefully aligned with board and school improvement initiatives.
- differentiated professional development opportunities are provided in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.
- extensive opportunities are provided for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.
- almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.
- all system-sponsored professional development is closely aligned with the

## QUESTIONS

1. Your district may or may not do what you consider a good job in this area of its work.  
When it does (or if it did), however, how do you build on or take advantage of your district's efforts in this area?
2. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that are (or could be) especially helpful to you? If so, what are they and why do they matter?
3. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that have negative consequences for your school leadership efforts? If so, what are they and how do they matter?

## DISTRICT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Available evidence suggests that district leaders increase their success in developing broadly shared mission, vision and goals in their districts by enacting the five leadership practices in the box below.

- Provides extensive PD opportunities for both teachers and school-level leaders, most of it through some form of learning community or on-the-job context.
- Uses internal system networks as central mechanism for the professional development of school-level leaders.
- Aligns the content of professional development with the capacities needed for district and school improvement.
- Requires individual staff growth plans to be aligned with district and school improvement priorities.
- Holds staff accountable for applying new capacities by monitoring the implementation of school improvement plans.

## QUESTIONS

1. Does this list overlook any district leadership practices that you consider particularly helpful in developing a broadly shared mission, vision and goals for the district? If yes, what are they? What makes them important?

2. Are any of these five district leadership practices especially crucial in your experience?

If so, why? What makes them especially important?

## FINAL THOUGHTS ARISING FROM THE DISCUSSION OF CASES AND REVIEW OF RESEARCH BY: KENNETH LEITHWOOD

This module was field tested with a large group of senior district leaders and principals in Sudbury on September 15. Key features of the module included a review of research on selected aspects of how districts successfully enact professional development for school staffs and the examination of two cases of such work provided by the Algoma and Hamilton Wentworth District School Boards. The research and cases provoked considerable discussion among participants about professional development efforts in their own districts. I provided a commentary about four issues, summarized here, by way of concluding the discussion.

### **1. The first question to be answered by districts in designing professional development is about *what not how*.**

What approaches to instruction should we use for our teachers' professional development? How can we make the professional development as engaging as possible? Over what period of time should the professional development take place? Who should facilitate the professional development? What can be done to encourage teachers to use what they learn through their professional development in their classrooms? How will we evaluate the effects of the professional development?

These are all important questions for district staff to ask in the course of designing a professional development initiative for some target group in their organization. But all of these questions are about the processes associated with delivering the PD. One obvious additional question to be asked is what goals do we intend to achieve through the PD? The answer to this question is likely to be an increase in the capacity of participants [to do something different which, in turn, will increase [some desired learning] on the part of students.

And this brings us to the heart of the issue I want to highlight. How certain are you that whatever capacity or practice it is that the PD is designed to help participants master will actually contribute to the desired learning of students? What evidence do you have that it will? How good is that evidence? The "gold standard" for evidence that warrants a change in most fields of practice currently comes from meta-analytic reviews of a significant body of prior research. Not evidence from a couple of studies. Not policy-copying from other jurisdictions. And not some guru's own "clinical experience" or theory delivered in a charismatic way.



This is an admonition not to waste a lot of money and a great deal of participants' time developing whatever is the new practice advocated by your professional development unless you have a high degree of certainty that it will produce its desired effects. Absent of such evidence, leaving people alone to figure out their own ways forward may be your more cost-effective strategy.

**2. Be wary of creating a culture of dependency. Not all new capacity development requires organizational intervention.**

This second comment is closely related to the first. There was a time long ago when teacher unions began to argue that their members should not be expected to implement anything new in their classrooms unless districts or schools first provided them with professional development. At that time, the implementation of new curriculum guidelines was mostly what was meant by new. This was the beginning of what now often seems like a culture of dependency on formal professional development for all new professional learning. Which is, of course, absurd!

Consider, for example, some recent data collected from two large samples of principals involved in networks (called *principal learning teams*) as part of their participation in the *Leading Student Achievement* project. LSA has sponsored, by now, two studies of the characteristics of leadership networks that are productive sources of learning for their members. As part of those two studies, principals were asked to rate the value for their own learning of 11 different sources of professional learning. Networks were highly rated (second). But the highest rated source was “my own professional reading.” And almost as highly rated as networks were “learning from a district colleague with close knowledge of my work” and “learning from a staff member in my own schools” (both sources rated the same). The type of propositional knowledge requiring “high road transfer” (powerful but relatively abstract ideas and concepts), as we noted in the module, is likely more available through professional reading than most other sources.

This leads me to argue that, as important as it is for districts to provide their members with meaningful professional development, it is likely just as important to nurture a norm of individual responsibility for continuous learning on the part of all district staff.

**3. Learning “through the job” is often a much more powerful form of capacity building than is learning “about the job.”**

Another longstanding line of evidence about professional growth on the part of school leaders confirms the power of on-the-job learning. This evidence always places the perceived value of on-the-job learning far ahead of other sources that school leaders typically have available.

Using one of the distinctions introduced in the module, nothing beats actually performing the job as a source of “near road transfer.” The job is as near as it gets to job-embedded PD. The huge proportion of tacit knowledge required to do the job is much more available in the direct feedback resulting from being in the context and relationships that are part of the job than any other source. It is mostly the relatively small proportion of explicit knowledge required for the job that is available from less direct sources.

Districts often encourage teachers aspiring to be principals to prepare themselves, at least in part, by participate in school and district work groups and to exercise leadership in those groups. Perfect. District leaders are confronted with a wide array of thorny challenges to deal with. Engaging school leadership in helping solve these district problems is a highly authentic strategy for the continuing professional development of practicing school leaders. District challenges as the curriculum for principals’ further development.

**4. Capacity building aimed at deepening instructional expertise should be structured so that people with very similar instructional duties are able to learn together and from one another.**

A key question to be addressed when designing professional development is how the interaction among participants will be organized. As we heard in discussions during the module field test, districts often seem to prefer organizing participants so that they are learning with and from those with diverse responsibilities rather than those with similar responsibilities. The assumption underlying this form of organization is that the focal capacities for PD are best developed through “breadth.”

However, taking the provincial challenge of improving students’ mathematics performance as an example suggest just the opposite would be best form of organization, and two of the papers we discussed as part of the module provided a basis for this claim. Most evidence points to the need for more mathematical content knowledge among elementary school teachers and more knowledge and skill about specifically how such content is best taught. The knowledge required of teachers in this case is very specific—how best to teach the specific content included in the curriculum for the grade that I teach and how to do that with students much like the ones in my classroom. These capacities require

depth not breadth, so the best organization for PD designed to develop such capacities would be a job-alike organization.

The larger point to be stressed here is that the interactions encouraged by the structure of PD should be determined by the capacities to be developed rather than some general preference unrelated to those capacities. Neither breadth nor depth of interaction is preferable. It depends.

## EVALUATION

### MODULE THREE (SEPTEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup>, 2016)

#### **JOB-EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL STAFF**

**If your participation in this module has caused you to consider doing something different in your own system, please describe what it is.**

- Create greater alignment and coherence regarding messaging to the system around SIPSA goals, professional learning and administrator learning teams. (2)
- This thinking will pose different questions for our system team with respect to alignment, facilitation skills of our leaders and the purposefulness of our structures
- Look at differentiating instruction for all in our system.
- Developing capacity and getting proper training for in our administrators. (2)
- Look at ways to develop critical reflection with our administrators
- How to align from top down and bottom up.
- This session has made us name and reconsider the criteria needed for professional development. We believe voice and choice are at the top of the list.
- Evaluating content knowledge of administrators and evaluating the structure of professional development.
- Great examples of the use of job embedded strategies.
- Strategies through focus group interviews that can be adopted.
- Enjoyed the framing of idea from low road to high road. At the low road level we will be differentiating PD for staff by allowing choice of PD sessions to attend. Keeping our focus under an over riding umbrella but allowing voice and choice. (6)
- Curious about exploring the relationship between content knowledge and intentional practice.
- I gained insight from my table partners and enjoyed collaborating with colleagues. (3)

- Professional learning with the senior team.
- Building capacity for department heads
- Hope to make family of schools meetings more job embedded specific to feedback to teachers regarding instruction (Perhaps using a rounds model?)
- I will re-think system PD option and optional PD after work with others from across the system in various roles
- Continue to ensure that we balance building internal capacity with a focus on job embedded learning while not creating system dependency.
- Reminds me of the need to continually reinforce within the system, the reality of how each individual, regardless of role (academic or non-academic) is crucial to student success.
- Have we prescribed so much that we are at the point of creating dependency in our school leaders in terms of instructional leadership?
- I feel that both case studies provided excellent thoughts that pushed our own thinking as a board in regards to the following: Balance of self: versus system directed (provide menu of learning options) (Algoma's example)
- Our approach to data/evidence conversations with teachers and principals regarding what evidence they have to support what they see as the learning needs (versus diagnostics) (4)
- Just last week we enjoyed skipping our review of the staff handbook in favor of a discussion on how to promote resilience in our students. Your affirmation was appreciated and I look forward to promoting more distributed leadership.
- Ask permission to align our School Improvement plan to school needs as opposed to just the Board focus. Loved the questions that we are all afraid to ask
- Increase and examine our specific monitoring for collecting data
- Hold staff more accountable with an emphasis on pressure and support
- Today we talked about our SO visits. We developed a process, questions and follow up.

- I want to ask my staff what they would like and want to learn and then plan our PD accordingly. Ensure needs are based on the SIP. How do we effectively re-structure our time and dig into the data like we should be (6 times)
- Today challenged my thinking and to reflect on what we do and why we do it. It was great timing for our district planning. How do we provide a more coherent model for PD as a board? (4 times)
- Reminded me to look at instructional leadership in broader terms. (Relationship trust, disciplinary climate etc.)
- Makes me reflect on (a) how do we correlate the needs of the students with available resources with out creating dependence? (b) How do we implement culture/environment leadership into a predominately academically driven data district?
- Open our school based learning up to senior admin.
- We talked about ways to encourage professional reading by modeling it. Ways to help teachers understand the minds/profiles of their learners to improve instructional practice.
- Be more aware of opportunities for co-learning and teaching within or building.
- Pleasure to listen to a brilliant man again
- Please identify any changes or refinements that can be made to this module that will improve its contributions to participants learning.
- Great day and well structured. (Thank you) (8 times)
- Perfect module and perfect timing of where we need to go.
- Great balance of presentation and discussion (5 times)
- Would appreciate if those who presented the case study wandered among the tables (circulate ) to answer questions during our discussion
- Appreciated the opportunity to share with peers/colleagues. Concrete best practices are valuable (2 times)
- Enjoyed the module. Always appreciate Ken's thinking, research delivery and insights (2 times)

- Enjoyed the opportunity to reflect with my team. (Don't split us) (4 times)
- Loved the time to work with our system team. Although interesting to sit with other boards I feel we could be much more focused as a senior team.
- Would value meeting with other boards who were in the room beyond our team. ( 4 times)
- More interaction – Present information in a more engaging manner
- Would like more clarification regarding the explicit factors affecting family influences on leadership.
- More anecdotes that support concepts shared. This will help clarify the meaning of some of the concepts.
- Case studies to include a vivid explanation of the Low road (i.e. the “How to”)
- Would like a little more detail when the case studies are presented. They were excellent but would like more specifics. Give them a little more time.

# PRESENTATION



## Effect Size on changes in achievement over five years



(Leithwood, K. (2011). Characteristics of High Performing School Systems in Ontario)



## From Strong Districts....



Devote little time to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and principals; time now devoted almost entirely to professional development.



Most professional development is carefully aligned with board and school improvement initiatives.



Differentiated professional development opportunities are provided in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.

3

## ....continued....



Extensive opportunities provided for all members to further develop their expertise



Schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives and are provided with needed resources. Leaders trained to facilitate such work



All system-sponsored professional development is closely aligned with the best evidence about how people learn

4

# How People Learn: Fundamental PD Implications



5

## What “Job-embedded” PD means



Learning that takes place in a context the same as - or very similar to - the context in which the learning will be applied

e.g.,

for teachers—the classroom

for principals – the school

6

## Basic theoretical premise justifying Job- embedded PD **Transfer of Learning**

**"High road" or "Far" transfer**

**"Low road" or "Near" transfer**

(Perkins & Salomon, 1992)

7

## **"High road" or "Far" transfer**



Defensible justification for large-scale PD  
for many people at the same time

Emphasis is on **What** not **How**

8

## High road transfer...



Depends on mindful abstraction from the context of learning or application and a deliberate search for connections



Demands time for exploration and the investment of mental effort

9

## “Low road” or “Near” transfer



Defensible justification for one or small group PD  
(job embedded)

Emphasis is on **How** not **What**

10

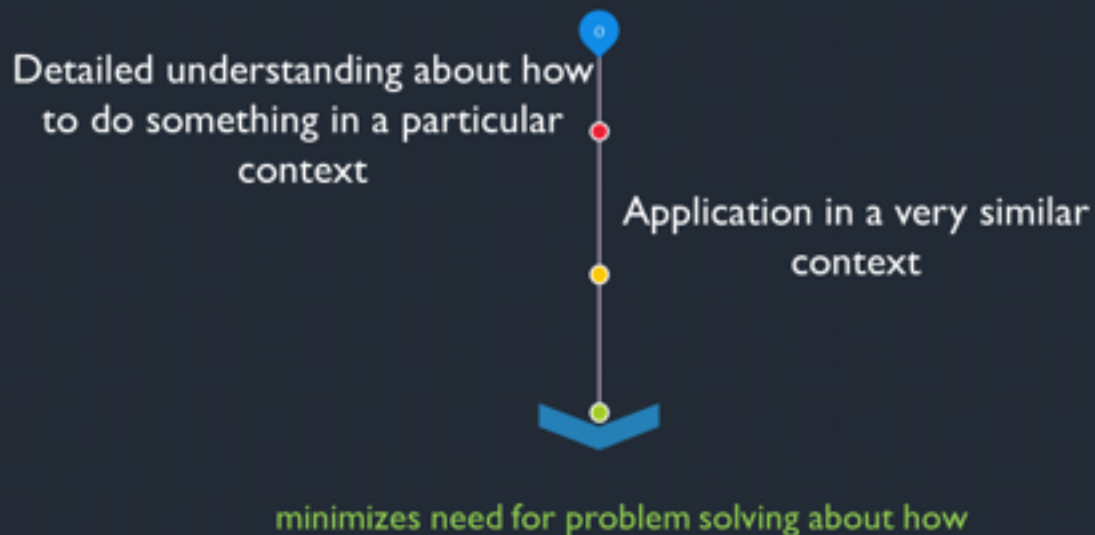
## Low road transfer...



Happens when new setting is sufficiently like setting in which initial learning occurred that a semi- automatic response occurs reflexively

11

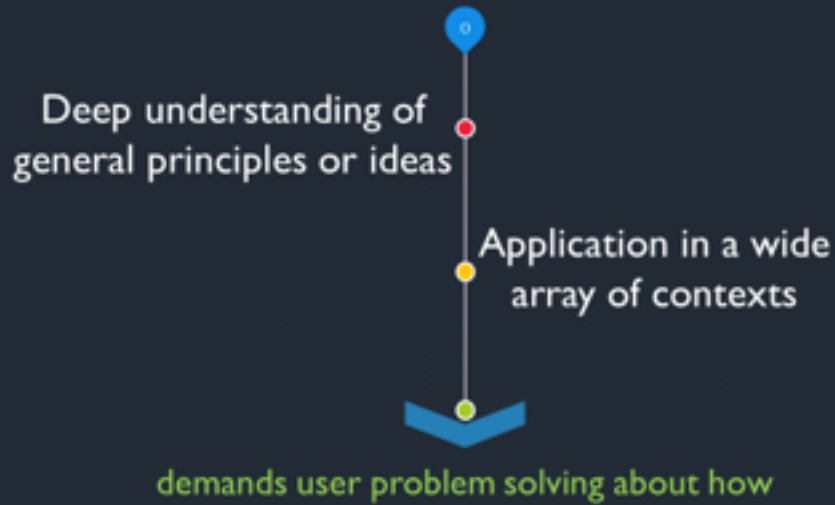
## Low road or near transfer



12



## High road or far transfer

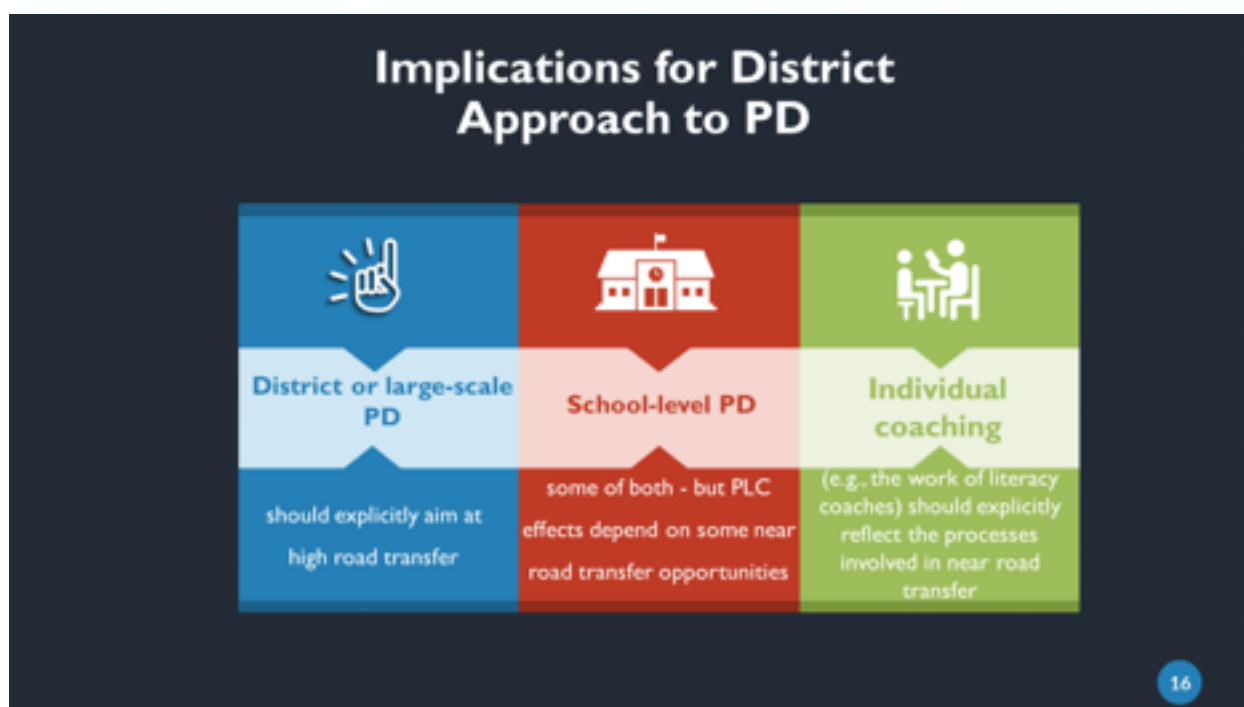
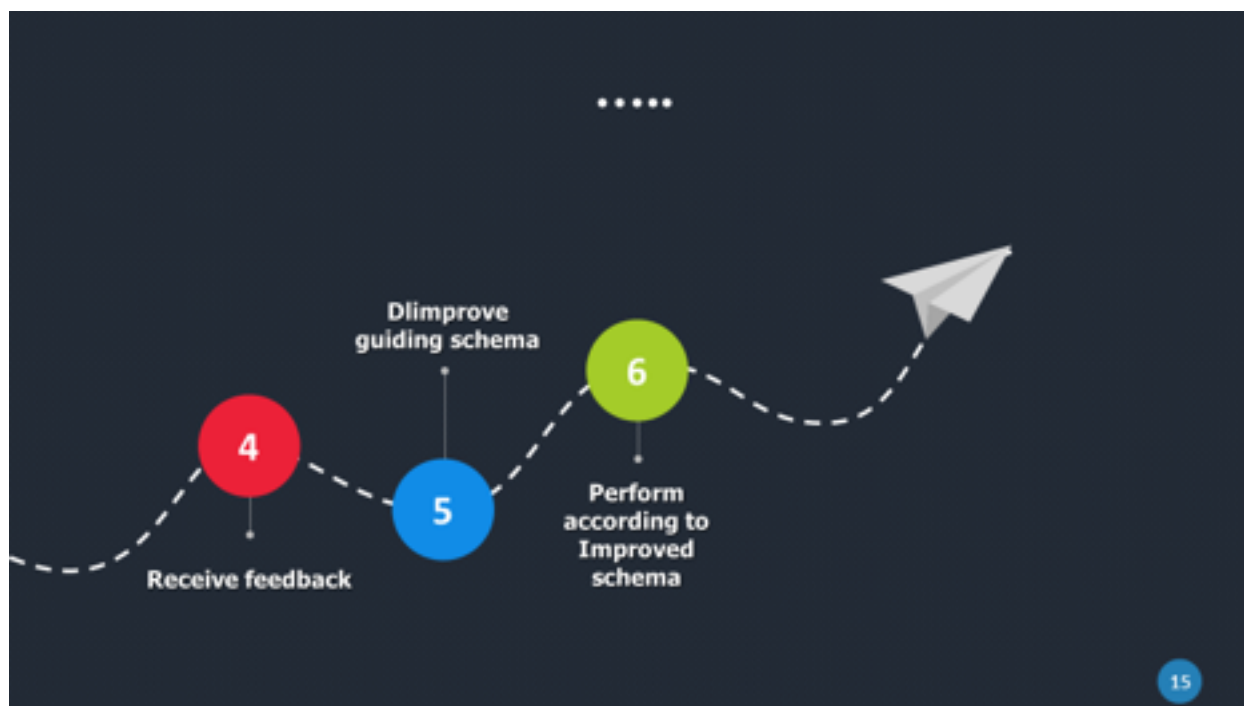


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## Low road skill development



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## MODULE FOUR

### LEARNING ORIENTED IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

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# LEARNING-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES

## MODULE DESCRIPTION

Improvement processes at the district level typically begin with some formal planning activities like board improvement planning.

Almost all Ontario schools base their improvement efforts on school improvement plans developed in a wide variety of ways. Such planning identifies goals and strategies for their achievement at the district and school level and aligns structures, staff and fiscal resources in support of such achievement.

Evidence about organizational improvement processes suggests strong districts:

- Have a coherent approach to improvement which usually includes a small number of key improvement goals consistently pursued over sustained periods of time.
- Proceed in manageable stages using the early stages as learning opportunities.
- Do not overload schools with excessive numbers of initiatives.
- Make considerable effort to build the capacities needed by school staffs for successful school improvement.
- Encourage improvement efforts in schools guided by explicit and well-tested frameworks, policies and practices, as well as widely shared goals that permit local adaptation. All stakeholders have clearly defined roles to play in this approach to school improvement.
- Integrate new initiatives into existing routines and practices. Established structures and procedures are maintained and built. Care is taken to ensure continuity and extension of core values.

In this module, through the use of presenting the latest research, providing additional research articles, case studies and focus group questions, participants explored a variety of approaches taken by three different school systems towards improving learning oriented improvement processes.

# AGENDA

## 1. Objective

As a result of participating in this module, district leaders will deepen their understanding of what is entailed in:

- One-to-one conversations (e.g., superintendent/principal, teacher/principal) about improvement processes that result in greater capacity for productively engaging in those processes
- Creating structures and relationships which foster authentic collaboration between central office and school staffs
- Creating networks within districts that stimulate the professional learning of most participants

## 2. Review of research with an emphasis on networks (presentation)

## 3. Case Study: Upper Grand District School Board (Appendix A)

What can be learned from this case about how to create a coherent instructional guidance system?

- Discuss the written case (in teams of four or five people)
- Debrief what was learned from the case by each team
- Questions about the case to the Upper Grand District School Board senior leaders and principals
- Synthesis of key findings from the written case

## 4. Case Study: Waterloo Catholic District School Board (Appendix B)

What can be learned from this case about how to create a coherent instructional guidance system?

- Discussion of written case (in teams of four or five people)
- Questions about the case to Waterloo Catholic District School Board principals and senior leaders
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case by each team
- Synthesis of key findings from written case

## 5. Case Study: Ottawa Catholic District School Board (Appendix C)

What can be learned from this case about how to create a coherent instructional guidance system?

## 6. Compare and contrast learnings from two cases plus OCDSB and the research – Full group discussion

- Consider relationship to relevant research and to the approach currently being taken by one's own district

- Highlights of the Ottawa Catholic District School Board case
- Highlight key lessons (what to do for sure, what not to do at any cost); full group discussion making as many links as possible to the cases and readings.

## SAMPLES OF RELEVANT RESEARCH

Bransford, J., Brown, A., Cocking, R. (Eds.) (2000). *Brain, mind, experience and school*. Washington: National Research Council.

Hoppe, B., Reinelt, C. (2010). Social network analysis and the evaluation of leadership networks, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21, 600-619.

Finnegan, K., Daly A., Che, J. (2013). System wide reform in districts under pressure: the role of social networks in defining, acquiring, using and diffusing research evidence, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 51, 476-497.

Robinson, V., Sinnema, C., & le Fever, D. (2014). From Persuasion to Learning: An Intervention to Improve Leaders' Response to Disagreement, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 13, 260–296.

## MODULE EVALUATION

1. If your participation in this module has caused you to consider doing something different in your own system, please describe what that is.
2. Please identify any changes or refinements that could be made to this module that would improve participants' learning.
3. How can this work best be used with others in the future?

## APPENDIX A

### WATERLOO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD CASE STUDY

The Waterloo Catholic District School Board is located in a largely urban area in the heart of southwestern Ontario. The Regional Municipality of Waterloo (population 560,000) consists of the tri-cities of Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge and the surrounding townships of Woolwich, Wellesley, Wilmot and North Dumfries. Approximately 35,000 elementary, secondary and adult students receive a "quality, inclusive and faith-based education" in the board's 46 elementary, five secondary and two Continuing Education (adult) sites.

The Board's first schools, St. Agatha Catholic Elementary School (St. Agatha, Ontario.) and St. Boniface Catholic Elementary School (Maryhill, Ontario.) opened in 1836, predating the Catholic Diocese of Hamilton by some 20 years.

The Waterloo Catholic District School board employs approximately 3,200 full and part-time staff and has an annual budget of more than \$250 million. The Board of Trustees is comprised of nine municipally-elected trustees and two high school student trustees elected by their peers.

The Waterloo Catholic District School Board has a longstanding history of engaging in community partnerships with various community and Catholic community organizations, social service agencies, charities and other educational institutions. Waterloo Catholic District School Board continues to nurture many partnerships that provide the Board with the opportunity to enrich curriculum, improve student achievement and assist with the social/emotional and spiritual growth of all our students.

This case describes how the Waterloo Catholic District School Board has gone about enhancing the conditions of two of the nine characteristics of strong districts: *Creating learning-oriented organizational improvement processes* and *providing job-embedded professional learning*. These two characteristics describe the work we are engaging in across the system and demonstrate the instructional practices and involvement at all levels: senior administration, school administrators, consultants, literacy/numeracy coaches and classroom teachers.

#### **CREATE LEARNING-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES**

Learning-oriented improvement processes, evidence suggests, are created or further enhanced when system leaders:

- Require improvement processes to be evidence-informed
- Set a manageable number of precise targets for district school improvement
- Include school-level leaders in decisions about district-wide improvement decisions
- Create structures and norms within the district to encourage regular, reciprocal and extended deliberations about improvement progress within and across schools, as well as across the system as a whole
- Develop and implement board and school improvement plans interactively and collaboratively with school leaders
- Create structures to facilitate regular monitoring and refining of improvement processes
- Acknowledge provincial goals and priorities in district and school improvement initiatives
- Allow for school-level variation in improvement efforts

## **PROVIDE JOB-EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

- The Strong Districts and their Leadership paper indicates that job-embedded professional learning practices contribute to the development of strong districts by:
- Providing extensive professional learning opportunities for both teachers and school-level leaders most of it through some form of learning community or on-the-job context
- Using internal system networks as the central mechanism for the professional development of school-level leaders
- Aligning the content of professional training with the capacities needed for district and school improvement priorities
- Requiring individual staff growth plans to be aligned with district and school improvement priorities
- Holding staff accountable for applying new capacities by monitoring the implementation of school improvement plans

## WHY THESE CHARACTERISTICS?

We want to engage and include leaders (system, school administrators and teachers) in the instructional improvement work, building capacity in developing an understanding of research-based, intentional, responsive instruction for students. Our newly crafted Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement places an *Assessment for Learning* stance at the core of our work. We are moving from a systems instructional rounds model to a school-based instructional rounds version where teachers own the process of instructional rounds through collaboration. Further, over the past few years, the school's largely connected the work to their problem of practice and corresponding inquiry question. This year there is a slight swing back on the pendulum, purposefully directing the work to the numeracy agenda. The instructional expertise belongs to the staff in the school and we want to work on demonstrating "in-classroom" leadership. We provide job-embedded professional development often through a coaching model, and a number of our schools also use school-based instructional rounds. System instructional rounds demonstrated gains as a means of capacity building with school administrators and focused dialogue regarding improving student achievement.

Similarly, we want to align the work of instructional rounds directly with classroom practices by creating opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice and come together as learning communities to build capacity and increase student learning. Through school-based instructional rounds we are embedding processes that allow teachers the opportunity to reflect on their practice. As is the case in the classroom, it is very difficult to isolate variables that promote professional learning for teachers. Both these conditions—creating learning-oriented organizational improvement processes and providing job-embedded professional learning—create the foundation for opportunity for teachers to become reflective practitioners. Both characteristics work seamlessly in tandem as we move our learning from system instructional rounds to school-based instructional rounds.

Our intent is to involve all leaders as key leads in facilitating successfully and consistently the process of instructional rounds in their schools alongside their staff in an effort to provide a coherent approach to school improvement. This learning and practice will help support the foundational knowledge which will complement the capacity building component by putting the learning into action. The implementation of school-based instructional rounds will contribute to the development of a common vision and understanding of what effective classroom instruction looks like. This will in turn serve as an effective learning model for all staff. The work of instructional rounds will provide strategies to hone our precision with respect to the instructional core, curriculum content, teaching strategy and student learning need,

providing a foundation upon which every child in every classroom benefits from research-based, effective instructional practices. Job embedded learning ideally happens with supervisory officers, principals, consultants, literacy/numeracy coaches and classroom teachers. All are part of the process and dialogue and have a shared responsibility and voice in the instructional rounds process.

## **WHAT WE DID**

System instructional rounds was supported by sending a diverse leadership group to Harvard from 2011-2013. The teams brought the learning back to develop district support models based on Elmore's work in *Instructional Rounds in Education* as it relates to instructional rounds processes. In May 2014, we sponsored a team from Harvard to Waterloo region to provide a two-day workshop to all administrators, consultants and literacy/numeracy coaches on facilitating school-based instructional rounds. Currently, twenty schools have implemented school-based rounds and a number of other schools are in the process of doing so this year, as it has been identified in our Strategic Plan, launched last year, as a preferred process for capacity building. The consolidation of funding under the RMS has put some pressure on our ability to promote and support SBIRs financially, despite the interest. Through Catholic learning communities, Principal learning teams, and differentiated networks for administrators and teachers, we build capacity through the rounds process on identifying meaningful problems of practice that are rooted in the instructional core. Problems of practice are the focus for instructional rounds in the classrooms. Within the participating schools, teams of teachers receive specific instructional rounds training facilitated by school administrators and consultants.

During this collaboration, much time is spent on developing a common concrete understanding of the purpose of instructional rounds, as well as ensuring a collective understanding of the school's problem of practice. A myriad of resources, including Ministry monographs/ DVD's, are selected to support the identified and agreed upon school-wide or division-wide problem of practice. Staff self- assessment tools are used to help identify, and record professional learning needs.

Teachers are involved in network sessions with other schools from across the board. The benefits of networking with other schools not only include additional professional dialogue and strategy sharing, but also the opportunity to focus on building next steps collectively. School improvement teams, with the support of literacy/numeracy coaches, work on building capacity with staff in the identified learning needs area; this allows teachers to confidently actualize theory of action statements in their classrooms. The theory of action statements are measured through teacher moderation of student work and the learning



evidenced in the classroom. After much collaboration with teachers, building meaningful relationships and trust through the work and ensuring a common understanding of language and process, the “classroom instructional rounds” can begin. Afterward, the debrief session is integral to the learning and the process wherein teachers share their classroom observations and as a group challenge each other to identify their next level of work. Specifically, identifying next steps required to “solve” their identified “problem” is the crux of the discussion. Much of the discussion is based on what teachers need to do to move student learning forward and identify student learning need, which is often a natural extension of teachers’ needs. All dialogue and discussions are recorded and used to drive the final report findings for the school. The administrator is a facilitator in the process and the school teachers make up the “support team.”

Principal learning teams are connected and aligned to the instructional rounds process in a fashion that supports their own capacity building. The principal learning teams meet regularly and follow a consistent protocol as they collaborate on each other’s presented problem of practice. Critical to building principal capacity within the Catholic learning community is ensuring that meeting norms and protocols are established and consistently applied. Vital to the success of the work is monitoring how the process will directly impact the classroom through student work and overall achievement. It is important to implement diagnostic measures/ improvement target check-ins along the way in order to measure how we are doing. The Renewed Math Strategy reporting requirements help complement this goal. Supervisory officers are directly linked to the learning communities and follow up with school teams on the identified level of work.

## **SIGNIFICANT TURNING POINT**

Initiatives over the last few years have been designed in their very nature to improve student achievement and enhance teacher practice. The School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) is a great tool for this purpose. Our turning point was actualizing the SEF as a teacher tool during the rounds process and getting “buy in” from all stakeholders. The four pilot schools that began the work in school-based instructional rounds reported staff buy-in and a more effective use and understanding of the SEF document in the process. The work became meaningful to teachers versus being simply viewed as an “event.” In an educative context, the effective implementation of research-based practices translated into positive implications for students; school-based rounds served as a vehicle for educators to reflect on these practices as evidenced in their classrooms.

## **WHAT WAS THE RESPONSE OF THE GROUPS TO THE WORK YOU WERE DOING?**

The response of school leaders was positive and receptive as they saw the potential in supporting all schools within their own context through the instructional rounds process. All involved welcomed the notion of learning about and participating in instructional rounds through an asset model. The entry point for schools was based on their understanding of the learning conditions of their school, not on the expectations of the learning conditions of the system. As a system, we recognize that the instructional rounds work will look different at each school; the process is similar but the outcome matches the needs identified by each school. All involved recognize that it is their collective individual responsibility as school leaders to ensure that, in light of the different phases of teachers' professional development, we provide a vehicle to not only develop capacity but to sustain capacity. Through the instructional rounds process, we demonstrate a willingness to collaborate in moving the teaching and learning forward, working and learning side-by-side with teachers. It is about building school cultures that embrace an environment that allows teachers to learn from and with one another and similarly allow administrators to learn from and with one another. The repetition of the instructional rounds process allows for a constant school-wide focus on the importance of adopting sound pedagogical practices rooted in our Catholic Graduate Expectations. School-based instructional rounds further allow school communities to focus on teacher expertise and celebrate the fact that each teacher is a leader who can enrich their knowledge base by sharing their challenges and successes.

Instructional rounds continue to spread and gain traction as more schools embark in the process. At the school level, more teachers are becoming actively involved in the learning and are volunteering to participate in school-based instructional rounds. This is a direct result of school administrators understanding the process and its benefits after participating fully in system instructional rounds. The instructional rounds process is much more meaningful at the school level.

## **CURRENT STATUS**

Waterloo Catholic District School Board currently engages in both district support instructional rounds and school-based instructional rounds. Further, in one of the more notable evolutions of the practice, we have examples of schools collaborating/partnering on school based instructional rounds. They are finding both richness to the process in terms of what new eyes can bring, but also concerns as to whether it can compromise truly a deep observation. All schools are on a system rotation and schools volunteer to engage in school-based rounds rather than system rounds. Last year, four schools successfully piloted the implementation of school-based instructional rounds and have shared their journey with the system. This

year we have ten schools engaged in school- based rounds and eight schools participating in system rounds. It is our intent to move completely away from system rounds in the next two years. The discussion and learning that principals engage in within their learning communities will be key in moving all schools forward. Support will be differentiated based on the needs of the learning teams and on the school-based action plans developed.

## **ADVICE FOR OTHERS**

The greatest learning from working through this board-wide initiative was discovering that much time needs to be spent on developing a common understanding of what instructional rounds are and what they are not, and as such, engaging in system instructional rounds and building capacity with school leaders in this area is a critical first step before embarking on school-based rounds. Similarly, ensuring the identified problem of practice is rooted in the instructional core and is based on school data is an area that constantly needs to be revisited. The problem of practice has to connect to school improvement planning and has to be actionable and observable. This is an area, again, where an inordinate amount of time must be spent building capacity and establishing consistent practice in how to identify a school's problem of practice. Dedicating and aligning professional resources to support the dialogue in the debriefing sessions is integral to ensuring all have a common foundation and understanding of evidence-based practices. Structures and norms within the learning team need to be in place in order to encourage regular, reciprocal and extended deliberations about improvement within a school and move away from simply discussing the “niceties” of classroom observations; move from “great discussions” to “focused learning conversations.” Ensuring that all staff are held accountable for applying the new capacities by monitoring the implementation of the school improvement commitments is imperative to the process. It is important to include all stakeholders in the process – ownership of the process by all is key to overall success.

## APPENDIX B

### OTTAWA CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD CASE STUDY

#### **PROBLEM OF PRACTICE**

How can the leadership team foster a learning-oriented organizational improvement process for 4200 employees spread out over 84 sites that impacts student achievement?

#### **IDENTIFICATION**

Initial discussions at executive council (academic superintendents, business superintendents, Associate Director and Director of Education) identified a need to scale our existing networks if we hoped to impact system change. EQAO data and quantitative indicator data combined with qualitative data signaled a need for strategic action to impact system change.

#### **INITIAL CONDITIONS**

The Board Priorities had been established centrally for many years. The Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement (BIPSA) was being created by an expanding central team, and School Improvement

Plans for Student Achievement (SIPSA) were created by school principals and small school-based student success teams. These key areas that had the ability to help the Board staff focus its strategies were loosely coupled and appeared to be add-ons to the existing good work in the District.

## **CREATING CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS**

The Board Priorities are precise and targeted. The three (3) key priorities of: Success for Students, Success for Staff, and Stewardship of Resources, became the key framework at all major retreats and strategic planning sessions. The Board priorities are now reviewed on an annual basis during the Trustee Retreat, during the Senior Executive Team retreat, by our Catholic School Parent's Association and by all Principals, Managers and Coordinators during a larger Catholic Learning Leaders meeting (CLL). Google Docs was the tool used to allow for collaboration and input. Each review ensures that budget, time, and strategies are aligned.

## **SCHOOL INNOVATION PLAN FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND WELL-BEING (SIPSAW)**

Rebranded as School Innovation Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being, SIPSAW's are now dynamically created and reflect the Catholic Professional Learning Cycle (Plan/ Envision – Act/Sow – Observe & Gather/Nurture – Reflect/Discern). Schools receive central release time to work on their plans. School teams are brought together in clusters to share and exchange strategies used in their plans. School teams analyze school data to determine challenges of practice that are identified as the school focus of learning for the following school year. Professional Development days include time allocated to monitoring and modifying the (SIPSAW) to ensure that the plan is a living document. The plan is created in Google Docs and shared centrally and accessible to each family of school superintendent. Family of school superintendents monitor the progress of each challenge of practice during school visits. Tools such as Google Hangouts allow for networking and collaborating across the district without the need for mandatory face to face meetings. Student Success staff engage in a “SIPSAW Sort” where they go through all 84 plans and group them by common focus. This creates a natural network of schools that can work collaboratively and share practices. The SIPSAW Sort is also used to inform the Board Innovation Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being (BIPSAW).

## **BOARD INNOVATION PLAN FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND WELL-BEING (BIPSAW)**

The Board Innovation Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being is divided into four main pillars. A superintendent is assigned to lead each of the pillars. An interdepartmental team is created to ensure that

each of the pillars reflects major ministry initiatives and reflects the information gathered from the SIPSAW sorts. Time for common meetings is scheduled a year in advance to ensure that priority is given to monitoring and modifying the Board Innovation Plan. A researcher is assigned to each of the four pillars of the BIPSAW to ensure that evidence-informed decision-making is leading to action. The Board Innovation plan is also created in Google Docs to allow for continuous input and modification. The BIPSAW is reviewed by all principals, managers and coordinators and is presented to Trustees at Board meetings and during a Trustee retreat for further modifications. This cyclical process creates the necessary accountability to ensure that the plans are no longer binders on shelves that are only looked at once a year.

## **LEARNING NETWORKS**

School Innovation Plans, the Board Innovation Plan and the Board priorities are key to the success of each of our learning networks. Principals meet with their family of school superintendent at pre-scheduled times during the year to focus on research based practice that is reflected in their School Innovation Plans. In addition to the family of school network, Principals are encouraged to participate in a smaller cluster of schools that are often based on the outcome of the SIPSAW sort and/or based on like neighborhood clusters where they can focus on similar aspects of their School Innovation Plans. Technology is used to facilitate the sharing of evidence and school staff is provided with release time to meet as clusters of schools or networks.

## **TURNING POINTS**

A significant turning point in the success of our structure involved scheduling team BIPSAW meetings one year in advance. This simple step took away many of the competing schedule conflicts that existed in previous years. Scheduled time to monitor SIPSAWs during school visits and during PD days has helped to create a dynamic review process and provides time for reflection. Providing time at family of school principal meetings allowed principals an opportunity to modify and review their plans with a trusted critical colleague who was focused on a similar goal. Providing staff with a tool such as Google Docs, allowed for more collaboration and helped to keep the school improvement plans dynamic. Keeping the same three (3) targeted Board priorities has allowed all employees across the organization to see their important role in a learning organization.

## **LEARNING ORGANIZATION**

The structures that have been put in place have allowed our Board to transition from a system that was focused on a performance stance to a system that is now focused on a learning stance. Evidence includes

the increased number of staff participating in learning networks, the evidence gathered during student success visits and the district support process, and our overall EQAO data and student success indicator data. A common measurement tool has been implemented to review the effectiveness of each learning network. The creation of a central coherence committee has helped provide an interdepartmental approach to supporting staff and students with a common, agreed-upon language that focuses on deep learning.

## **FINAL POINTS**

A culture of learning requires a commitment of all employees regardless of their role in the system. Providing leadership opportunities in all areas of the Board will result in distributed leadership and validation of the ability to lead without a title. Staff that are fortunate to serve in a formal leadership position need to create the structures to allow others to share their talents and ideas. Technology can help to provide tools to improve collaboration, if a trusting environment has been fostered. Innovation and change can flourish in a learning culture where all staff see their role in the overall success of students.

## APPENDIX C

### UPPER GRAND DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD CASE STUDY

Leadership Dimensions: Creating learning oriented organizational improvement processes that include a comprehensive performance management system for school and district leadership development (Areas of Focus: #4 and #7).

While we have focused our case study on Leadership Dimensions 4 and 7, we have experienced first-hand how the nine Leadership Dimensions impact each other.

#### **PROBLEM OF PRACTICE**

How can we create an aligned, focused culture within the Upper Grand District School Board, provide a venue through which best practices can be shared among schools and simultaneously build capacity so administrators can lead the learning in their buildings?

#### **IDENTIFICATION**

The former method of providing program support to elementary schools and building capacity had been compared to a game of Whack-a-Mole. Due to past work sanctions, individual teachers had been able to choose what topics they wanted in-service on and, perhaps even more importantly, what they didn't want in-service on. With contract negotiations completed and upcoming labour peace anticipated, the time was right for change and the Five-Year Cycle of Support and changes to the District Support Visit process for both Elementary and Secondary schools were developed.

#### **INITIAL CONDITIONS**

Data collected during District Support Visits suggested that across our school district, pockets of exemplary classroom practice shone in each of our elementary and secondary schools; however, high impact strategies were not as widely spread as our annual School Self Assessments suggested. While many teachers were attuned to the current research in education and the changes required to impact student learning, the variability within schools was considerable, as Hattie suggests. At the Secondary level, there was also large variance in the implementation and sharing of best practice. We opened discussions at one school with the administration and members of the school Leadership Team to explore a process for improving alignment and sharing successes. Moreover, focused discussions between the District Support Team and the school Leadership Team provided greater clarity to the “real” nature of teacher practice than was evident in the School Self Assessments. Our urgent need as a system was to



increase the spread of proficiency and expertise of teachers in the use of best practices. To do this, we needed to tear down the walls between classrooms, to break down the doors between schools and to share the exemplary practice we saw happening in our schools.

## **THE BIPSA**

Our focus was on moving a system from compliance to engagement by aligning these new initiatives with the Board Improvement Plan and District Support Visits. The what, why and how format of the BIPSA provided a structure and a means to model coherence between the new initiatives proposed and current practices. In both elementary and secondary panels, specific examples illustrating why the current District Support Structure was not working were shared with administrators, as were suggestions as to how this process could be improved. Data from the previous year's District Support visits and School Self Assessments, a commitment to focus on student learning, and initiatives to continue, as well as interventions to stop, were outlined. The goal was to ground the work in evidence and to seek out multiple sources of data to inform our decisions, one of the nine recommendations put forth by Leithwood in *Strong Districts and Their Leadership*. At this point in the process, the ideas presented in Hattie's article, "What Works Best in Education: The Politics of Collaborative Expertise" were seminal to our process and a commitment to "One year of teaching = One year of learning" was introduced to the cycle, as was the idea of identification of "Urgent Student Learning Needs."

## **CREATING CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS**

The intention was to build an aligned, focused culture within the Upper Grand District School Board and change the model of curriculum support delivery. The goal was to create a venue through which best practices could be shared among schools and between the elementary and secondary panels and provide support to administrators so that they could lead the learning in their buildings. In the plan, elementary schools were grouped into years one through five. Each year had a specific learning goal to work on and a menu of support services and opportunities available to them based on their year in the cycle. School teams led by their principals in each year of the cycle would identify the "Urgent Student Learning Needs" in their school. Support and professional development was provided to administrators at P/VP meetings and further supported through Principal Learning Teams. This support: 1. explained the what, why, how, and next steps of identifying Urgent Student Learning Needs, 2. how to collect data and 3. how to implement strategies to improve student achievement.

At the secondary school level, a pilot “responsive School Self Assessment” was initiated. The School Self Assessment was driven by the Professional Learning Teams in the school, and their area of focus. In these teams, teachers in all subject departments linked pertinent School Effectiveness Framework indicators to research questions for collaborative inquiries. Specific feedback on focus, direction and next steps was provided to each team by the SEF Lead and Program Department. The feedback was grounded in evidence of student learning and best practices contained in the SEF. For example, Indicator 4.3, “Teaching and learning in the 21st Century is collaborative, innovative, and creative within a global context,” prompted the Inquiry Question, “How do we inspire innovation to better prepare our students with STEM backgrounds for a rapidly changing world?” This Big Idea question led to the development of “essential questions” which propel teacher actions such as “To what extent have our purposeful and intentional strategies had an impact on: 1) Teaching and learning that includes critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration; and 2) Students connecting and challenging beyond the world of the school, using a variety of learning technologies. PLTs have focused their collaborative professional learning since March 2016 on addressing these questions. Evidence of impact is continually reexamined and will be shared with the District Support Team in November.

## **LEARNING ORGANIZATION**

Throughout the year, discussions with school administrators on how to identify urgent student learning needs, collect data and implement effective teaching practices became part of our P/VP meetings.

Elementary and secondary curriculum staff, special education teams and the psychology department delivered focused and aligned messages. Each meeting built on the previous message and mirrored the work school staff needed to take back to their schools. Principals came to understand how identifying Urgent Student Learning Needs reflected the professional learning needs in their building. The collection of data and the importance of the triangulation of this data (including observations, conversations and student process and product) remained an important integrated message throughout the process.

Evidence-based, high impact teaching strategies and the constant evaluation of their effectiveness are at the forefront of how we are learning to address identified urgent student learning needs.

The intent of the Five Year Cycle of Support was stated clearly in the form of essential agreements between educators. Feedback on the “Can We All Agree?” suggested that principals and teachers found it motivating. During the journey to develop school improvement goals based on the urgent learning needs of students, principals and their teams were encouraged to keep the following five tenets front and center:

- Students deserve the very best education we can offer.
- Students come to us with different levels in their understanding.
- Analyzing student work together helps us to understand learning needs.
- It is difficult for educators to meet the diverse needs of all learners.
- Educators, working collaboratively to analyze and respond to evidence of urgent student learning needs, have the greatest impact on learning.

Knowing that collaborative educator expertise makes the difference, we engaged many of our strong school leaders in modelling the sharing of best practice at our monthly P/VP meetings. Substantial time at each meeting was set aside for collaborative learning by our principals on topics responsive to their identified principal learning needs (e.g., kinds of data, protocols for collaboration, high impact strategies, challenging conversations, as outlined in: Five Year Cycle and Supports at a Glance).

## **GOING FORWARD**

As Leithwood states, if a district has a broadly shared mission, vision and goals and a coherent instructional guidance system, it will move from good to great. With this in mind, we intentionally included administrators in the work from the beginning to illustrate that this centrally directed change was work that was owned by all. By creating a culture of trust and collaboration, our intention was to begin to break down the isolation administrators and subsequently teachers often feel. As we move forward with our plan, the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement remains at the core of our work and the Five Year Cycle of Support and the District Support Visits have become a commitment to excellence and a philosophy that we strongly believe in. One year of work equaling one year of progress isn't just about students. One year of work equaling one year of progress is about teachers, administrators and system leaders coming together and aligning their work to raise the achievement bar, close the achievement gap and support student wellbeing and achievement. It is about the work we need to continue to do each and every day.

# STRONG DISTRICTS FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

## LEARNING-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES

The seminar or module you have worked through today identified and illustrated, with several case stories, one of nine key features of high performing or “strong” districts. These features have been identified through empirical research conducted in Ontario school systems, as well as research carried out in other contexts.

### QUESTIONS

1. In light of what you learned today, have you identified any refinements you would like to make to your district’s approaches to organizational improvement? If so, please identify those possible refinements.
2. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that are (or could be) especially helpful to schools? If so, what are they and why do they matter?
3. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that have negative consequences for schools? If so, what are they and how do they matter?

## EVALUATION

### MODULE FOUR (OCTOBER 7<sup>TH</sup>, 2016)

#### LEARNING ORIENTED IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES

**If your participation in this module has caused you to consider doing something different in your own system please describe what that it.**

- Concepts of district reviews in secondary. (3 times)
- Departmental vs. cross curricular.
- How do we monitor the work of the Administrative Learning Teams?
- Connecting elementary organizational improvement (5 year plan) with Secondary Improvement.
- We need to review our current structures ( e.g. Principal Learning Teams, Organization Leadership Meetings) to ensure that they function and perform in the way intended. (5 times)
- We need to develop a better process and protocol for Instructional rounds. We also need to modify the process of District Review. Although staff are involved, earlier involvement would make staff feel that they are involved in a more meaningful way. \*\*
- Going to implement several suggestions made today to streamline the hard work our board has done to empower effective networking.
- Try to use more staff voice.
- Make a concerted effort to ensure resources are focused on that which they are intended to affect.
- Consider whole system alignment in District Improvement
- So valuable to speak about process for District Review and different structures especially during non-evaluative years.
- Being targeted and specific with regards to marker students.
- Protocols for monitoring strategies during discussions.
- SIPSA January to January

- Money – release time and resources
- Human Resources – Curriculum leaders and coaches etc.
- Teachers share ownership of the SIP.
- Focus in on data

**Please identify any changes or refinements that could be made to this module that would improve participants learning.**

- No suggestions – Like the format and the appreciate the space to think,
- Great session! Perhaps more time for table discussion
- Thank you for providing the right amount of time for table talk. In other sessions it was not enough and today it was just right.
- It was great and informative. Such needed discussion. Could possibly ask each board to take 2 minutes to share best practice as so many ideas were in the room
- Provide additional time to delve into the research with practical examples of what is happening in schools. How to do a better job of building networks for example.
- Abstracts on the research ahead of time would be helpful.
- Really like the case studies. I would have liked more conversation about the case studies with people from different boards.

**How can this work best be used with other in the future?**

- Facilitated conversations will continue to leverage the case studies.
- We will continue to bring this work back to our senior teams as a lens to examine our own District work. (3 times)
- We want to use the site a vehicle for sharing with our colleagues. [www.strongdistrictleaders.com](http://www.strongdistrictleaders.com)  
Please encourage further communication. Thank you for sharing email and for establishing the hub.

- Those discussion questions we experienced today would be great for all admin/senior staff to discuss at a future meeting.
- We believe the time to work with our own group was appreciated. If you were in a mixed group the result would not be the same.
- Case studies were authentic. Knowing what districts struggled with before and during was important. More of this would be good.
- Ken's research fills gaps in our knowledge that most (admin) figure out by trial and error. Good to hear the why!
- Please mix up people from different boards ( de-privatize practice!)
- Great to have more time at the beginning to get to know people
- Student achievement officers could share with board's best practices. (SILC) System Improvement Learning Cycle.
- Perhaps LSA team led by Principals. Versus Admin to Principals.
- Make the process more lateral.
- Each LSA Principal brings a friend (colleague) to the meeting to spread the knowledge and build capacity.
- Share best practices versus case study. Example add presentation slides to module.
- Great to hear the journey of the various boards to provide reflection on our own work as well as areas for refinements.
- The case studies were very interesting and helpful. It would have been helpful to go a little deeper with more specifics.
- Sharing more details about the school inquiry projects and sharing resources with others
- I would like timing of this to be in Spring in order to look at what changes we want to make and propose for September.



### From “Strong Districts” research....



A coherent approach to improvement which usually includes a **small number of key improvement goals** consistently pursued over sustained periods of time



Proceed in **manageable stages** using the early stages as learning opportunities



Do not overload schools with excessive **numbers of initiatives**



## From “Strong Districts”...



Encourage improvement efforts in schools guided by explicit and **well-tested frameworks**, policies and practices, as well as widely shared goals that permit local adaptation. All stakeholders have clearly defined roles to play in this approach to school improvement



**Integrate new initiatives** into existing routines and practices. Established structures and procedures are maintained and built. Care is taken to ensure continuity and extension of core values



**Build the capacities** needed by school staffs for successful school improvement

3

## Building capacities



Human capital development  
(**knowledge, skill, attitudes**)  
through professional  
development – “explicit  
knowledge” emphasis



Social capital development  
(**relationships providing  
access to resources**)  
through networks – “tacit  
knowledge” emphasis

4

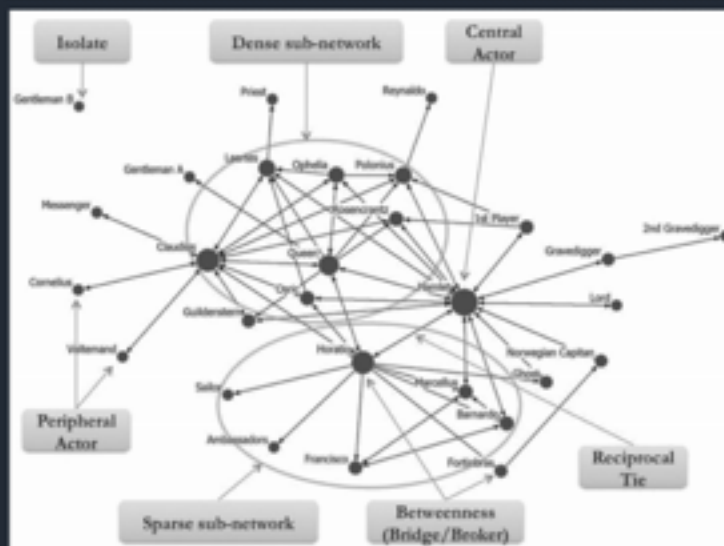
# Social capital through informal networks

Daly, A. (ed.) (2010). *Social Network Theory and Educational Change*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Educational Press.

Finnegan, K., Daly A., Che, J. (2013). System wide reform in districts under pressure: the role of social networks in defining, acquiring, using and diffusing research evidence, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 51, 476-497.

5

## Example Informal Network Structure (SNA)



6

## Implications from research on informal network structures about what districts can do....

- ❖ Stimulate overall connectivity
- ❖ Nurture horizontal connections  
Existing tacit knowledge varies across groups
- ❖ Establish a strong district core  
Ties between educators at different "levels" NB source of resources
- ❖ Encourage bridging across clusters

7

## Effective informal network building continued.....

- ❖ Encourage both strong and weak ties  
Access to expertise is key to successful improvement
- ❖ Exploit the influence of opinion leaders  
Who has the most influence in the district (the brokers) ?
- ❖ Build trust among network members  
A prerequisite to risking change

(see Adams, C., Miskell, R. (2016). Teacher trust in district administration, Educational Administration Quarterly, 52, 675-706)

8

# Social capital development through formal networks

- ❖ Effective leadership networks
- or
- ❖ Principal learning teams

## 1st study

Leithwood, K., Azah, V. (2016). Characteristics of effective leadership networks, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 54, 4.

## 2nd study

Just completed as part of latest LSA evaluation

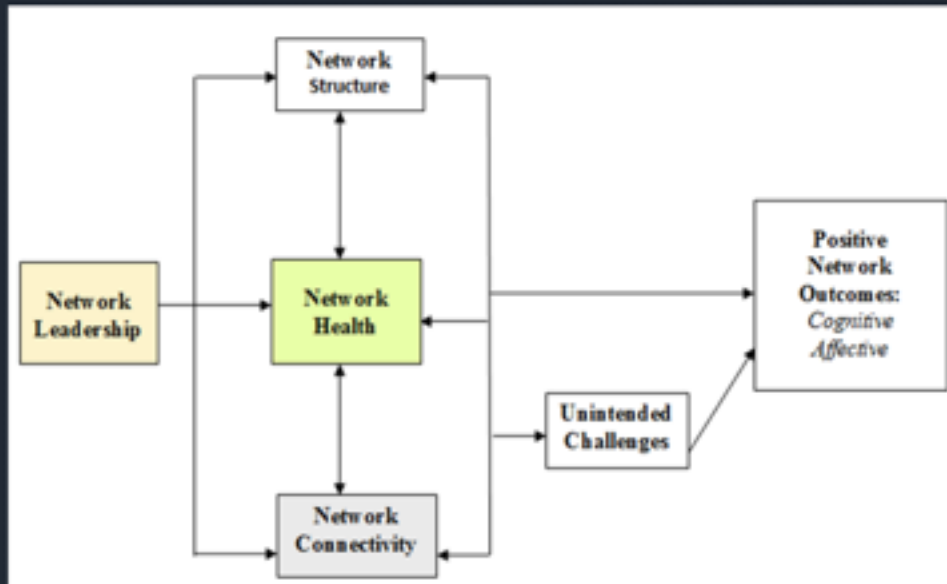
9

## Motivation: Evidence about Sources of School Leaders' Learning

A central office leader with close knowledge of my school.	2.88
Another central office leader not directly responsible for my school	2.49
One or more of my own staff members.	2.88
Scheduled PD sessions provided by my district.	2.76
PD opportunities provided by the LSA project	2.56
Sessions facilitated by branches of the Ministry of Education (Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Student Success: Learning to 18, Leadership).	2.50
My Principal Learning Team (network)	3.01
Other networks in which I participate.	2.78
My professional reading (print and on-line).	3.15
University-sponsored program(s).	1.72
Principal association-sponsored professional learning.	2.49

10

## Initial framework



11

## Cognitive Outcomes

I learn a great deal from participating in my network	3.20
Much of what I learn in my network are general principles or guidelines that I find useful in making decisions about what to do in my own school	2.96
Much of what I learn through my network are quite specific actions or strategies that apply directly to my own school improvement work	3.05
Much of what I learn through my network, while often interesting, is not useful to me in providing leadership in my own school	3.14
Participation in my network has provided me with a broader understanding of my district's efforts to improve student achievement and well-being	3.07
I have a much better understanding of the province's goals and initiatives for improving education as a result of my network participation	2.85
Participation in my network has improved my ability to help my teachers improve their classroom instruction	3.05

12

## Affective Network Outcomes



Participation in my professional network(s) is an important source of my job satisfaction

3.02



I have gained a significant amount of confidence in being able to provide leadership in my school as a result of my network participation

2.91



My network participation has increased my commitment to making a positive difference for students in my own school

3.02



My network participation has increased my commitment to helping other schools improve their students' achievement and well-being

2.85

13

## Collective Outcome Measure (2nd study only)

- ❖ Improved the **flow of ideas** across school leaders in my district.
- ❖ Improved the **flow of ideas** between school and district leaders in my district.
- ❖ Increased the level of **cooperation** and willingness to work together among leaders in our district.
- ❖ Increased the **search for innovative** ideas and practices on the part of leaders in our district.

14

## The Evidence (1st study)

- ❖ two focus groups (12)
- ❖ survey responses of 450 school leaders who were members of district-wide principal networks

15

## 2nd study... a “replication” (but not exactly)

- ❖ Smaller sample size (n= 340)
- ❖ Expanded outcomes (collective)
- ❖ Additional leadership measures
- ❖ Additional health measures (dark side)
- ❖ Omit Unintended Consequences

16



## Overall results similar for both studies

The **model** (framework) was a very good fit with the data  
(as a whole explained 51% of the variation in Network Outcomes).

**Network Leadership** had the largest total effect on Network Outcomes  
( $R^2 = .56$ )

*followed closely by the effects of*

**Network Health** ( $R^2 = .49$ )

and

**Network Connectivity** ( $R^2 = .46$ ).

17

## Network



18



## Network Leadership

Effective leadership in networks is:

- ❖ widely shared
- ❖ helps develop clear purposes and focus
- ❖ monitors network progress
- ❖ provides support of various sorts to network members.

19

## Network



20

# Network Health

A healthy network is one which has:

- ❖ explicit purpose and clear expectations
- ❖
- ❖ effective communication mechanisms
- ❖
- ❖ collaborative environments
- ❖
- ❖ trusting relationships

21

## Network

Network Leadership

Network Connectivity

Network Health

Network Structure

22

# Network Connectivity

**A network in which members are effectively connected includes:**

— frequent interactions among members (often face-to-face)

provides members with ready access to both local knowledge and external expertise when needed.

23

## Network



24

## Network Structure

- ❖ **size of the network** (influenced by the typical ways in which members interact)

- ❖ **some member characteristics** influence a network's effectiveness (e.g., range of roles).

25

## Unintended Challenges

A selection of some of the often unanticipated difficulties and frustrations that network members encounter as part of their network membership.

**Not significant in first study so omitted from second study**

26

## Implications for district leaders about formal leadership networks

1 Networks as key sources of professional learning

2 Training for network leadership

1

2

3

5

4

5 Face-to-face interaction (relatively small networks)

4 Technology-assisted interaction (relatively large networks)

3 Specific features of productive networks

27

Learning-oriented improvement processes

THANK YOU



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## MODULE FIVE

### BROADLY SHARED MISSION, VISION AND GOALS

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# DEVELOPING A BROADLY SHARED MISSION, VISION AND GOAL SETTING PROCESS

## MODULE DESCRIPTION

This module was on developing a broadly shared Mission, Vision and Goal setting process.

Strong districts have widely-shared beliefs and visions about student learning and well-being that have been transparently developed with the engagement of multiple school and system stakeholders. These direction-setting features of strong

districts fall within the parameters set by the province. In these districts, the beliefs and visions held by members include a focus on raising the achievement bar, closing the achievement gap, and nurturing student engagement and well-being.

Strong districts

- Ensure that a transparent visioning/direction-setting process is carried out
- Consult extensively about district directions as part of the process
- Spend sufficient time to ensure that the mission, vision and goals (directions) of the system are widely known, understood and shared by all members of their organizations
- Articulate, demonstrate and model the system's goals, priorities, and values to staffs when visiting schools
- Embed district directions in improvement plans, principal meetings and other leader-initiated interactions

Participants were presented with the most current research in this area and engaged in focused discussion by responding to two unique case studies that featured these districts approach to developing a broadly understood mission and vision process.

# AGENDA

## 1. Objectives

As a result of participating in this module, district leaders will improve their capacities to:

- Help create a set of district directions that are appropriate for their local communities, consistent with provincial educational goals and both ambitious and inspiring to all stakeholder groups.
- Create wide support for, and understanding of, district's directions among staff, students, parents and other community stakeholders.
- Engage elected officials productively in the development and mobilization of district directions.

## 2. Overview of Relevant Research (presentation)

## 3. Case Study: Durham Catholic District School Board

*What can be learned from this case about how to build a broadly shared district mission, vision and goals?*

- Discussion of written case (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case by each team
- Synthesis of key findings

## 4. Case Study: District School Board of Niagara

*What can be learned from this case about how to build a broadly shared district mission, vision and goals?*

- Discussion of written case (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case by each team
- Synthesis of key findings

## 6. Full group discussion

- Compare and contrast contexts for setting directions in the case study districts
- How does the research summarized in 2 (above) relate to or inform these district cases
- Key lessons: what to do for sure, what not to do at any cost.



## SAMPLES OF RELEVANT RESEARCH

- Berson, Y., Halevy, N., Shamir, B., Erez, M. (2015). Leading from different psychological distances: A construal-level perspective on vision communication, goal setting and follower motivation, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 26, 143-155.
- Bitter, C., Taylor, J., Zeiser, K., Rickles, J. (2014). Providing Opportunities for Deeper Learning: Findings From the Study of Deeper Learning: Opportunities and Outcomes, American Institute for Research (September)
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Center for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, Education Connections (355 Goshen Road, PO Box 909, Litchfield, CT 06759)
- Ontario Ministry of Education (2014). *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (April)
- Yettick, H., Brounstein, K. (2014). Benefits of 'Deeper Learning' Schools Highlighted in Studies: Students did better in and out of class, *Education Week* (September 30).
- Zeiser, K., Taylor, J., Rickles, J., and , M. (2014). Evidence of Deeper Learning Outcomes: Findings from the Study of Deeper Learning: Opportunities and Outcomes. *American Institute for Research* (September).

## **Broadly Shared Mission Vision and Goals DSBN Strategic Plan Renewal 2015–2020**

### **Background:**

In the fall of 2015-16, DSNB stakeholders came together to develop a five-year Strategic Plan to focus and guide school operations. It ensured all stakeholders were working toward common goals and intended outcomes and results. This was a collaborative process that included a shared vision, mission and values to support all learners. The sessions were facilitated by an outside consultant, Bill Tucker, a former Director of the Thames Valley District School Board. The Board of Trustees approved the Strategic Planning process and created a Board Ad Hoc Committee to oversee the process and have the final approval of the plan. The Strategic Plan was based on a five-year focus on student success and the implementation began in 2016.

### **DSBN Trustee Advisory Committee:**

On December 8, 2015, the Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Advisory Committee met to discuss the 2015– 2020 DSNB Strategic Plan renewal process. The committee included five trustees, two student trustees, three superintendents, the communications manager and the Director of Education.

At the meeting, the following items were approved:

- A retired Director of Education would be chosen to facilitate the process
- Thought exchange would be used to obtain feedback from stakeholders and the community
- Three half-day strategic planning sessions would be held
- A trustee would assume the role of Chair of the Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Advisory Committee

### **Strategic Working Committee Sessions:**

Seventy-nine (79) participants were invited to attend the three half-day Strategic Planning Committee sessions. The committee had representation from: elementary/secondary students (10), administrators,

teachers, First Nation Métis Inuit, unions/federations, trustees, senior team, staff, school council parents, and the community.

### **Strategic Renewal Plan Process – Moving Forward 2015 – 2020:**

#### ***Session 1***

The process would be used to review the Strategic Plan update from 2010 and provide:

- Overview of the current Strategic Plan and BIPSA
- Celebration: highlight successes and review our accomplishments
- Analyze the impact of the Mission, Vision and Values (Did we make a difference?)
- Engage and launch Thoughtexchange to gain feedback from the system and beyond
- Ascertain whether we need to refine/amend our plan

#### ***Session 2***

- Gather feedback in the following areas: student, staff and system growth
- Review input with stakeholders
- Review input from each area and develop a first draft of the revised Strategic Plan
- Finalize Strategic Plan and prepare report to the Board of Trustees

The goal of the sessions was to provide an opportunity for all participants to share their thoughts and ideas on what our priorities should be and how we can continue to best move our system forward in a positive way.

### **January 14, 2016 Strategic Working Committee Session:**

Bill Tucker, retired Director of Education, facilitated this session as well as the following two sessions. During this session, senior vice president of Thoughtexchange, Lea Scherck, presented the online feedback process to the committee and answered questions of clarification.

#### ***DSBN Strategic Plan “In Focus” Feedback Link***

Directly following the January 14, 2016 session, a link was placed on the DSBN and school websites inviting individuals to provide feedback by completing a brief questionnaire. The “In Focus” link was also shared with all staff, trustees and community partners. Consultations with the community were a critical

element of the strategic plan development process. The questionnaire required participants to answer questions and provide their thoughts about the District School Board of Niagara.

The process included three stages:

*Share* – participants shared answers to open ended questions;

*Star* – participants considered ideas from others and starred those they felt were most important; *Discover* – everyone discovered what was important to participants.

The online feedback/consultation revealed the following results:

- 1,967 unique participants
- 7,995 thoughts were contributed
- 106,102 stars were assigned to help prioritize thoughts

#### **February 22, 2016 Strategic Working Committee Session:**

The Strategic Planning Committee met to review and discuss the results of the Share and Star stages of the “In Focus” Thoughtexchange input process.

#### **March 24, 2016 Strategic Working Committee Session:**

Bill Tucker reviewed all input as well as the collated suggestions for the renewed strategic plan.

The committee worked on a collaborative process to prepare the DSBN Strategic Plan 2015– 2020 which would be recommended to the Board. Consultation with stakeholders on the strategic plan was an important final step in the planning process. It created a formal opportunity for stakeholders to share their perspectives and rework the key elements of focus to ensure they see themselves in the vision of the District School Board of Niagara.

Participants reviewed all suggestions which came from the “In Focus” electronic input, as well as committee input.

As in past strategic plan renewals, the DSBN Strategic Plan 2015–2020 renewal process included representation from all DSBN stakeholder groups and the broader community to ensure all voices were heard.

Everyone had the opportunity to provide suggestions they thought met the spirit of the changes to the DSBN Strategic Plan under *Values*: Respect, Relationships and Responsibilities and *Strategic Priorities*: Student, Staff and System growth opportunities.

At the end of the session, a draft was shared with all participants by the Director of Education.

### **Final Approval Process:**

In May 2016, the Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Advisory Committee met to review the 2015–2020 DSBN Strategic Plan renewal process.

A draft DSBN Strategic Plan 2015–2020, the Thoughtexchange report and a summary and recommendations was presented and approved by the Board of Trustees.

The DSBN’s “I Matter” strategic plan is referenced in all Board Reports, Budget and shared with all Board Committees.

The official launch of the DSBN Strategic Plan 2015–2020 occurred at the System Welcome Back session in August 2016.

### **I Matter:**

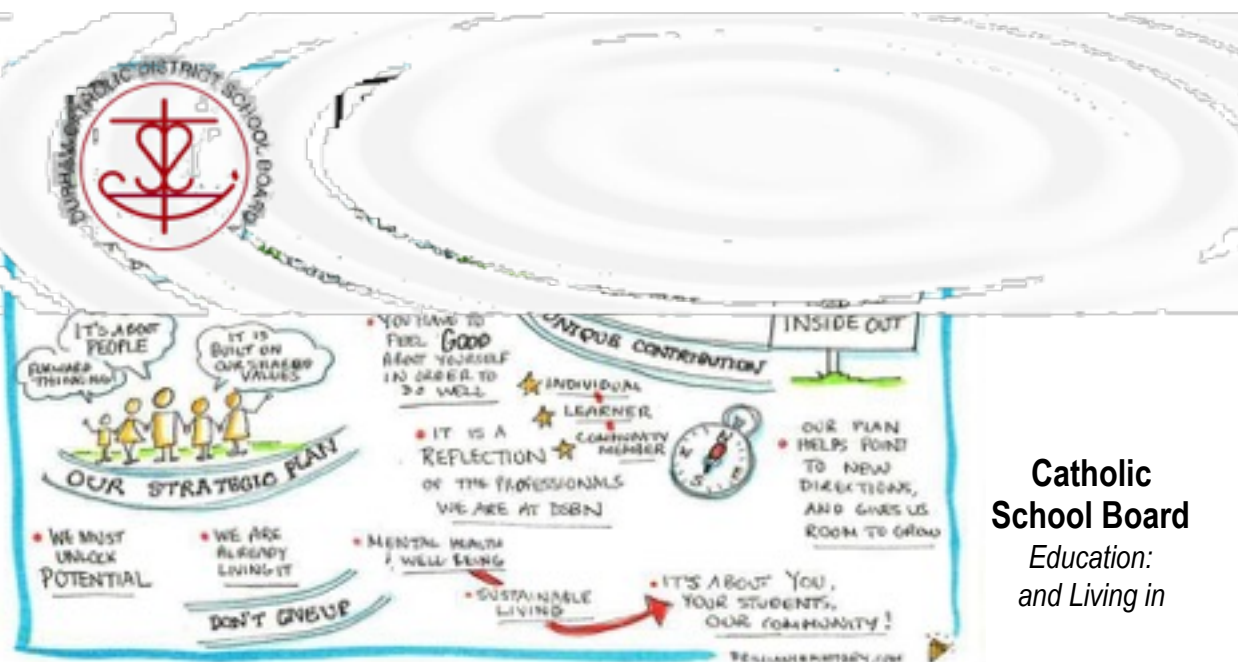
The DSBN Strategic Plan 2015–2020 has become widely shared across the system through the “I Matter” campaign. The campaign was created to recognize the plan’s focus on the role of the individual and individualized supports in education.

The plan notes that everyone associated with the DSBN matters in three ways: as individuals, as learners and as members of the community.

Promoting the plan under the “I Matter” framework has fostered a greater engagement, with many schools developing their own initiatives to incorporate the DSBN Strategic Plan 2015–2020 into the school community.

**Durham District  
Catholic  
Learning  
Faith**

**Catholic  
School Board**  
Education:  
and Living in



## Reflection on the Discovery 2020 Strategic Planning Process and Strong Districts and their Leadership Research

### Dimension #1:

*"Establishing broadly shared mission, vision and goals founded on ambitious images of the educated person"*

### Background

The Durham Catholic District School Board is a vibrant school district situated in the Greater Toronto Area, and spanning the Cities of Oshawa and Pickering, Towns of Ajax and Whitby, and Townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge. Home to 38 Elementary Schools, 7 Secondary Schools, and 6 Alternative and Continuing Education Sites; we serve 21,310 elementary and secondary students.

During the 2013-2014 academic year, we experienced a cycle of renewal, with the appointment of a new Director of Education, Anne O'Brien, and a number of new Supervisory Officers. At this time, Durham Catholic District School Board engaged in a comprehensive system and community level review in order to develop the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, entitled *Discovery 2020*.

The *Discovery 2020* strategic planning process was developed to help shape the vision of the Board for the next five years, and was built to align with the goals outlined in the Ministry of Education's plan, *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, as well as the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations. Following a year of comprehensive consultation, analysis, and review, working groups representing a cross-section of stakeholders, established three key principles and ten integrated themes to support what our students require to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Within each theme, there are three identified priorities and three broad goals. Through this planning process, more detailed plans with strategic actions, timelines and indicators of success have been developed. A new mission, vision and value statement for the Board has also emerged to help invigorate this new strategic direction.

At the onset of the year, the focus for *Discovery 2020* was established through a process of consultation aimed at developing our system direction. What did we hope for our Catholic Graduates just entering the system when they

graduate leading into 2020? What will our students require as 21<sup>st</sup> century learners? How should our system respond to meet these needs?

The *Discovery 2020: Strategic Plan* process was aligned with the following “specific practices” outlined in the *Practices of Strong District Leaders*:

**Staff Survey**

- Strong District Leaders ensure that a transparent visioning/direction-setting process is carried out and consult extensively about district directions as part of the process;
- Spend sufficient time to ensure that the mission, vision and goals (directions) of the system are widely known, understood and shared by all members of their organization; and
- Articulate, demonstrate and model the system’s goals, priorities and values to staffs when visiting schools and embed district directions in improvement plans, principal meetings and leader-initiated interactions.



## Development Phase

### Staff Survey

- Numbered Memo was issued to all staff in the system seeking participation
- Email blast was sent with link to online survey
- 1,100 responses were received and analyzed

### Student Voice Forums

- Chair of the Board and Director of Education visited all schools, and in each secondary schools had lunch hour Student Voice Forums
- Students were invited to share their views in conversation and in written form
- Students completed individual questionnaires in order to identify challenges and opportunities within the school system moving forward

### Stakeholder Consultation

- Staff hosted a Priest Breakfast to seek input on the future of Catholic education in Durham
- Staff sought the input of the Durham Catholic Parent Involvement Committee through presentations and updates at monthly meetings
- Staff sought the input of the Special Education Advisory Committee and the various associated community groups through presentations and monthly updates
- Monthly updates were provided to the Board of Trustees with opportunity for feedback and dialogue
- Regular and ongoing communications were shared with union affiliates and all staff

### Public Consultation Sessions

- Members of the community were invited to three sessions at various locations across the district
- Sessions were promoted through back-pack letters, board website, newspaper and parish bulletins
- Trustees and Durham Catholic Parent Involvement Committee members helped co-facilitate with staff
- Community members provided input on key questions related to strategic planning
- Every participant in attendance at a consultation session was sent a personalized letter of thanks from the Director of Education

### Invitation to Conversation with the Director of Education

- Through the staff survey, staff were given the opportunity to request a one-on-one conversation with the Director
- Face-to-face full day sessions were scheduled through a series of Saturdays

### Planning Committee Sessions

- A large committee comprised of members from each school and all stakeholder groups
- Session #1: Introduction to Strategic Planning – Mission, Vision and Values
- Session #2: Setting the Stage
- Session #3: Developing the Vision
- Session #4: Evaluating Opportunities
- Session #5: Looking at Key Data
- Session #6: Selecting Key Strategies
- Session #7: Developing the Plan
- Session #8: Determining Next Steps

Through the Discovery 2020 Strategic Planning Committee and all of the actions identified above, three Guiding Principles emerged which are now considered central to the promotion of student well-being and achievement in the Durham Catholic District School Board. Excellence, Equity and New Evangelization are prominently featured on all documents and publications developed within the Board, as central to our work moving forward:

- **Excellence:** Children and students of all ages will achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills and demonstrate good citizenship. Educators will be supported in learning continuously and will be recognized as among the best in the world.
- **Equity:** All children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood.
- **New Evangelization:** Students will embrace the Catholic Church's renewed efforts to meet the spiritual needs of today's society, as witnesses to the Gospel values in their everyday lives.

*(Sources: Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education, Ontario Ministry of Education, and Religious Education, Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document Grades 1-8)*

In keeping with the three guiding principles of Excellence, Equity and New-Evangelization ten key themes emerged and working groups were formed to support:

- Witnessing Faith
- Teaching and Learning
- Expanding Pathways
- Inspiring Leadership
- Celebrating Inclusion
- Serving in Partnership
- Emerging Technology
- Advancing Communications
- Managing Resources
- Continuing Education

### Strategic Planning Working Committees

- A committee was formed to develop a new statement of mission, vision and values
- Each department led a working committee to develop an action plan for each key priority area (ten themes)
- Supervisory Officers served as facilitators in the development of strategic priorities, goals and actions for each area of the Board (corporate and academic alignment)
- Realistic timelines for completion of goals and actions and indicators of success were identified to assess the progress through the Director's Annual Report to the community and the DCDSB Balanced Scorecard

The impact of this collective work has been clear. We have noted that there is an increased sense of integration across the varied departments in our system. No one theme stands alone, for example, the work of Serving in Partnership will support Teaching and Learning. Links can be made across the themes, and the realization that we have a coherent and cohesive plan brings a renewed energy into the system. The fact that the plan was created through a collective and sometimes pain staking process has resulted in a strong sense of ownership and clear sense of direction. We believe that all of our actions, whether within departments of the Board, or at school or classroom level, should reflect the system priorities. The strategic plan can now provide us with the basis from which to develop PD plans, departmental plans, and reconsider the relevancy of our board and school improvement plans. The extensive consultation process, together with transparent visioning and direction setting, we believe to be key to harnessing momentum and gaining traction as a system.

## Implementation Phase

- New statement of Mission, Vision and Values was articulated and shared on an ongoing basis at all Principals Meetings and gatherings
- All public addresses by the Director of Education reference the three guiding principles of Equity, Excellence and New Evangelization, and all meetings close with the Mission Statement
- Supervisory Officers have presented their priority area(s) across a variety of contexts, including Animation of Culture activities with central staff and at each monthly Board of Trustees meeting
- *Discovery 2020: Strategic Plan* was released to all employees through email link and appeared as a prominent link on the Board website
- *Discovery 2020* was shared with all stakeholder groups including our Parish priests, D.C.P.I.C. and S.E.A.C. committees, and community members
- The Board Improvement Plan for Student Well-Being and Achievement infographic was updated to include the new Mission Statement and was provided to every employee of the board (vinyl adhesive visual)
- The Board and School Improvement Plan templates were reorganized to align with the strategic plan format
- Graphic design elements were embedded in all digital and print communications to align with the guiding principles and themes within the plan
- The opening Professional Activity Day in September 2014 was organized to launch exploration of the Strategic Plan
- A video was created to launch and promote *Discovery 2020*
- A system-wide P.A. Day in November 2014 was held with all employees of the Board to continue to articulate the system directions and highlight the guiding principles and themes within the plan The Director's Annual Report to the Community and Annual Balanced Scorecard has indicated measurement towards the realization of goals and indicators of success identified in both *Discovery 2020* and the Annual Board Improvement Plan (academic and corporate)

The impact of this very intentional approach to building a common understanding of our mission, vision and values, through the *Discovery 2020* plan along with the three guiding principles of Excellence, Equity and New Evangelization, is that we note that people are using the same language and considering more carefully whether the work that they are performing, activities they are planning, or decisions they are making reflect the system direction. We are better equipped to create a greater sense of alignment, and future planning is much more focused in nature. When the priorities are well understood, the importance of the work ahead becomes clearer.

In creating alignment, we have been much more efficient in allocating our time, energy and resources to the issues that matter most.

## **Alignment and Coherence**

### **Our Mission**

- The mission is displayed in each school and Board
- It is recited at the end of every Board, Director's and Administrative Council meetings
- It is widely memorized and central to the work we do
- Printed on all documents of the Board

### **Our Vision**

- We are reminded of our Board's vision on an ongoing basis through our planning

### **Our Catholic Values**

- Presentation stand in every school foyer
- Laminated poster in every classroom
- Presentation stand in every church affiliated with school board
- These are widely known and integrated into the Board, school and classroom level planning

### **Video**

- Prepared video for dimension # 1

### **Infographic**

- Created an adhesive information graphic for all 2,600 members of the Board for their computers, mouse pads, centered on our Board Mission and Strategic Planning

### **Discovery 2020 Strategic Plan**

- Discovery 2020 Strategic Plan 2014-2019

### **Board Improvement Plan**

- The Board Improvement Plan replicates the design and organization of the Strategic Plan, as it derives smart goals from each themes of the plan

### **Director's Annual Report to the Community**

- The Director's Annual Report once again is organized in the same design and order of the strategic plan and board improvement plan; is data driven based on empirical evidence

### **Balanced Scorecard**

- Each June, a balance scorecard is presented to the Board of Trustees and staff outlining goals achieved from the Board Improvement Plan and Strategic Plan in that academic year

### **Publishing Materials**

- All materials published from every department is developed subsequently following the guidelines of the Discovery 2020 Strategic Plan, relating directly to the strategic plan through their visual identity and branding with icons identified

### **Director's Weekly update**

- Each week, the Director provides an update to Trustees and staff outlining various activities that related to the Board Strategic Plan with icons identified

### **Director's Performance Appraisal**

- The Director's Performance Appraisal relates directly to each area of the Strategic Plan and Board Improvement Plan with specific accomplishments within

### **Board Reports**

- Various Board Reports are presented on updates of the Strategic Plan, e.g., Emerging Technology, Teaching and Learning

### **Screen Savers**

- Screen savers on every computer relates back to Mission, Vision and Values and a monthly graphic that focuses on the Board Improvement Plan

### **Communications**

- Daily [homepage banners](#) are posted to reflect Board/school events, announcements
- Director sends out various messages to the entire system (e.g., Welcome Back, Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, New Year, Family Day, Lent, Summer blessings, etc)., updating them on key Discovery 2020 strategic directions and accomplishments

## **Summary**

The *Discovery 2020* initiative reveals features consistent with strong districts identified in the research of Ken Leithwood. Upon further reflection, we can see that specific practices are not limited to the identified dimension, but can be identified throughout the 9 Dimensions in the research. Key themes that emerge across the contexts link back to the importance of the collectivity of the work, and the importance of remaining engaged with the priority areas in the strategic plan, and a tenacious persistence in sharing these key messages with your school system (at all levels). The framework in *Strong Districts and Their Leadership* provides an invaluable tool for self-reflection in planning for system level growth and improvement.

## FURTHER THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT WE LEARNED BY: DR. KENNETH LEITHWOOD

Participants from the twelve (12) districts attending this module responded to a summary of research on effective leadership networks and presentations by members of two districts about their approaches to fostering learning-oriented improvement processes in their districts. Five issues stood out for me as a result of listening to participants' reflections on the meaning of the research and district cases for work in their own districts.

### 1. LEARNING AS THE RESIDUE OF ACTION

Understandably, most of us involved in an improvement effort in districts or schools have important but relatively immediate goals we want to accomplish as, for example, improving our students' math performance, reducing bullying, and increasing the achievement of particular groups of students. But it is important to remind ourselves that, once we have accomplished or made significant progress toward achieving these proximal goals, there will be new goals to challenge us.

Because the improvement process in schools never ends, we need to approach each of our improvement cycles with the intent of both accomplishing the immediate set of goals and becoming more skilled for tackling the next set. One way this can be done is to use the end of an improvement cycle as a time, with your colleagues, to reflect on just what you actually ended up doing (which might be quite different from what you originally planned to do). This reflection should include identifying and codifying what it was that moved the improvement effort forward, what turned out to be not especially helpful, and what you did that might, with some adaptations, be helpful in subsequent improvement cycles. Repeated cycles of such codified reflection will make the organization increasingly smarter about how to improve itself. It is a "pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps" strategy for learning, one that helps emancipate you from the tyranny of others' prescriptions for change.

### 2. INFRASTRUCTURES FOR IMPROVEMENT

An infrastructure for improvement consists of stable, well-defined structures and processes that make improvement efforts easier and more predictable, thereby improving the chances for success and reducing the costs of change. The Upper Grand District School Board's "district support team" is an example of such infrastructure described during the module. These structures and processes (also objects for

improvement, as the Essex case illustrated) should be designed to weigh the value for the organization of proposals for change from outside the organization, assess the need for change from inside the organization, establish priorities for change and both plan for and manage improvement processes. Well-designed infrastructures for change greatly increase the chances of learning from past efforts when they routinely bring organizational members together for purposes of problem solving. Networks hold considerable potential as part of a district's improvement infrastructure.

### 3. THEORIES OF ACTION

Until quite recently, approaches to school and district improvement planning consisted of not much more than variations on standard needs assessment processes; many still are. While widely adopted, such approaches to improvement have not actually resulted in much improvement. Part of the reason for this lack of impact has been the struggle involved in identifying and collecting the types of evidence needed to track progress and provide useful feedback about what is working as intended and what seems not to make a difference. The use of “theories of action” to guide improvement initiatives (touched on in the Waterloo Catholic District School Board case) is a deceptively powerful alternative to these more traditional improvement planning processes, partly because of the solution it offers to the evidence problem.

The string of “if-then” claims typically constituting a theory of action push improvement planners to be explicit in some detail about the actions they propose and what each of those actions will accomplish. Theories of action also encourage planners to provide justification for their proposed actions, potentially encouraging more use of systematic evidence for such justification. Well-developed theories of action press improvement planners to frame their proposed actions as hypotheses that can be tested with action-relevant evidence. The hypothesis-driven nature of the evidence identified by a theory of action offers considerable guidance to those leading organizational improvement efforts, such guidance largely missing from the more common approaches to district and school improvement.

### 4. INQUIRY PROCESSES

Much of the conversation in and about networks is framed as a process of inquiry, as are broader discussions about the nature of professional collaboration. In the face of such attention to inquiry processes, it is important to remind ourselves that evidence about the outcomes of inquiry is generally quite disappointing. John Hattie's synthesis of this evidence in his book *Visible Learning* is a compelling

source of this evidence collected in many different contexts. Closer to home, LSA’s annual evaluations for many years included an examination of the relationship between “collaborative inquiry processes”, as they typically took place in LSA schools, and EQAO evidence about student achievement in math and language. Those evaluations never found the relationship between student achievement and collaborative inquiry to be either statistically significant or practically meaningful.

The conclusion to be drawn from evidence of this sort is not, however, that inquiry does not work; it is that for inquiry to produce the results we hope for, some key conditions have to be in place. These conditions are just as important for productive inquiry among our colleagues in networks, for example, as they are for students in our classrooms. The knowledge-building work of Marlene Scardamalia and Carl Bereiter, now one of the two main priorities of the LSA project, is arguably the most concise and comprehensive source of such conditions (12 in total<sup>19</sup>). Productive inquiry does not come naturally. It requires encouragement in one form or another, for example, to make constructive uses of authoritative sources, value and build on idea diversity among members, to take collective responsibility for improving the knowledge of the group and to continually work with colleagues to take collective understandings to a new level. An additional source of evidence about conditions needed to support productive inquiry can be found in a recent meta-analysis by Lazonder and Harmsen<sup>20</sup>.

## 5. SOURCE OF RELEVANT PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE FOR “GOING DEEPER”

Much of the inquiry underway in our networks and schools at the present time is aimed at “going deeper.” In classrooms, going deeper means students acquiring more complex and meaningful understandings of curriculum content. In networks such as PLCs and PLTs, going deeper often means determining what types of instructional practices will assist students to go deeper. Of course, students’ math achievement is often the focus of these efforts to go deeper.

One of the most important questions presently confronting school and district leaders is about who in the organization has enough deep knowledge themselves to lead others aiming to deepen their own knowledge. Our conversation during the module was specifically about deep *pedagogical content*

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<sup>19</sup> For example, see Knowledge Building 12 Principles, Adapted from the work of Dr. Marlene Scardamalia and Dr. Carl Bereiter by Dr. Monica Resendes for the Leading Student Achievement project, September 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Lazonder, A., Harmsen, R. (2016). Meta-analysis of inquiry-based learning effects of guidance, *Review of Educational Research*, 86, 3, 681-718.



*knowledge* – expert-like knowledge about whatever is the curriculum content of interest, in combination with expert-like knowledge about effective ways helping students acquire such knowledge.

Much of this conversation during the module entailed weighing the advantages and disadvantages for secondary schools of identifying department heads as holders of deep pedagogical knowledge in their disciplines and so promising leaders of efforts at helping others improve their own knowledge. One of the advantages, supported by a recent review of research<sup>21</sup>, was that department heads in many contexts turn out to be more effective leaders of change in secondary schools than are principals or vice-principals. But this advantage, we noted, depended on department heads in our own district contexts having both the leadership capacities and opportunities required to be effective leaders of change.

We agreed (a) that in many districts, the department head position has been “downgraded” by the loss of stipends and time, (b) in some districts, in spite of the loss of stipends and time, there are department heads who are providing such leadership, (c) the existence of a well-established position may make it easier to resuscitate the contributions of those in the role than ignoring the position and creating alternatives for leading and (d) when the challenges of having department heads provide leadership seem insurmountable, awarding leadership to other teachers with the needed expertise may be an effective alternative. We also heard that, in some districts not now providing department heads with stipends and time, all was not lost; future changes could add strength to the role.

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<sup>21</sup> Leithwood, K. (2016). Department head leadership for school improvement, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 15, 2, 117-140.

# EVALUATION

## MODULE FIVE (DECEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2016)

### BROADLY SHARED MISSION, VISION AND GOALS

#### **What were your new insights as a result of your participation?**

- We are in the game and the jerseys are the same color most of the time.
- Marketing (or a similar term) is critical to the gathering of voice and to the effective implementation of the plan.
- There is not a right or wrong way in our mind to do strategic
- The process needs to be locally generated to meet the local needs, culture and norms
- Simplicity is key to widespread buy in and implementation.
- Student voice resonates with all stakeholders
- Strategic alignment supports simplicity.
- Cast a wide net for stakeholders input and implementation is the key
- We really enjoyed the 4 part Leadership types for strategic planning: Adaptive, Shaping, Classical, Visionary.

#### **What do you feel you need more of in terms of your professional growth?**

- We really enjoyed hearing from other districts and their ideas.
- The reminder to have a larger focus on strategic rather than operational goals. And ensuring that we are tracking evidence for it.
- Work with our team to develop our upcoming process.
- Examples of effective practice from across the province.
- Great examples of ways in which research makes a difference
- Great to see more completed strategic plans. Lets hear more about the process that boards engaged in to get the job done.

#### **What suggestions do you have to improve this presentation?**

- It was excellent. We learned a great deal from the two boards and making the link to research.
- Thanks for a great day. Please put Ken's summary up on the website.
- Continue to seek interactive strategies to deepen the conversation/sharing that takes place during the modules.

### Broadly Shared Mission, Vision and Goals

Review of selected research with  
an emphasis on **Goals** for students

## From the study of Ontario districts

(Leithwood, K. (2011). *Characteristics of High Performing School Systems in Ontario*)



*Function is both "directional" and "motivational"*

## Key Qualities



Transparently developed with multiple school and district stakeholders



Reflects parameters set by the province (e.g., *Achieving Excellence*).



Understood and shared by almost all staff.

(Leithwood, K. (2011). *Characteristics of High Performing School Systems in Ontario*)

3

## Key Content



Nurturing student engagement



Raising the achievement “bar”



Closing the achievement “gap” (equity)

(Leithwood, K. (2011). *Characteristics of High Performing School Systems in Ontario*)

4

## About Missions and Visions

Morgan and Morgan (a large Florida law firm)




**“Our mission is you”**

5

## Learning from Morgan & Morgan

(“our mission is you”)



**“Our mission is your  
child”**

What else needs to be said?

6

## Some Ontario Examples



Confident learners,  
caring citizens (Algoma)



Growing excellence,  
inspiring success (Grand  
Erie DSB)



Extraordinary lives start  
with a great education  
(Dufferin-Peel CDSB)



Ignite learning (DDSB)

7

## The purpose for Mission and Vision statements



A source of inspiration and a means  
for creating shared commitment to  
district goals among staff, students  
and other stakeholders

8

## The “acid test” for mission and vision statements

**Do they increase  
understanding and  
commitment to the  
Goals?**

9

## Goals

What goals should all districts in Ontario be developing in their students?

Three obvious sources for answering this questions....



Achieving Excellence



Report Card Learning Skills



21st century skills

10

## Goals

What goals should all districts in Ontario be developing in their students?

Three obvious sources for answering this questions....



Achieving Excellence



Report Card Learning Skills



21st century skills

10

## Ontario's "Achieving Excellence" & The Paradigm Wars

Within the Student Achievement goal:

**"Conventional" Paradigm  
&  
"New" Paradigm**

12



## The Conventional Paradigm



13

## The Conventional Paradigm

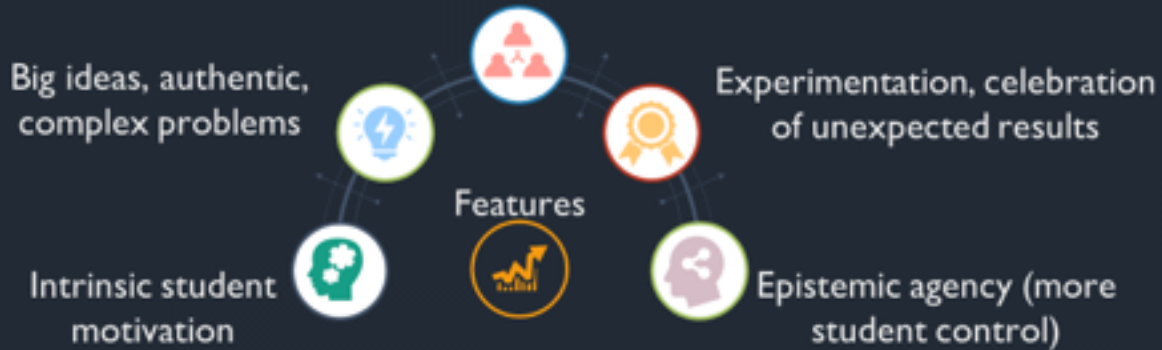
Rooted in :

- 1 Ralph Tyler
- 2 Behaviorism, Behavioral objectives & criterion-referenced tests
- 3 Extrinsic motivation of students
- 4 Performance-oriented approaches by students to their learning
- 5 SMART goals
- 6 Accountability policies

14

## The “New” Paradigm

Cooperation and collaboration rather than competition among students



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## The “New” Paradigm

Rooted in :

- 1 Dewey, Bransford, Bereiter
- 2 Cognitive psychology, constructivist approaches to instruction
- 3 Intrinsic student motivation
- 4 Mastery-oriented approaches by students to their learning

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## A second source Report Card “Learning Skills”



17

## What else?

### Four additions to Learning Skills from Achieving Excellence and 21st Century Skills

- 7 Fully engaged (AE)
- 8 Problem solving/real world connections (AE, 21st)
- 9 Critical thinking (AE)
- 10 Creativity (AE, 21st)

18

## Ten Goals for all Districts

These 10 goals for all districts require a future focus for classrooms, schools and districts on....

**Deeper Learning**

19

## New research examines benefits of “Deeper Learning” schools

Bitter et al (2014), Yettick et al (2014) Zeiser et al (2014)



- 3 recent large scale reports (American Institute for Research)
- 10 secondary school networks focused on deeper learning vs. 13 non-networking schools
- Researcher-created tests and State tests

20

## “Deeper Learning” defined...



“education that emphasizes core academic content, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, effective communication, self-directed learning, and an academic mindset”.

21

## Results (academic)



“...the advantage to students of attending a deeper-learning school was equivalent to moving from the 50th to the 54th or 55th percentile in reading, mathematics, and science, as measured by [PISA]”

22

## Results (non-academic)



"students who attended deeper-learning schools were more academically motivated and engaged than the comparison group of students. They also had better collaboration skills".



"The two groups were similar, however, when it came to creative thinking, perseverance, and other personal traits emphasized by deeper learning".

23

## Results overall



"On average, students at deeper learning schools had better test results and people skills.



They were also more likely to graduate from high school on time and enroll in four-year colleges".

24

## Key Takeaways



“Network schools took a range of approaches to developing the deeper learning competencies.



Most schools integrated project-based learning to develop mastery of core academic content knowledge and critical thinking skills”.

25

## Takeaways (cont.)



“Interpersonal skill development was a goal at a majority of network schools and was addressed through instruction, assessment, and internship opportunities”.

26



## Guidelines for Going Deeper

Local resources, for example, Scardamalia, Bereiter and the LSA project...

### Principles of “Knowledge Building”

(for more, see the *Coherent Instructional Program* module)


28

## Summing up...

- 1 Missions/visions aim to inspire and create commitment to goals
- 2 There are at least 10 important goals all districts should aim to accomplish with their future students
- 3 Achieving these goals will require a “deep learning” approach to teaching some of the time
- 4 Much to be gained and nothing to be lost with a “deep learning” approach
- 5 “Deep learning” combines assumptions related to both conventional and new paradigms for education

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**Broadly Shared  
Mission, Vision  
and Goals**

**For more information**



**[www.strongdistrictleaders.com](http://www.strongdistrictleaders.com)**

**@ K. Leithwood**

## MODULE SIX

### COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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# A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

## MODULE DESCRIPTION

Research has pointed to the important contribution to student learning made by the development of effective school-level leadership and school leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. School leadership development is a “high-leverage” strategy since small numbers of school leaders can potentially influence large numbers of teachers and; school leaders are clearly part of district “management,” with responsibilities for achieving district goals.

This module, through the use of three case studies and exposure to the research engaged in, focused learning and sharing from a group of three very different school districts.

Strong districts ...

- Have well-designed and carefully implemented procedures for identifying, recruiting, selecting and appraising school level leaders.
- Implement procedures for transferring school-level leaders that does no harm and, whenever possible, adds value to improvement efforts underway in schools.
- Ensure that the most skilled leaders in the system are placed where they are most needed.
- Encourage school-level leaders, when useful, to supplement their own capacities with system-level expertise.
- Expect school-level leaders to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers’ instruction, a central criterion for selecting school leaders and for their performance appraisal.
- Have well-designed and carefully implemented procedures for identifying, recruiting, selecting, and appraising system-level leaders.
- Keep both the community and the central office staff focused on learning and support principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure high levels of learning for all students. These districts assume responsibility for significantly improving instructional leadership in schools.
- Expect the behavior of both district- and school-level leaders to reflect the leadership practices and personal leadership resources identified in the Ontario Leadership Framework, as well as such other practices considered critical for local board purposes.
- Encourage coordinated forms of leadership distribution throughout the board and its schools.

The afternoon portion of this module was the first time we were able to share the preliminary results of the Strong District and Their Leadership research finding from our survey data and for participants to examine their board's results should they have participated in the study.

# AGENDA

## **1. Objective**

As a result of participating in this module, district leaders will know how to significantly refine procedures in their systems for identifying, recruiting, selecting, developing and appraising both school- and system - level leaders.

## **2. Overview of relevant research (presentation)**

## **3. Case Study: Hamilton Catholic District School Board**

*What can be learned from this case about how to build a comprehensive approach to leadership development?*

- Discussion of written case and what was learned from this case
- What was learned from the Hamilton Catholic District School Board case that was useful to you?

## **4. Case Study: Durham District School Board**

*What can be learned from this case about how to build a comprehensive approach to leadership development?*

- Discussion of written case
- What was learned from the Durham Public District case useful to you?

## **5. Case Study: Ottawa Catholic District School Board**

*What can be learned from this case about how to build a comprehensive approach to leadership development?*

- Discussion of written case and what was learned from this case

## **6. Compare and contrast the approaches to leadership development described in the three cases (full group)**

- Consider relationship to the relevant research and to the approaches currently taken by three case districts
- Identify key lessons - what to do for sure, what not to do at any cost
- Concluding synthesis about how to build a comprehensive approach to leadership development

## **7. Analysis of District Results – Presentation and Discussion**



## CASE STUDY: HAMILTON-WENTWORTH CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD (HWCDSB)

### STRONG DISTRICTS AND THEIR LEADERSHIP: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

#### HWCDSB Demographics

Schools	
Continuing Ed.	5
Elementary	49
Secondary	7
Total	29,098

Staff	
Continuing Education - Teacher	77
Elementary - Teacher	1,075
Secondary - Teacher	559
Other Staff	2,885
Total	4,596

Enrollment	
Continuing Ed.	102
Elementary	18,569
Secondary	10,427

Total	29,098
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Web:	<a href="http://www.hwcdsb.ca">www.hwcdsb.ca</a>
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## **Background**

The Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board has operated a defined leadership development program for teaching staff interested in having an opportunity to explore school level leadership since 1982 as seen in Appendix A.

Three distinct programs provide candidates with daily experiences in leadership at the school level combined with monthly professional learning opportunities facilitated by experienced principals and members of Senior Administration. The three programs are:

- a) Principal Internship Program (Elementary);
- b) Assistant to the Principal (Elementary);
- c) Secondary Leadership.

Through these programs, the candidates have an opportunity to apply learnings and leadership skills in the setting of a school while also discerning whether formal school leadership is the right path for their career in Catholic education.

For the Board's Senior Administration, having aspiring leaders participate in the leadership program allows for the mentoring and training of potential leaders on the strategies and areas of focus of both the Board's Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) and the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being (BIPSAW). In addition, the leadership programs provide important insight regarding potential candidates as they are recruited and formed as Department Heads, Vice-Principals and Principals.

## **Connection to Strong Districts & Their Leadership (Leithwood, 2013)**

Strong districts:

- Have well-designed and carefully implemented procedures for identifying, recruiting, selecting and appraising school-level leaders;
- Encourage school-level leaders, when useful, to supplement their own capacities with system-level expertise;



- Expect the behaviour of both district- and school-level leaders to reflect the leadership practices and personal leadership resources identified in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*, as well as such other practices considered critical for local board purposes
- Encourage coordinated forms of leadership distribution throughout the board and its schools.

(Leithwood, 2013)

In addition, Leithwood and his colleagues provided support for the board's leadership focus on the importance of leveraging the personal leadership resources, as outlined in the *Catholic School Level Leadership Framework*, to facilitate school cultures that supported staff motivation and commitment (2006). They state that, "School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions" (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 10). They also say how school leaders "had quite strong and positive influences on staff members' motivations, commitments and beliefs about the supportiveness of their working conditions" (Leithwood et al., 2006, p.10).

### **Principal Internship Program (Elementary)**

The Principal Internship Program began as a pilot in 1982 as seen in Appendix B). The program came about out of a recommendation to the Board of Trustees that recognized the importance of preparing aspiring leaders for future leadership openings within the system:

This program will contribute to preparing staff for the assumption of leadership in a Catholic School. During the internship, candidates are assigned to a school and given practical experience in school management, supervision, curriculum development, implementation and assessment. In addition, candidates will have an opportunity to gain experience and insight into dimensions of the school program, school climate and other aspects of the school that enhance its unique Catholic mission. The appointment to this Program is for a two-year term. The program also involves a mentor component and an after-hours course component.

(HWCD SB RFI Report)

Successful applicants are appointed to a school that does not have a vice-principal and engage in a variety of leadership responsibilities under the supervision of the principal. These responsibilities can include supervision schedule preparation, consumable supply ordering, student discipline, presentations to the Catholic School Council, participation on the Special Education Resource Team, leadership with the School Improvement Team, involvement on system-level committees and many other similar responsibilities that are part of the role of school leadership.

The program's after-hours mini-course allows participants to examine a variety of topics predominately centered on the components of the Catholic School Level Leadership Framework (Institution for Education Leadership, 2013). Two weekend sessions allow participants to examine themselves more closely. Using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator principal internship candidates examine their psychological preferences and how they perceive the world and make decisions. More recently those involved in the program have had the opportunity to examine their Emotional Intelligence Quotient and how this is an important aspect of leadership.

Finally, participants are engaged in a mentor/mentee program, choosing a principal or vice-principal not at their school and engaging with them in regular mentoring sessions.

To date the Principal Internship Program has had:

25 Principal Internship Groups		
259 Participants which produced:		
Directors of Education	Senior Administrators	Elementary Principal/Vice Principal
2	4	119

### **Assistant to the Principal/Secondary Leadership** (see Appendix C)

In order to continue to build capacity with these aspiring leaders, especially in the absence of vice-principal opportunities, Senior Administration established the Assistant to the Principal position. Unlike the Principal Internship Program that lasts for a two-year term, individuals appointed to the Assistant to the Principal position do not have a term limit to their appointment. These successful candidates are placed in schools that have neither a vice-principal nor a principal intern. Similar to the Principal Internship Program Assistants to the Principal have in-school leadership opportunities supervised by their principal, participate in after school monthly sessions facilitated by a superintendent and two principals and select a mentor to support their ongoing leadership development.

Through these programs, the HWCDSB is able to have either a vice-principal, assistant to the principal or a principal intern in each elementary school (49). This provides for good capacity building and succession planning. It also allows for consistent support for the principal, school staff and students.

The Secondary Leadership Program began in 1992 in order to provide support and capacity building for secondary teachers aspiring to leadership as department heads and/or school principal/vice-principal positions. The posting is for two years and is similar to the Principal Internship Program. Each secondary school supports up to 3 candidates for a total of twenty-one per group. To date there have been 10 secondary leadership program cohorts.

### **Personal Leadership Resources: Supporting Catholic School Level Leaders and School Leaders in Training**

In the last 2 years the content and structure of the professional learning for superintendents, principals, vice-principals and the three leadership programs has been evolving. While the *Catholic School Level Leadership Framework* has been the foundation of professional learning and leadership development for a number of years it became increasingly evident that a focus on developing the Personal Leadership Resources for all leaders, or future leaders, was an important foundation for those in leadership in the Board.

The decision to increase focus on the cognitive, social and psychological personal leadership resources of the Board's leaders was because of some key factors:

- a) The HWCDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan identified the importance of mental health at work and the fostering of schools, and departments, in which psychological health and safety were essential for both student achievement and the successful administration of the Board;
- b) Changes to the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act particularly in the area of harassment in the workplace;
- c) Observations by Senior Administration, both formal (in the Principal Performance Appraisal) and informal (regular school visits) revealed that those leaders who were most successful (measured both by student achievement and staff cohesion) seamlessly blended the characteristics of the *Leadership Framework* with well-developed personal leadership resources. Conversely, those leaders that experienced workplace complaints and/or grievances were rarely because of a “failing” in the characteristics of the framework but rather too often centered in how they used (or failed to use) their personal leadership resources in the enactment of their leadership.

In support of this focus, two parallel tracks of training have been undertaken. Track 1 consisted of an in depth examination of Mental Health at Work (see Appendix D). Over a series of 6 sessions, the following topics were covered:

- Mental Health at Work Overview;
- Understanding Employee Mental Health;
- Mindful Leadership;
- Policy and Legislative Frameworks;
- Accommodating Mental Health; and
- Leadership Visioning.

The second track involved using an instrument to examine emotional intelligence as seen in Appenix E. Supports provided to participants to use the results of this tool included:

- Applying one’s personal Emotional Intelligence Quotient to the role of leadership;
- Understanding how to use emotions to facilitate divergent thinking and effective decision making;
- Understanding how to effectively use emotional intelligence during times of conflict; and
- Enhanceing understanding of their own personal emotional intelligence and its application to personal and professional life;

(EITC, 2013)

With both of these leadership training tracks all of Senior Administration were the first group to work through the learning. Since that time all principals and vice-principals have participated in this work and the three leadership training groups have done work with emotional intelligence and have been given an introduction to Mental Health at Work.

### **Administrative Services Extension**

The success of this work with school-level leadership in the Board has also begun with leadership in other areas of the Board. Managers and supervisors in the various administrative services of the Board have had the opportunity to have professional learning on Mental Health at Work and the legislative requirements connected to a psychologically safe work environment. In addition, leadership in this area have engaged in the EQi2.0 process to examine their own leadership skills and biases.

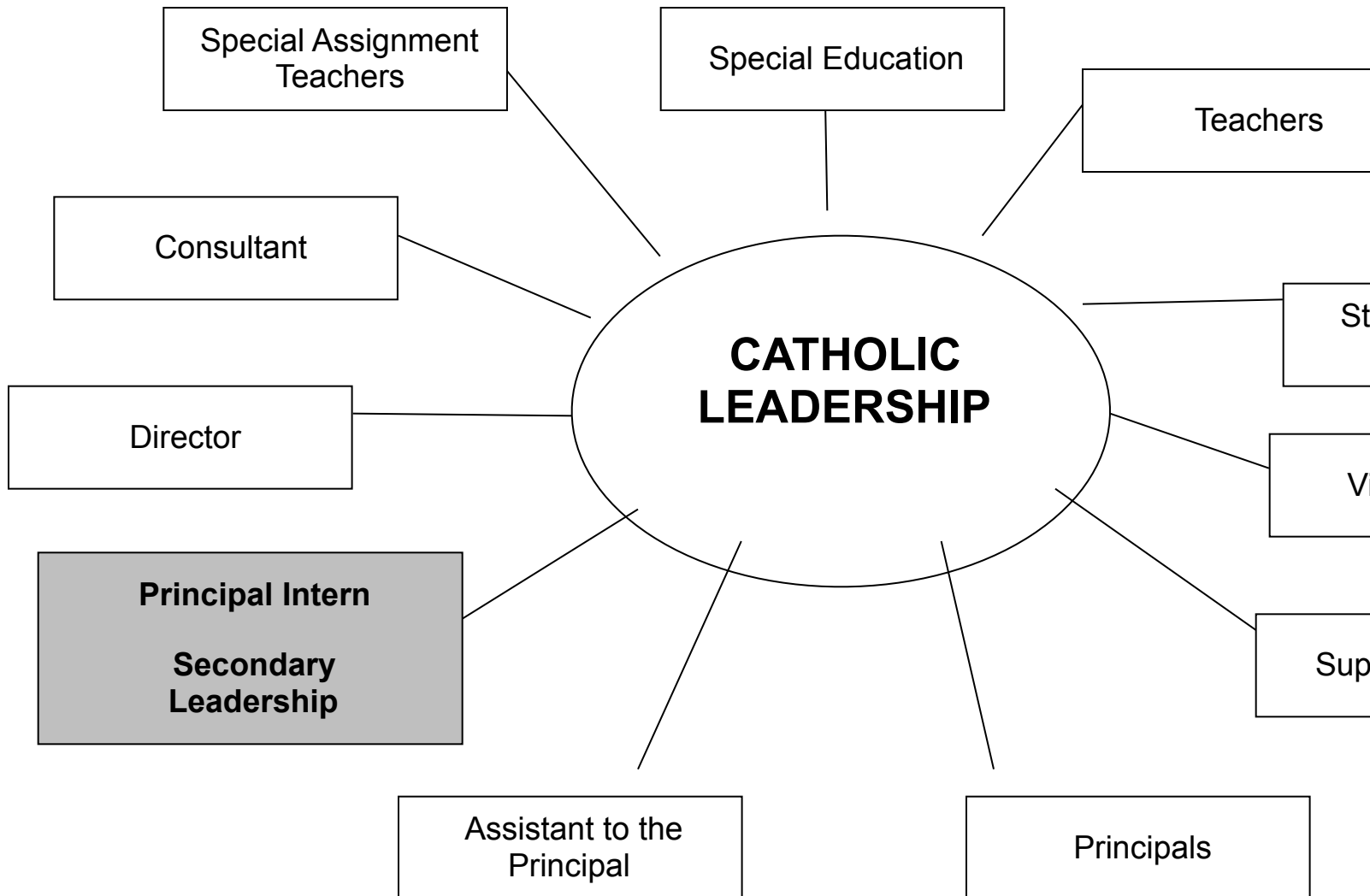
## **Conclusion**

The approach of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board to leadership development is to assist leaders to demonstrate knowledge, care and compassion in carrying out their responsibilities within the role and to approach leadership from a servant leader perspective.

Acquiring information regarding their own personal skills and abilities through the EQi 2.0 inventory and using that information to develop their individual plan for development based upon that information is important. The work will assist leaders to be aware of those qualities and skills and how they affect their interactions with others. Additionally, leaders need to know the legislative framework that guides them around specific issues such as the duty to accommodate. Ultimately, as a system there is an overall plan as well as individual plans designed to facilitate the growth of leadership skills in the board.

Through this focus on leadership growth and development, the HWCDSB believes the students trusted to its care will experience school and classroom environments in which “all learners realize the fullness of humanity of which Our Lord Jesus Christ is the model” (HWCDSB Mission & Vision Statement).







## **OVERVIEW**

### **PRINCIPAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM/SECONDARY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

During the two-year Leadership Program, selected candidates will be given a variety of opportunities to experience leadership first hand. These will occur through:

- an in-school component, under the supervision of the Principal
- a mini course component after hours and on two weekends
- a mentor component

#### **GOALS OF THE PROGRAM**

- to discuss the importance of Catholic leadership in a Catholic community
- to provide leadership training that will meet the needs of the candidates and the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
- to provide participants with increased knowledge of the policies and practices of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
- to increase the knowledge of the participants in the area of current leadership theory and practices
- to provide an opportunity for personal growth by increasing interpersonal and leadership skills.

#### **The In-School Component**

This part of the Leadership Program provides the opportunity for the candidates to experience leadership responsibilities assigned by the Principal. The candidate should have some experience in all aspects of leadership in the area of:

1. Catholic Leadership
2. Administration
3. Curriculum
4. Special Projects

#### **Mini Course Components**

1. Effective Catholic Leadership
2. Board policies and administrative practices
3. Curriculum Leadership
4. Accountability
5. Leading a Safe School
6. Special Education
7. Interpersonal Skills
8. Career Planning and Development
9. Mentorship

#### **Mentorship**

Each candidate will select a “mentor” – someone currently involved with educational leadership, within the first few weeks of the Program. The “mentor” will be facilitator, advisor, and contact person throughout the two-year period that the candidate is a participant in the program. A minimum of four formal meetings will be held between mentor and mentee in each of the two years of the program.

#### **Program Evaluation**

The Program:

The Program will be evaluated in a continuous and ongoing manner. It will be evaluated formally at the end of year 1 and Year 2, by both the Principal and Leadership candidates.

#### **Standards of Performance**

The leadership candidate is accountable to the Principal for following through on the components of the in-school program agreed to through a process of consultation. Principals will be required to assess the effectiveness of the candidate's leadership role at the end of Year 2.



## CRITERIA FOR LEADERSHIP GROUPS THE HAMILTON-WENTWORTH CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INTERN (SECONDARY LEADERSHIP ✓)	ASSISTANT TO THE PRINCIPAL	VICE-PRINCIPAL	PRINCIPAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good standing with OCT</li> <li>• 5 years minimum of successful teaching experience</li> <li>• have completed religious renewal as required by Board Policy (35 hours)</li> <li>• have completed/or are enrolled in a graduate program (e.g., Master of Education or Master of Religious Education) OR have a specialist's certificate in at least one program area and completed Religious Education Part I</li> <li>• have experience in more than one (1) division</li> </ul> <p>Package:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• updated resume</li> <li>• religious renewal form</li> <li>• principal's support letter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good standing with OCT</li> <li>• 5 years minimum of successful teaching experience</li> <li>• have completed religious renewal as required by Board Policy (35 hours)</li> <li>• Part I of Principal Qualification Program or Principal Intern Program</li> <li>• experience in at least 2 divisions</li> <li>• demonstrated initiatives and leadership at the school level</li> <li>• completion of one religious education course</li> </ul> <p>A Completed Package – (see principal)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal's Qualifications</li> <li>• Religious Education Specialist</li> <li>• 8 years' experience and at least 1 year with Board</li> <li>• at least (2) years of demonstrated leadership (e.g., Principal Intern, Secondary Leadership, Assistant to the Principal, Department Head, Consultant)</li> <li>• teaching experience in 2 divisions (Elem – Pr. Jr. Int.) (Sec – Int. Sr.)</li> <li>• completion of Religious Renewal as required by Board Policy (35 hours)</li> <li>• demonstrated system committee experience</li> </ul> <p>A Completed Package – (see principal)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal's Qualification</li> <li>• Religious Education Specialist</li> <li>• experience as a vice-principal</li> <li>• 8 years' experience and at least 1 year with Board</li> <li>• teaching experience in 2 divisions (Elem – Pr. Jr. Int.) (Sec – Int. Sr.)</li> <li>• completion of Religious Renewal as required by Board Policy (35 hours)</li> <li>• completion of Religious Renewal as required by Board Policy (35 hours)</li> <li>• demonstrated system committee experience</li> </ul> <p>A Completed Package – (see principal)</p>

## **Topics covered in Leadership Training Series for Senior Leadership, Principals, Vice-principals**

### **Mental Health at Work Overview**

- Excellence Canada Framework and implementation of the National Standard of Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace- Mental Health at Work;
- Organization Guidelines for Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace: positive leadership style, communicating effectively, designing jobs for positive mental health, recruitment of employees, balancing work and life demands, positive mental health and wellbeing initiatives
- Conducted pre-training surveys

### **Understanding Employee Mental Health Helpful Leadership Behavior**

- The skills and strategies necessary to facilitate difficult conversations related to mental health and managing your own emotions
- Mindful Leadership and developing the skills and strategies to improve workplace relationships
- Emotional Intelligence and Mental Health
- Managing conflict

### **Policy and Legislative Frameworks**

- Increasing knowledge and skills related to legislative mandates and requirements: Human Rights and OHS
- Facilitating positive leadership and workplace culture
- Facilitating consistency in problem solving and application of policy and legislative frameworks in managing mental health at work
- Best Practices Related to Return to Work and Stay at Work Interventions for workers with mental health concerns

### **Accommodating Mental Health**

- What to do when an employee reports or exhibits mental health concerns
- What if you suspect that an employee is suffering from a mental health issue
- Employer's duties, employee's duties medical documentation
- Forms of accommodation
- Basic accommodations/complex accommodations
- Accommodating a mental health disability vs. other types of disabilities
- Discipline and accommodation

### **Mindful Leadership and Emotional Intelligence**

- application of Emotional Intelligence, mental health in the workplace and neuro-leadership

- ongoing coaching and support regarding the implementation of EQ in relationship to leadership development

## Appendix E

### EQ-i 2.0 Model of Emotional Intelligence



#### STRESS MANAGEMENT

**Flexibility** is adapting emotions, thoughts and behaviors to unfamiliar, unpredictable, and dynamic circumstances or ideas.

**Stress Tolerance** involves coping with stressful or difficult situations and believing that one can manage or influence situations in a positive manner.

**Optimism** is an indicator of one's positive attitude and outlook on life. It involves remaining hopeful and resilient, despite occasional setbacks.

#### SELF-PERCEPTION

**Self-Regard** is respecting oneself while understanding and accepting one's strengths and weaknesses. Self-Regard is often associated with feelings of inner strength and self-confidence.

**Self-Actualization** is the willingness to persistently try to improve oneself and engage in the pursuit of personally relevant and meaningful objectives that lead to a rich and enjoyable life.

**Emotional Self-Awareness** includes recognizing and understanding one's own emotions. This includes the ability to differentiate between subtleties in one's own emotions while understanding the cause of these emotions and the impact they have on one's own thoughts and actions and those of others.

#### SELF-EXPRESSION

**Emotional Expression** is openly expressing one's feelings verbally and non-verbally.

**Assertiveness** involves communicating feelings, beliefs and thoughts openly, and defending personal rights and values in a socially acceptable, non-offensive, and non-destructive manner.

**Independence** is the ability to be self directed and free from emotional dependency on others. Decision-making, planning, and daily tasks are completed autonomously.



#### DECISION MAKING

**Problem Solving** is the ability to find solutions to problems in situations where emotions are involved. Problem solving includes the ability to understand how emotions impact decision making.

**Reality Testing** is the capacity to remain objective by seeing things as they really are. This capacity involves recognizing when emotions or personal bias can cause one to be less objective.

**Impulse Control** is the ability to resist or delay an impulse, drive or temptation to act and involves avoiding rash behaviors and decision making.

#### INTERPERSONAL

**Interpersonal Relationships** refers to the skill of developing and maintaining mutually satisfying relationships that are characterized by trust and compassion.

**Empathy** is recognizing, understanding, and appreciating how other people feel. Empathy involves being able to articulate your understanding of another's perspective and behaving in a way that respects others' feelings.

**Social Responsibility** is willingly contributing to society, to one's social groups, and generally to the welfare of others. Social Responsibility involves acting responsibly, having social consciousness, and showing concern for the greater community.

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# CASE STUDY: DURHAM DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

## STRONG DISTRICTS AND THEIR LEADERSHIP: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

### **Lisa Millar**

*Director of Education*

### **Mark Fisher**

*Superintendent of Operations and Leadership Development*

### **Karla Torrente**

*Education Officer – Leadership Development*

## **DURHAM DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD 2016-2018**

The Durham District School Board (DDSB) is responsible for public education in the rural settings of Uxbridge, Brock and Scugog Townships and the urban settings of Ajax, Whitby, Pickering and Oshawa. The DDSB employs 7,000 teaching and educational services staff. With 131 elementary and secondary schools and learning centres, the DDSB accommodates more than 70,000 regular day students and thousands more who take advantage of a wide variety of continuing education and adult credit courses. More information can be found on the DDSB's website at [www.ddsb.ca](http://www.ddsb.ca). Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @DurhamDSB and on YouTube at DurhamDSB.

## **RATIONALE**

In the Durham District School Board (DDSB), we believe that leadership development is an evolving process that focuses on continually nurturing and refining school-level leadership practices to support continuous improvement throughout our organization. The purpose of this case study is to outline the *DDSB's comprehensive approach to leadership development* with a specific focus on:

- *school leader development used as a high leverage strategy to influence large numbers of teachers;*
- *creating a large pool of well-qualified school and system leaders and on-the-job support for them once in leadership roles;*
- *placing a priority focus on developing subsets of the personal leadership resources and leadership practices based on local circumstances (OLF p. 17).*

The *Ontario Leadership Framework* (OLF) provides the evidence-informed foundation for our collective capacity building efforts with students, staff and the broader community. We want to ensure that our current and aspiring leaders are well equipped to best serve their students and school communities. *Our goals, actions and this case study reflect how we identify, support and promote*

*the best possible leaders, and support them in their continual development of the personal leadership resources (PLRs) from the OLF throughout their leadership journey.*

## **SUCCESSION PLANNING AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SCHOOL LEVEL LEADERS**

In 2015, the DDSB initiated a system-wide school leadership development review and created the *Ignite Leadership Strategic Plan 2016 - 2018*. Our purpose was to evaluate existing school-level leadership practices and make recommendations to build the collective capacity of aspiring, new and experienced school leaders. The review highlighted the importance of succession planning and early identification of leadership in order to increase the number, quality and diversity of aspirants.

As a result, the *Leadership Development Department* initiated and produced the *Succession Planning 2016 Analysis and Report*. The report outlined a plan for onboarding and training to create a pool of highly qualified school leaders that are prepared with the necessary skills and knowledge required at all stages of their leadership journeys. The significant additional leadership actions taken by the department based on the Leadership Review resulted in:

- developing the *Ignite Leadership Strategic Plan* and the 10 Leadership Domains;
- focusing on recruitment, training and leadership for learning at all stages;
- designing leadership modules for aspiring, newly appointed and experienced leaders; and
- revising the Mentorship Program.

## **INITIAL CONDITIONS**

*“School leaders are pivotal to the development of excellent teaching, excellent schools, and ultimately, enhanced student achievement and well-being.”*

(OLF p. 3)

Our succession plan data revealed that a significant number of experienced administrators will be eligible to retire by 2020, which represents a challenge in our district. The data below identifies the leadership needs by 2020.

- 10% or 10 elementary vice principals,
- 40% or 46 elementary principals,
- 25% or 11 secondary vice principals, and
- 50% or 13 secondary principals.

Our analysis also included an overall picture of the experience in the role of our administrators. The chart below details the current experience level of our principals and vice principals. This information has been vital to assisting our department in designing and creating relevant professional learning and job embedded opportunities for our school administrators. The graphs below illustrate the range of experience in our existing administrator groups.

With 28 administrators in acting roles in the fall of 2016, we also examined the challenges in effective succession planning and found the needs to be in:

- supports for leadership capacity development;
- the lack of transparency in the promotion process; and
- repeated unsuccessful attempts for promotion and the lack of meaningful feedback.

## CREATING CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

### Advanced Leadership Key Operational Goal:

The DDSB's 2016-2017 *Ignite Learning Strategic Plan* named *Advanced Inspired Leadership and identifying, supporting and promoting leadership capacity for all stakeholder groups in the DDSB* as a key operational goal.

In order to implement this, the *Leadership Development Department* completed the following steps to support and address three areas related to school leadership:

- ***Identification of Aspiring School Leaders***
- ***Development of Newly Appointed School Leaders***
- ***Support for Experienced School Leaders***

### Aspiring Leaders:

In order to *identify, support and promote leadership capacity*, one essential step has been the intentional identification of future leaders by superintendents and principals. Our program for aspiring leaders includes the following features:

- Orientation sessions to provide an overview of the program and opportunity to network with other aspiring leaders, as well as an opportunity to connect aspiring leaders with superintendents, who led conversations and answered questions about leadership in the DDSB.
- Established two tracks: Yellow and Green tracks.
- Yellow track: Aspiring Leaders considering administration in the next 3-5 years -  
Green track: Aspiring Leaders considering administration in the next 1 -2 years
- Learning modules both online and face to face featuring sessions on:
  - Self-Assessment for Aspiring and School Leaders  
Tool – Transition from Teacher to Vice Principal
  - Becoming an Emotionally Intelligent  
Administrator – Safe Schools for Aspiring  
Leaders
  - Equity and Inclusivity for Aspiring  
Leaders – Special Education for  
Aspiring Leaders
  - Cultural Competency for Aspiring Leaders

- Professional learning opportunities are available to those on both the yellow and green track. Those identified in the green group have the opportunity to also participate in the following sessions:
  - ***Preparing for the Process***: Provides participants with an overview of the promotion process
  - ***Preparing for the Portfolio***: Provides participants with an overview of the expectation for the portfolio
  - ***Preparing for the Interview***: Provides participants with tips and strategies for the interview process, as well as an opportunity to work with experienced administrators to complete practice questions.
  - ***Leadership Prep Groups***: A series of sessions in small groups led by experienced administrators which focus on key topics and strategies for aspiring school leaders. Teacher to VP (elementary and secondary), and VP to P (elementary and secondary)

We currently have a pool of over 140 aspiring leaders who are involved in a variety of leadership development training and initiatives that provide differentiated support to those individuals. This will ensure that they are better prepared for the role of a school administrator.

Another pressure point identified in our leadership review and *Ignite Learning Strategic Plan* was the need to have our administration be more reflective of our school communities. Strategies to address barriers in supporting diverse aspiring and existing leaders are being addressed.

Working with the *Equity and Inclusive Education Department*, the *Racialized & Aboriginal Leaders Program* was created.

### Newly Appointed Leaders:

At the start of 2016, there were over 50 newly appointed administrators in their first or second year. Research shows that providing support during this transitional time is essential in order to ensure school leaders' development and success, and as a result we provided a robust professional learning program.

- Mentoring: Assigned mentor, and each pair completed *Predictive Index (PI)* and coaching around its effective use in a mentorship, goal setting and professional learning.
  - The *Predictive Index* is an assessment tool that provides an understanding of leadership skills that can be leveraged and areas of adaptation and growth. This supports differentiation of professional learning for leaders.
- Mentor Coaching Support for Administrators: Created a program designed to provide job embedded support for operational/technical aspects for those in acting vice principal and principal roles.
- Learning sessions offered in key operational and instructional areas:
  - *Finance/Budget*
  - *Human Resources*
  - *Communications*



- *Health & Safety*
- *Safe Schools*
- *Equity*
- *Special Education*
- *Aboriginal Education*
- *School Effectiveness Framework*
- *Student Success*

## Experienced Leaders:

Actively involving experienced administrators in professional learning is essential as individuals move through different stages of the leadership journey. Our leadership review recommended providing administrators opportunities to continue to develop *Personal Leadership Resources (PLR)* and the necessary skills to lead schools.

- Unique partnership with *Rotman Executive Professional Learning* at the University of Toronto. Each module was at full capacity of 45 participants.
  - Modules included: *Difficult Conversations, Managing Change, Integrative Thinking to Problem Solving, Teamwork & Collaboration*. Sessions have included follow up resources created and designed by DDSB administrators to extend the learning.
- ***Leadership Management*** - the OLF states that management “*is an integral part of leadership.*” (OLF p. 5). It is important that all of our administrators receive ongoing training and support in the operational elements of the role.
  - Working with a committee of principals and vice principals who are designing and leading the learning for their colleagues.
  - Elementary and secondary topics related to the operational leadership required for school administrators. Topics to date have included: staffing and how to effectively execute parallel investigations.
- ***Mentoring for Experienced Administrators*** - This is a recognition that mentoring is an effective professional learning tool at all stages of an individual’s career.
  - We began piloting group mentoring sessions on topics such as navigating a unionized environment, and exit and entry plans.
- At each principal meeting, professional learning is provided to assist principals’ development leading the implementation of the Renewed Math Strategy (RMS).

## SIGNIFICANT POINTS IN OUR PROGRESS

### Internal Selection and Promotion Process:

Ensuring equitable access and practices are reflected in our policies and hiring is a key aspect in the DDSB’s *Ensuring Equity* operational goals. A significant recommendation was to update the internal selection and promotion process, and to develop and pilot an external process for principals and vice principals. Our new process offers a more comprehensive approach that includes school visits, reference checks, a written portfolio, an interview and consensus around final decisions made by the Senior Administration team.

- A Selection and Promotion committee was struck in the winter of 2015. The committee was comprised of superintendents, principals, vice principals, system principals, and a hiring manager.
- Best practices from the pre-existing DDSB process and other Boards of Education in Ontario were reviewed.
- Draft internal plans were shared with Administrative Council, with an opportunity for input.
- Communicated with system about the proposed changes to the process, as timelines and requirements.
- Launched Internal Selection and Promotion process in the fall of 2016.
- Preparation sessions to prepare for the process including:
  - **Leadership Prep Groups**, led by experienced administrators in the roles – **Preparing for the Promotion Process**, an overview of the steps, and an opportunity to answer questions
  - **Preparing for the Interview**, where candidates work with experienced administrators to answer practice questions and provide feedback.
  - Individual coaching sessions scheduled with the Leadership Officer and other experienced administrators.

### External Selection Process:

1. External processes from other Boards were also studied to determine beginning steps in formalizing a new process in the DDSB.
2. Need to ensure that we created a process with high standards and expectations in order to attract high caliber applicants.
3. Using the *Predictive Index*, we created a profile for the role of an administrator, using input from a group of strong principals, and superintendents.
4. Created a multi-step selection process for potential candidates, involving the completion of a *Predictive Index*, school visits, portfolio and interview.
5. External Selection process was launched in January 2017.
6. A selection team comprised of superintendents of Operations/Leadership, Employee Relations, a hiring manager, system administrators and school principals.
7. The committee selected candidates to move to the next stage which consisted of a school visit conducted by two superintendents.
8. The successful candidates have been recommended to complete a portfolio and invited to an interview.
9. Final results are expected in mid to late May.

## KEY MEASURES OF IMPACT

The *Leadership Development Department* utilized the book *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough*, by Mark Friedman to regularly review and monitor our strategic plan and our actions with a focus on the following three questions as the framework:

- *How much did we do?*
- *How well did we do it?*
- *Is anyone better off as a result?*

These questions allow the department to precisely assess the work, its impact, and next steps.

The following information are some examples of our measures of impact for the current school year.

### **Aspiring Leaders:**

- Over 140 individuals identified as participating in our *Aspiring Leaders Program* in both our yellow and green track within the last year.
- 30 aspiring leaders attend the inaugural *Racialized & Aboriginal School Leaders* session. 4 of those aspiring leaders are currently moving through the promotion process.

### **Newly Appointed:**

- 100% of the newly appointed leaders in acting roles participated in the Mentor Coaching program.
- Over 100 mentors and mentees are participating in our mentorship program for newly appointed leaders.
- 50 mentors and mentees have completed their Predictive Index surveys and participated in coaching sessions.

### **Experienced:**

- 180 administrators participated in the *Administrator Growth Track* series offered through our partnership with *Rotman*.
- The average rating of the 4 sessions was 6.2/7.
- Participants noted the importance and relevance of the training to the work they lead in schools. The budget has been approved to continue the series next year.
- 185 of 254 administrators have attended the *Leadership Management* sessions.

### **Principal and Vice Principal Selection and Promotion Process:**

- We have had over 65 people come forward to move through the promotion process this year. This number is up from 37 in the previous year.

## **KEY LEARNINGS & ADVICE**

We believe that the DDSB's comprehensive approach to leadership development uses high leverage strategies to grow and enhance the leadership skills of our school leaders and is vital to our continued success in achieving our operational goal to "*identify, support and promote leaders capacity in the DDSB.*" Through continued use of data and feedback, we will remain focused on our intentional, and precise planning to implement effective promotion, professional learning, and

resource development which will support leaders at all levels. Our significant learnings throughout this process will guide us as we continue our efforts.

### Summary of Our Reflections:

- Collect relevant data to identify gaps as a starting point
- Consult with various stakeholders to gather input and different perspectives  
Anchor the leadership initiatives in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*
- Create and implement a comprehensive approach to leadership development
- Ensure that a comprehensive approach to leadership development is a priority in the Board strategic plan and reflected in the operational goals
- Be transparent through the change processes and share information to obtain support from the Board Trustees and the broader community
- Set realistic timelines
- Celebrate the incremental success throughout the process
- Regularly revisit measures of impact to inform future planning

## CASE STUDY: OTTAWA CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARDS

### STRONG DISTRICTS AND THEIR LEADERSHIP: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



# **Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development at the OCS<sub>B</sub>**

## **Leading & Learning Department**



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### **Background**

The OCSB consists of 4,000 employees who directly or indirectly impact the success, spiritual growth and the development of deep learning skills for over 40,000 students.

Building relationships and providing support for people to effectively contribute to the organization's values and mission are key functions of the Leading and Learning Department. This is achieved by facilitating and coordinating the implementation of professional learning opportunities that acknowledge and promote the leadership capacity inherent in everyone.

### **Challenge of Practice**

Considering the many leadership opportunities in our board community, it is fundamental that our recruitment strategies and mentorship programs evolve to support all individuals in pursuit of leadership. Concurrently, all individuals are encouraged to develop personal leadership resources aligned with the Catholic Leadership Framework.

### **Identification**

The OCSB has developed an aspiring leaders program that helps to identify potential candidates for formal leadership roles. Support from current leaders, professional learning sessions and leadership resources inform candidates about professional development and current leadership practices.

The OCSB maintains an eligibility list of candidates who have successfully qualified after completing the assessment process. Recognizing that some candidates may be on the eligibility list for more than a year. These individuals continue to receive professional learning through coaching, mentoring and developing personal leadership resources.

Additionally, OCSB promotes the development of leadership skills for non-teaching staff who aspire to roles of additional responsibility across our board.

### **Creating Conditions of Success**

#### **New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP)**

Board Priorities, Ministry of Education foci and identified educator needs drive the creation of rich professional learning that support new teachers and their mentors. Topics include: pedagogical strategies, assessment practices, deep learning, student success and wellness. The team solicits regular feedback to stay current with the needs of the Mentees and Mentors through surveys and social media. Our communication platforms [OCSB NTIP Website](#), Twitter hashtag #NTIPocsb and NTIP OCSB Google+ Community support on-going communication, discourse, sharing and collaboration.



# Creating Conditions for Success:

## OCSB Leading & Learning Journey



(see **appendix 1** for pathways.)

**Introduction to Leadership** - Leadership Part 1  
Participants are encouraged to consider what it means to lead and how leaders impact others. Open to all board employees.

**Leadership Part 2** - Sessions are designed to provide practical experiences and information about our system from leaders within. Open to board employees who have completed Leadership Part 1.

**Leadership Part 3** - Facilitation skills training. Open to board employees who have completed Leadership Part 2.

**Department Head and Curriculum Leaders** - These sessions consist of a presentation of case studies and sharing effective management/ leadership strategies. Open to all DH and CL in the OCSB.

**Caretaker Professional Learning** - Sessions provide an opportunity for caretakers to learn additional skills or further develop practical leadership skills. Open to all OCSB Custodial Staff.

**\*Deep Learning Certification** - These sessions support participants as they leverage the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning Toolkit and document their collaborative inquiries. Open to teachers who have previously participated in our New Pedagogies for Deep Learning network.

**\* Principal Professional Learning Program** This Program is open to Principals in the OCSB who have served in the role for three or more years. Session include: Leadership -Catholic Leadership Framework, Communication -Challenging Conversations, Principal Leadership in Human Resources, Staffing and Special Education.

**\*Coaching/Facilitation 3.0** - Professional learning sessions designed to support the professional learning needs of our coaching institute facilitators. Participants

**Journey of Discovery: God Among Us** - Sessions include various perspectives on Catholic spirituality and adult faith formation. Open to all board employees

**Office Administrators & Administrative Assistants** - This program provides Administrative Assistants and Office Administrators an opportunity to explore professional learning and networking.

**Educational Assistants Professional Learning** - This program provides the opportunity for educational support staff to develop relationships, to explore and share resources for growth and development.

**Mental Health in Schools** - Through a combination of presentations, group discussions and activities, participants will gain a better understanding of mental health issues.

**Early Childhood Educator Professional Learning** - This program provides ECEs opportunities to develop relationships and skills needed to support their roles,

**Coaching Institute Level 1 & 2** - These interactive sessions focus on the coaching principles of equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis and reciprocity and are aligned with our gospel values, Open to all Staff in a mentoring or coaching role.

**\*Thinking Mathematically** - Using the 4 key areas from the monograph, Making Space for Students to Think Mathematically, educators and administrators will engage in collaborative learning. Open to all K-12 Administrators and Educators

**\*Learning Technology Google Certification** - Following Google's online course model, K-12 participants will learn about the suite of tools and their applications. Open to all OCSB employees.

**\*Introduction to Deep Learning** - Sessions support K-12 educators and administrators as they leverage the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning framework to support deep learning and global competencies. Open to all K-12 OCSB employees=

**\* New additions**

*The Ottawa Catholic School Board's Leading & Learning Journey program is recognized throughout the province for its success in offering all staff professional development and personal growth opportunities. The program reflects, in content and approach, our Gospel values and all sessions are aligned with our Board Priorities. The Leading & Learning Journey program*



*not only supports the development of leaders, it provides an excellent learning opportunity that can support all staff in their personal and professional growth.*

## Leadership Pathway

## Learning Pathway



# Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development at the OCS<sub>B</sub>

## Leading & Learning Department

### Creating Conditions for Success (cont'd.)

#### Wellness Conference for Non-Teaching Staff

A Better Me, A Better You is an annual one day conference for non-teaching staff working both centrally and in our schools. The focus of this popular event offers attendees breakout sessions that relate to wellness and an opportunity to hear an inspirational message from an highly acclaimed keynote speaker.

#### Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS)

#### Partners for Growth

A Google+ Community has been created for the Partners for Growth community to foster collaboration and the sharing of information, ideas and resources. This community supports active communication that fosters a shared sense of camaraderie and learning. Additionally, committee members have been progressive in developing innovative face to face sessions that leverage the mentors to meet the learning needs of this community.

#### Succession Planning

Priorities around succession planning are identified to address the leadership needs across OCSB. Research was conducted to support a gap analysis and needs assessment targeting leadership and succession planning. The results from this comprehensive study have supported our board's recruitment process and professional learning sessions to serve leadership development across OCSB.

## Turning Points/Final Points

A climate fostering learning and change to build capacity in those aspiring to leadership positions is fundamental for the board's continued growth and success. Nurturing the development of professional partnerships and developing a deeper understanding of the Catholic Leadership Framework, with specific emphasis on personal leadership resources, continues to be a goal of our leadership programming. This philosophy has generated interest in the wider staff community which has encouraged the development of leading and learning programs for all staff.

The commitment to offering current programming to individuals from within the board who aspire to leadership positions can have a tremendous impact on the success of the individual's leadership journey. Feedback and suggestions from staff that address leading and learning needs within the board help contribute to the development of professional learning opportunities that support both system learning and leading pathways. This contemporary practice will serve all future leaders in all employee groups across the OCSB.

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# Formal Leadership: Pathways & Professional Growth Information



*Appendix 1 ~ pg. 1 of 2*

## Aspiring Leaders Programs

Pathway 1: Aspiring Leaders for Teachers Applying for Vice-Principal  
Pathway 2: Teachers Currently on the Vice-Principal Eligibility List  
Pathway 3: Aspiring Leaders for Vice-Principals Applying for Principal  
Pathway 4: Vice-Principals currently on the Principal Eligibility List

### Pathway 1:

Teachers interested in Applying for Vice-Principal

- Recruitment meetings are held each September;
- At the beginning of the school year, details regarding the recruitment and information session will be posted electronically on the OCSB staff portal
- Principals will ensure the delivery of the information to staff members;
- Potential candidates, after attending the recruitment and information session, are required to arrange a meeting with the school principal/system supervisor to discuss the level of “readiness” for future leadership opportunities. The *Catholic Leadership Reflection Guide* is the resource used to support this dialogue;
- Principal/system supervisor determines if potential candidate will be recommended for the Aspiring Leaders Program for Teachers to Vice-Principal

### OCSB Requirements for Teachers Applying to Vice-Principal Competition:

- Completion of Ontario Principal’s Course Qualification Program (PQP) Part 1 and 2. Candidates must have part 1 and be enrolled in part 2 to to be granted an interview. Candidates must have part 2 completed prior to being appointed to a vice-principal position. OCSB currently offers PQP 1 and PQP 2 in partnership with the Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario;
- The Catholic Leadership Declaration form for Teachers, completed by the principal/system supervisor, must be submitted for all recommended candidates and forwarded to the Leading & Learning Officer;
- It is highly recommended that teachers applying for the role of vice-principal enrol in the aspiring leaders program to help prepare for the assessment centre process;
- Leadership Portfolio - criteria and information will be shared during session one;
- A minimum of 5 years teaching experience in: at least 2 divisions, Primary, Junior, Intermediate, Senior, and more than one OCSB school is preferred;

- Candidates must have qualification and experience in the division applying for;
- Current pastoral letter;
- Religious Education AQ - Part I and Special Education AQ - Part I;
- Demonstrated expertise in school improvement practices, assessment and evaluation practices, technology skills, and conflict management /communication skills.



## **Formal Leadership: Pathways & Professional Growth Information**

### **Pathway 2:**

Teachers currently on the Vice-Principal Eligibility List

- Designated staff in the board's Leading & Learning department coordinate professional learning opportunities for candidates who have been placed on the vice-principal eligibility list and candidates will have an opportunity to attend Vice-Principal Council meetings;
- Teacher candidates are encouraged to work closely with a Vice-principal mentor throughout the process for continued learning as identified by set learning goals.

### **Pathway 3:**

Aspiring Leaders Program for Vice Principals applying for Principal

- Potential candidates, after attending the recruitment and information session, are required to arrange a meeting with the school principal/system supervisor to discuss the level of "readiness" for future leadership opportunities. The *Catholic Leadership Reflection Guide* is the resource used to support this dialogue;
- Principal/system supervisor determines if potential candidate will be recommended for the Aspiring Leaders for Vice-Principals Applying for Principal;
- Important dates and deadlines are shared at the Recruitment and Information Session;

### **OCSB requirements for applying to the Principal Competition:**

- A minimum of two (2) years experience as vice-principal in the desired panel is preferred;
- Candidate must have qualification and experience in the division applying for;
- Submit the Catholic Leadership Declaration Form for Vice-Principals;
- Upon receipt of the authorized form, candidates will receive confirmation of program enrollment;
- It is recommended that vice-principals applying for the role of principal, enrol in the Aspiring Leaders Program for assessment centre preparation;
- Leadership Portfolio - criteria and information will be shared at the first Aspiring Leaders session/VP council;
- Demonstrated expertise in school improvement practices, assessment and evaluation practices, technology skills, and conflict management /communication skills.

### **Pathway 4:**

Vice Principals currently on the Principal Eligibility List

- Designated staff in the Leading & Learning Department will provide resources to candidates on the Principal Eligibility List that support the transition from vice-principal to principal. Additionally, candidates will have the opportunity to attend professional learning opportunities that support preparation for the Assessment Centre;

- Using Ministry of Education funding from the Board Leadership Development Strategy initiative, release time will be provided to assist the candidate's participation in full day professional learning session
- The Leading & Learning Officer, in consultation with supervisory officers facilitates the enrollment of principal candidates into the program and sends invitations to those candidates;
- The vice-principal candidates on the eligibility list for principal are encouraged to work closely with their principal mentor throughout the process for continued learning as identified by setting learning goals.

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# STRONG DISTRICTS AND THEIR LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

## ONTARIO WIDE RESULTS

### Leading and Teaching in School<sup>22</sup>

*Items of Domain Variables, District Means, District Standard Deviation (SD) Ontario Means, and Ontario SD Based on School Leaders' Ratings*

<i>The extent to which you agree that the following statements accurately describe your school at this time (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4= Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)</i>			<b>Ontario Mean</b>	<b>Ontario SD</b>
<i>The extent to which you agree that the following statements accurately describe your school at this time (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4= Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)</i>				
<b>Academic Press or Emphasis</b>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.74</b>	<b>0.74</b>
a. My staff and I set high standards for academic success.			4.15	0.64
b. Most students respect others who get good grades.			4.06	0.69
c. Students seek extra work so that they can be successful.			2.97	0.87
d. Students try hard to improve on previous work.			3.44	0.76
e. Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the staff and I in my school.			4.09	0.74
<b>Disciplinary Climate</b>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.61</b>	<b>0.97</b>
a. Students start working soon after lessons begin.			3.85	0.72
b. Students are rarely absent except for good reasons.			3.21	1.07
c. Students rarely get into fights.			3.88	1.01
d. There are not many conflicts among students in my school.			3.48	1.07
<b>Teachers' Use of Instructional Time</b>				
Aggregate (all items in scale)			<b>3.59</b>	<b>0.82</b>

<sup>22</sup> This result table reports the current status of each of the variables measured in the *Leading and Teaching Survey* completed by 878 school leaders in Fall 2016.

a. Teachers' classrooms are free from distractions to student learning.			3.40	0.96
b. Teachers minimize time lost due to student lateness and absence.			3.34	0.88
c. Students are on task.			3.78	0.66
d. Conditions in teachers' classes allow for an appropriate pace of instruction.			3.70	0.78
e. Most teachers begin classes promptly.			3.91	0.79
f. Most students are capable of taking charge of their own learning in age-appropriate ways.			3.43	0.88
<b>Classroom Instruction</b>				
Aggregate (all items in scale)			<b>3.44</b>	<b>0.85</b>
a. Teachers' instruction is explicitly guided by the goals that they intend to accomplish with their students.			3.65	0.74
b. Teachers monitor students' progress to make sure that they are actively engaged in meaningful learning.			3.67	0.72
c. Teachers provide prompt, informative feedback to students.			3.48	0.75
d. Student achievement results are carefully analyzed for differentiated instruction.			3.16	0.88
e. Instructional strategies enable students to construct their own knowledge.			3.33	0.78
f. Significant opportunities are provided for students to learn collaboratively.			3.69	0.78
g. Data are used to identify weaknesses in students' academic skills and to develop interventions to remediate or reteach.			3.50	0.83
h. Teachers supplement face-to-face instruction in schools with technology-facilitated assignments reinforcing what has been learned in class.			3.26	0.95
i. All students receive the same quality of instruction.			3.09	1.00
j. Struggling students get the attention they need.			3.36	1.00
k. Resources are allocated to support students with the greater needs.			3.70	0.92
<b>Teacher Trust in Others</b>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.93</b>	<b>0.77</b>

a. Most teachers trust their students to do their best work.			3.74	0.72
b. Most teachers in this school can count on each other for support.			4.27	0.77
c. Most teachers in my school trust me to provide the support they need to do their work well.			4.23	0.67
d. Teachers can count on support from most students' families.			3.50	0.93
<b>Teacher Collective Efficacy</b>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.80</b>	<b>0.80</b>
a. Most of my teachers believe that most of our students come to school ready to learn.			3.59	0.88
b. Most of my teachers are confident they will be able to motivate their students to learn.			3.82	0.73
c. Most of my teachers are able to get through to even the most difficult students.			3.54	0.84
d. Learning in this school is made easier because students feel safe and welcome.			4.17	0.72
e. Most of my teachers truly believe every child can learn			3.89	0.86
<b>Teacher Commitment</b>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.95</b>	<b>0.84</b>
a. Most teachers in my school believe very strongly in the school's values and goals.			4.17	0.74
b. Most of my teachers are willing to devote considerable effort to help accomplish the school's goals.			3.99	0.86
c. Most of my teachers are willing to adapt to changes that are aligned with school goals.			3.78	0.86
d. Most of my teachers are willing to "go the extra mile" to help students.			4.10	0.82
e. Most teachers refine their instructional strategies based on evidence.			3.56	0.90
f. Most teachers volunteer to help their school colleagues when they think they can be useful to them.			4.07	0.84

<b>Safe and Orderly Environment</b>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.99</b>	<b>0.84</b>
a. The learning environment in my school is safe and orderly.			4.27	0.72
b. Teachers in my school make serious efforts to promote an inclusive school.			4.30	0.74
c. My school emphasizes the prevention of youth violence in schools rather than suspensions.			4.22	0.77
d. My school uses threat assessment rather than violence surveys to assess the safety of the school.			3.62	0.99
e. My school provides mental health services for those students who need it.			3.88	1.08
f. School staff, parents and communities work together to promote school safety.			4.01	0.82
<b>Collaborative Cultures and Structures</b>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.65</b>	<b>0.82</b>
a. In my school teachers adjust instruction on the basis of feedback from other colleagues in the school.			3.35	0.86
b. Teachers in my school interact frequently with trusted colleagues outside our school in efforts to improve instructional practices.			3.34	0.92
c. Teachers in my school often challenge one another's beliefs about education.			3.08	0.93
d. Teachers in my school collaborate with one another to develop common assessment tools for measuring students' progress.			3.45	0.94
e. Teachers share instructional strategies that work.			3.90	0.76
f. Teachers and I ensure the collaborative efforts on student data analysis leads to changes in instruction in classrooms.			3.65	0.76
g. Our school celebrates the achievements of staff and students.			4.20	0.72
h. Teachers' conversations are primarily focused on teaching and learning when they meet together for professional learning.			3.83	0.85
i. Teachers in my school have sufficient autonomy to make collaborative decisions about teaching and learning.			4.04	0.68
<b>Organization of Planning and Instructional Time</b>				

Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.61</b>	<b>0.99</b>
a. Teachers in my school have common planning times to discuss teaching and learning.			3.02	1.23
b. Teachers have regular opportunities to meet together for their professional learning.			3.49	1.09
c. The school's timetable maximizes instructional time for students.			4.12	0.83
d. I ensure that there are very few disruptions to student instructional time.			3.81	0.78
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Family Educational Culture</b></p> <p>The extent of your efforts with your staff to engage with parents in each of the following five ways: (1 = <i>Not something we have given much thought to</i>; 2= <i>to a small extent</i>; 3= <i>to some extent</i>; 4= <i>to a large extent</i>; 5 = <i>We have been very successful with almost all parents who would benefit from our efforts</i>)</p>				
Aggregate (All items in scale) <i>Most of my students' parents or guardians</i>			<b>3.64</b>	<b>0.84</b>
a. Help parents to develop high but realistic expectations for their children's success at school and beyond.			3.44	0.86
b. Help parents develop effective forms of communication with their children in the home about their children's academic work at school.			3.43	0.91
c. Encourage parents to participate in school events.			3.93	0.81
d. Help parents to learn how to assist their children's learning at home.			3.50	0.85
e. Encourage parents to discuss their children's progress at school with teachers.			3.89	0.76
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Leadership of the School as a Whole</b></p> <p><i>Please indicate the level of confidence you have in your own ability to effectively enact each of the leadership practices listed below: (1 = not at all confident; to a small extent; to some extent; to a large extent, 5 = very confident)</i></p>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.95</b>	<b>0.76</b>
a. Give staff a sense of overall purpose.			4.23	0.65
b. Help clarify the reasons for your school's improvement initiatives.			4.20	0.66

c. Provide useful assistance to your staff in setting short-term goals for teaching and learning.			3.95	0.72
d. Demonstrate high expectations for your staff's work with students.			4.25	0.69
e. Provide individual support to your teachers to help them improve their instructional practices.			3.81	0.81
f. Encourage your teachers to consider new ideas for their teaching.			4.13	0.73
g. Model a high level of professional practice.			4.45	0.64
h. Develop an atmosphere of caring and trust with your staff.			4.61	0.59
i. Promote leadership development among teachers.			4.16	0.75
j. Identify staff development needs and provide effective professional development accordingly.			3.91	0.75
k. Encourage collaborative work among staff.			4.19	0.72
l. Ensure carefully coordinated participation in decisions about school improvement.			3.93	0.77
m. Engage parents in the school's improvement efforts.			3.22	0.92
n. Build community support for the school's improvement efforts.			3.37	0.95
o. Help staff improve their instructional programs based on student data.			3.84	0.77
p. Ensure creative uses of appropriate technologies to achieve excellence and to maximize teaching and learning opportunities.			3.71	0.83
q. Provide resources to help staff improve their teaching.			4.05	0.68
r. Regularly observe classroom activities.			3.53	0.97
s. Work effectively with your teachers following classroom observation, to help them improve their instruction.			3.43	0.91
t. Create a relationship with your teachers that encourages them to discuss educational issues with you.			4.27	0.71
u. Encourage your teachers to use data effectively to improve their instruction.			3.82	0.76
v. Buffer your teachers from distractions to their instruction.			3.84	0.84

**Strong Districts and Their Leadership Research**  
**Ontario Districts Survey<sup>23</sup>**

*Items of Domain Variables, District Means, District Standard Deviation (SD), Ontario Means, and Ontario SD Based on School Leaders' Ratings*

Features and Items			<b>Ontario Mean</b>	<b>Ontario SD</b>
<i>To what extent do you agree that your school system (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Agree; 4 = Strongly Agree)</i>				
<b>Mission, Vision and Goals for Students</b>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.32</b>	<b>0.64</b>
a. My school system has developed a widely-shared set of beliefs and vision about student learning and well-being that falls within the parameters set by the province.			3.65	0.57
b. My school system's beliefs and vision include a focus on closing achievement gaps.			3.72	0.50
c. My school system's beliefs and vision include a focus on "raising the achievement bar".			3.68	0.53
d. My school system's beliefs and vision include a focus on nurturing student engagement and welfare.			3.57	0.61

<sup>23</sup> This result table reports the current status of each of the variables measured in the *Ontario District Survey* completed by 699 district staff in Ontario, including 36 district leaders in the district in Fall 2016.

e. The elected board has helped to mobilize parents and the wider community in developing and supporting the vision?			2.80	0.77
f. The elected board has helped to mobilize teachers and administrators in developing and supporting the vision.			2.84	0.79
g. My school system's beliefs and vision for students are understood and shared by almost all staff.			2.97	0.74
<b>Coherent Instructional Guidance System</b>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.05</b>	<b>0.74</b>
a. Strongly supports schools' efforts to implement curricula that foster students' deep understandings about "big ideas", as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings.			3.26	0.68
b. Works effectively with schools to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.			3.09	0.71
c. Works effectively with schools to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards.			3.07	0.70
d. Has aligned all elements of school programs and resources (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment, staff, budget).			2.88	0.78
e. Instructional improvement work in my district includes teachers in a majority of schools and assists them in developing sophisticated understandings of powerful instruction for students.			2.95	0.82
<b>Multiple Sources of Evidence</b>				
Aggregate (all items in scale)			<b>2.93</b>	<b>0.77</b>
a. Have efficient information management systems?			2.88	0.77
b. Provide schools with relevant data about their performance?			3.04	0.78
c. Assist schools in using data to improve their performance?			2.97	0.77
d. Create collaborative structures and opportunities for the interpretation of data in schools?			2.87	0.76
e. Call on expertise from outside the school system for help with data interpretation when needed?			2.62	0.84
f. Use appropriate data for accounting to stakeholders?			2.97	0.71
g. Make effective use of existing research to guide policy making and planning?			3.13	0.73



<b>Professional Development for All Members</b> <i>How well do the following statements reflect your board's approach to professional development? (1 = Not at all; 4 = Very well)</i>			
Aggregate (all items in scale)		<b>2.91</b>	<b>0.80</b>
a. Very little time is devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and principals. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional development.		2.85	0.79
b. Most professional development is carefully aligned with board and school improvement initiatives.		3.37	0.68
c. Differentiated professional development opportunities are provided in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.		2.78	0.83
d. Extensive opportunities are provided for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.		2.83	0.83
e. Almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.		3.00	0.80
f. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.		2.64	0.87
g. All system-sponsored professional development is now closely aligned with the best evidence of how people learn.		2.90	0.80
<b>Professional Leadership</b> <i>How well do the following descriptions apply to leadership development in your school district/ system/ board? (1 = Not at all; 4 = Very well)</i>			
Aggregate (All items in scale)		<b>2.89</b>	<b>0.82</b>
a. My district has well-designed and carefully implemented procedures for identifying, recruiting, selecting and appraising school-level leaders.		2.76	0.89
b. My district implements procedures for transferring school-level leaders that does no harm and, whenever possible, adds value to improvement efforts underway in schools.		2.59	0.85
c. My board ensures that the most skilled leaders in the system are placed where they are most needed.		2.68	0.87

d. My board encourages school-level leaders, when useful, to supplement their own capacities with system-level expertise.			2.85	0.81
e. District leaders expect principals to be knowledgeable about the quality of their teachers' instruction. This is a central criterion for selecting school leaders and for their performance appraisal.			3.11	0.76
f. System leaders keep both the community and the central office staff focused on learning and they support principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instruction and ensure			2.95	0.77
g. Most district leaders encourage an instructional focus on the part of school leaders, provide opportunities and resources for improving the instructional leadership skills of school leaders and make this the main focus of their school visits. Instructional leadership is an explicit focus in selection and appraisal practices.			3.05	0.78
h. Our elected board expects the behavior of both system- and school-level leaders to reflect the practices and competences identified in the <i>Ontario Leadership Framework</i> , as well as such other practices as might be deemed critical for local board purposes.			3.17	0.80
<b>Alignment</b>				
<i>Which one of the statements below best captures your district's alignment of:</i>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			% of Ratings Ontario	
a. its financial resources with the support needed to achieve the board's goals for student learning?				
1. No effort has yet been made toward such alignment.			0.6	
2. Unsystematic attempts are being made toward such alignment.			4.3	
3. Such alignment occurs on a project by project basis but does not extend across the board's efforts as a whole.			40.1	
4. My board has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align our budget with the goals we are pursuing for students.			46.8	
b. personnel policies and procedures with the instructional expectations for staff				
1. No effort has yet been made toward such alignment.			2.1	

2. Unsystematic attempts are being made toward such alignment.			9.3	
3. Such alignment occurs on a project by project basis but does not extend across the board's efforts, as a whole.			43.8	
4. My board has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align our personnel policies and procedures with the goals we are pursuing for students.			36.5	
c. structures with the instructional improvement work required of staff				
1. No effort has yet been made toward such alignment.			0.6	
2. Unsystematic attempts are being made toward such alignment.			7.0	
3. Such alignment occurs on a project by project basis but does not extend across the board's efforts as a whole.			47.1	
4. My board has a systematic and ongoing process to continuously align our organizational structures with our staff's instructional improvement work.			37.1	
d. the time and money allocated to professional development with the value of such PD to the district				
1. The board has an ambitious set of goals for improving student learning but has allocated very little time or money for preparing staff to accomplish those goals.			1.9	
2. While some time and money have been allocated for the professional development of leaders and teachers, these resources badly underestimate what will be required if staff are to accomplish the goals established by the district.			27.8	
3. Although still underestimated, there have been recent and significant increases in the time and money allocated to professional development			31.6	
4. Adequate amounts of both the time and money have been allocated for the professional development of both leaders and teachers.			30.5	

<b>Elected Leadership</b>			
<i>How well do the following statements describe the practices of the board's elected officials?</i> (1 = Not at all; 4 = Very well)			
Aggregate (All items in scale)		<b>2.92</b>	<b>0.80</b>
a. Trustees use the board's beliefs and vision for student learning and well-being as the foundation for strategic planning and ongoing board evaluation.		3.03	0.75
b. Trustees focus most policy making on the improvement of student learning and well-being consistent with the beliefs and vision.		3.01	0.77
c. Trustees identify and fund policies and programs that provide rich curricula and engaging forms of instruction for all students and eliminate those that do not.		2.84	0.79
d. Trustees maintain productive relationships with senior staff, school staffs, community stakeholders and provincial education officials.		2.98	0.84
e. Trustees provide systematic orientation opportunities for new members and ongoing training for existing members.		2.74	0.79
f. Individual trustees support and act in accordance with decisions made by the board of trustees, as a whole.		2.99	0.78
g. Almost all trustees avoid becoming involved in school system administration.		2.83	0.87
<b>Organizational Improvement Processes</b>			
<i>How well do the following descriptions capture your school system's approach to improvement?</i> (1 = Not at all; 4 = Very well)			
Aggregate (All items in scale)		<b>2.65</b>	<b>0.83</b>
a. My district pursues only a small number of improvement goals at the same time.		2.66	0.85
b. We usually proceed in manageable stages and use the early stages as learning opportunities.		2.76	0.80
c. My district's approach to improvement is relatively coherent. A small number of key improvement goals are consistently pursued over sustained periods of time.		2.81	0.81

d. Schools are not overloaded with excessive numbers of initiatives.			2.22	0.91
e. Considerable effort is made to build the capacities needed by school staffs for successful school improvement.			2.76	0.82
f. Board improvement efforts typically focus on one portion of the system at a time (e.g., elementary schools then secondary schools; literacy improvement then numeracy improvement) and a schedule is created to ensure improvement in all parts of the school system over the long term.			2.50	0.87
g. Improvement efforts in schools are guided by explicit and well-tested frameworks, policies and practices, as well as widely shared goals that permit local adaptation. All stakeholders have clearly defined roles to play in this approach to school improvement.			2.75	0.78
h. The board integrates new initiatives into existing routines and practices. Established structures and procedures are maintained and built on. Care is taken to ensure continuity and extension of core values.			2.74	0.78
<b>Relationships</b>				
<i>Pick the one statement below which best describes</i>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			% of Ratings Ontario	
<b>Central Office Staff Relations</b> the relationships among staff in your school system's central office				
1. Central office staff work in isolation with only minimal communication and no sense of shared purpose.			2.7	
2. There is no evidence of shared purpose, but there is some connection among some roles and a limited amount of communication, although it is sometimes a bit strained.			24.2	
3. Roles are often interconnected and collaboration is common in response to a shared sense of purpose. Communication among staff is positive and occurs regularly.			47.8	
4. Roles are interconnected, work is undertaken collaboratively in the service of a widely shared set of purposes. Communication among staff is frequent and cordial.			16.3	

<b>District and School Staff Relationships</b> your district's support for networks or professional learning communities (PLCs)			
1. There is little awareness of the need for, or value of, professional networks or communities for either central office or school staffs.		7.3	
2. Networks and professional communities are evident in some schools and central office staff may participate occasionally in their own PLCs, but they are rarely viewed as effective instruments for staff learning or decision making.		8.2	
3. PLCs or networks are established at both school and system levels. While central office staff have come to value participation in their own PLCs or networks, they do not insist on such participation by teachers or administrators in schools.		51.6	
4. Networks and PLCs are well established at both school and system levels and have become the established way of solving problems and taking care of other business.		23.2	
<b>Relationships with Parents</b>			
a. your school system's efforts to help teachers and administrators develop the capacities they need to foster productive parent engagement <i>in the school</i> .			
1. We are expected to figure this out for ourselves.		12.4	
2. My board has provided some help in the past but no such help has been provided in the past year.		10.2	
3. School system staff often talk about the importance of parent engagement in schools but they have provided very limited opportunities for us to develop the knowledge and skills we require to do that part of our jobs better.		48.8	
4. My school system provides us with very helpful opportunities to acquire the insights and skills we need to productively engage our parents in school.		18.9	
b. your district's efforts to help teachers and administrators develop the capacities they need to assist parents in creating <i>conditions in the home</i> which support the success of their children at school.			
1. We are expected to figure this out for ourselves.		6.4	
2. My board has provided some help in the past but no such help has been provided in the past year.		38.6	

3. Central office staff often talk about the importance of helping parents create such conditions in the home but they have provided very limited opportunities for us to develop the knowledge and skills we require to do that part of our jobs better.			38.1	
4. My school system provides us with very helpful opportunities to acquire the insights and skills we need to productively assist our parents in creating conditions at home for supporting the success of their children at school.			7.2	
c. how your district holds schools accountable for productively engaging parents.				
1. My school system makes no effort to hold schools accountable for parent engagement.			6.4	
2. My school system's efforts are limited to occasional encouragement and informal questions from some district staff about what we are doing in my school.			38.6	
3. The performance appraisal of principals in my school system includes assessment of the nature and success of their school's parent engagement strategies.			38.1	
4. In addition to being part of our principal appraisal system, our school system has a formal policy on parent engagement and conducts periodic audits across the schools about the extent to which that policy is being implemented. School staffs and parents are asked for evidence as part of these audits			7.2	
d. How extensive is your school system's efforts - <i>independent of what schools do</i> - to provide programs and other opportunities aimed at helping parents ensure the success of their children at school? (1 = Schools initiate all parent engagement; 4 = System's efforts quite extensive)	0. 5 4		2.47	0.79
<b>Relationships with Local Community Groups</b> the nature of your school system's ties with local community groups				
1. Potential contributions of community groups are unrecognized and these groups have no involvement in the school system.			1.9	
2. Potential contributions of community groups are sporadically recognized, as are consultations with these groups and their involvement in school system decisions.			30.8	

3. Community groups are often recognized for their contribution and support; they are consulted on many decisions affecting the community. School system staff are often members of these groups, themselves.			44.2	
4. Community groups are routinely recognized for their contribution and support and consulted on almost all decisions affecting the community. School system staff are regularly members of these groups themselves.			13.4	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Ministry of Education Relations</b></p> <p><i>To what extent do you agree that the following statements describe your school district's relationship with the Ministry of Education: (1 = Strongly disagree; 4 = Strongly agree)</i></p>				
Aggregate (All items in scale)			<b>3.08</b>	<b>0.76</b>
a. My district communicates regularly with the Ministry, both formally and informally, about board goals and directions;			3.23	0.68
b. My district clarifies with the Ministry how it can be of most help to the board;			3.02	0.72
c. My district encourages Ministry collaboration in achieving board goals and directions;			3.09	0.73
d. My district provides feedback to the Ministry about the relevance of its initiatives to board goals and directions.			3.14	0.76
<i>Which one of the following statements best describes</i>			% of Ratings Ontario	
e. how your school system typically responds to the province's initiatives				
1. Central office staff and some school staff are made aware of new provincial initiatives.			2.6	
2. Central office staff share information about provincial initiatives with principals and principals relay this information to their teaching colleagues.			26.0	
3. Principals are assigned responsibility for implementing provincial initiatives. Procedures are established for schools to gain access to the resources they require for implementation.			32.5	



4. The province's initiatives are awarded priority in the district, systematic analysis of changes required in the district are carried out, and progress toward implementing these initiatives is reported regularly (e.g., at principals' meetings).			28.5	
f. your system's current approach to supplementing government initiatives in order to increase their local impact				
1. There are no clear links between provincial initiatives and activities in schools.			1.6	
2. Personnel are assigned responsibility for implementing provincial initiatives and discussions are held about what implementation might consist of in schools.			37.9	
3. The school allocates the resources (time, money, expertise) required to build the capacities staff need to implement provincial initiatives effectively.			37.9	
4. Problem-solving groups in schools consider how to implement provincial initiatives in order to get the best results for the school and its students.			12.2	
g. your district's attempt to leverage the province's initiatives in the interest of the board's priorities				
1. There has been little or no effort to integrate board and provincial priorities.			1.1	
2. District staff has recently indicated the need for efforts to integrate board and provincial priorities.			16.3	
3. A process is now underway for the first time to determine how to integrate provincial and district priorities.			17.3	
4. The district has a multi-year plan that explicitly integrates provincial and district priorities.			54.8	

### COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

One of the things that struck me most during our day together was the alignment of the work being done on leadership development by the three districts featured during the day and the results of relevant research summarized at the beginning of the session. More specifically, all three districts had been working systematically at their own comprehensive approaches to leadership development for periods ranging from two years to twenty years.

In all three cases, significant attention had been given to recruitment of new school leaders, including “tapping on the shoulder” strategies, opportunities for realistic but low risk leadership experiences, and formal programs for aspiring leaders. Networks were valued sources of leadership development in all three cases. Succession planning was clearly front of mind, especially in those districts with significant numbers of school leaders due to retire.<sup>24</sup> Less evident in the three cases was information about school leader appraisal. There was not much talk about this on the part of others at the session either.

A focus within some leadership development programs was on the operational skills needed to run a school efficiently. Good evidence indicates that such skills on the part of school leaders can contribute as much to student success as skills more typically associated with leadership. And some of the reasons for this not hard to discern. It is virtually impossible to be effective at improving one’s school if school operations and procedures are not effective and if they are carried out in an inefficient manner. Efficient management of operations saves time, which can then be devoted to the more complex leadership tasks likely to move the school forward.

There was considerable discussion about the importance of school leaders and teachers reflecting the cultural diversity of the students and families they serve. This discussion was about the inadequate state of many districts, at present, as well as both the sources of the problem and some possible solutions. Schools and districts serving communities with rapidly increasing diversity will need to be especially intentional about solving this problem during hiring, transfer, and promotion processes. But solving the problem through hiring, promotions and transfers will take a considerable period of time, and this solution will barely scratch the surface of the problem in the short run. There was some agreement that leadership development programs were one of the few levers available to a district to increase the cultural

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<sup>24</sup> For a useful perspective on teachers’ pathways to the principalship, see the recent review by Davis, B., Gooden, M., Bowers, A. (2017). Pathways to the principalship: An event history analysis of the careers of teachers with principal certification, *Review of Educational Research*, 54, 2, 207-240.

competence of their leaders. Cultural competence emerged as a critical focus for the early and ongoing professional development of school leaders.<sup>25</sup>

During the afternoon portion of the module, some preliminary results of the current Strong District research were summarized. Among the 12 school-level variables measured by this study, the impact of many exceeded, by a significant margin, the impact of classroom instruction as it was measured. This result, it was pointed out, is consistent with other recently collected bodies of evidence calling into question my often-quoted assertion to the effect that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as a school-based source of influence on student learning. In fact, evidence from the current Strong District study does support this assertion about leadership. But it does not reflect this assertion about classroom instruction. Many school conditions appear to contribute more to student learning than classroom instruction as it was measured in that study. These more powerful conditions include, for example, Academic Emphasis, Disciplinary Climate, Teacher Trust in Others, Collective Teacher Efficacy and a Safe and Orderly Environment.

If classroom instruction is a less dominant school condition than we have thought for many years, continuing to use the phrase “Instructional Leadership” as a label for effective leadership would seem to be seriously out of date. The growing attraction of the phrase Leadership for Learning is likely a better label to capture our meaning of effective school leadership. Indeed, the OLF is best described as a *Leadership for Learning* model since it rests on a foundation of evidence about whatever leadership capacities and personal leadership resources have been found to influence student learning.

One of the issues that neither the three cases nor our subsequent discussions had time to examine in much detail was the actual content or specific objectives of the leadership experiences and programs we heard described. Most of these programs were connected, one way or another, to OLF practices and/or personal leadership resources. I want to make a connection between such content and the design of the recent Strong District research that was summarized at the end of our session. This research included, as mediating variables between what districts do and what students learn, twelve (12) school conditions, among them the examples mentioned above. These conditions were selected for inclusion in the research because of the substantial amounts of prior research linking them with significant influences on student learning and evidence that they were relatively malleable by school leaders. If they are the leadership-

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<sup>25</sup> A recent synthesis of research on this issue can be found in Khalifa, m., Gooden, M., Davis, J., (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature, Review of Educational Research, 86, 4, 1272-1311.

sensitive conditions in schools with the most powerful effects on students, it follows that learning how to improve the status of those conditions should be a key part of a district's leadership program. The twelve (12) conditions encompass and extend the "domain-specific knowledge" needed by school-level leaders now outlined among the cognitive personal leadership resources of the OLF.

One of the three case districts alluded to its program for Secondary School leadership development. This prompted me to consider how rare it is to see acknowledgement of this distinction in most of the programs for leadership development in the province—or elsewhere—of which I am aware. Yet most people close to the work of elementary and secondary principal know that, while some aspects of the two positions are similar, much of consequence is different. This is part of what I think is a much larger issue in our K-12 culture, the extent to which we undervalue and fail to take advantage of specialized, deep expertise. It is not uncommon for superintendents with secondary school leadership backgrounds to be appointed to supervise elementary schools, for example.

Absent other compelling, mitigating circumstances (and I acknowledge that such circumstances do exist), this does seem to squander the specialized knowledge and skill of these senior leaders. So, arguments about the value of "learning across the panels" need to take into account the value that specialized expertise and experience add to the organization.

### MODULE SIX (APRIL 19<sup>TH</sup>, 2016)

#### COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

##### 1. What new insights do you have as a result of your participation in the Strong Districts and Their Leadership module?

- Updating Durham District School Board's **Strong Districts: A Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development** case study provided an excellent opportunity for us to assess the impact of our implementation and reinforced the need to involve school leaders actively in the capacity building process
- Reviewing the other two case studies highlighted the need for DDSB to extend the reach of our **Leadership Development Program** to ensure that we are connecting with teachers at multiple stages of their careers and not just when they are considering a transition to the vice principal role
- I am interested in further exploring the *Leadership for Learning* model and going deeper on the integration of PLRs and leadership capacities specifically the interplay between instruction, management and creating safe conditions for supported risk taking
- We learned a lot from the sharing sessions from other boards and really enjoyed the opportunity to hear their solutions to common issues. Our biggest takeaway was related to strategies for diversifying our work force / staff and leaders. We also were able to make some new connections and look forward to continuing the sharing and learning from each other.
- The importance of making tacit knowledge about leadership and leadership-development explicit, at all opportunities and with all audiences throughout the system; the importance of longevity in principal ships; the paramount importance of removing tasks that take principals away from student achievement and well-being.
- This was the first module that I attended as a guest to the study.
- Although our board did not participate in the study, I found the day intriguing and was inspired by the collaborative sharing of boards. I found myself reflecting on our current practices and saw strengths and areas requiring further attention. I felt there was great value in focusing on a

particular element and using data to measure its impact. This is an area where I feel we can do more work within my board.

**2. How would you like to see this work and learning continue to be supported?**

- Additional opportunities to talk about the processes behind implementation would be welcomed. The IEL website has such great resources which are very helpful when brainstorming and planning new activities. The learning is even richer when we are able to hear the how and the why behind strategies. Accomplishing this through webinars, conference calls or connecting in person would be appreciated.
- I would like more information on the role of the Principal Appraisal Process in building the capacity of school leaders
- I would appreciate more discussion related to diversifying our principal and vice principal cohort related to challenges such as Regulation 274 and a rapidly changing student demographic
- I would like to see continuation of opportunities for board teams to participate in various Strong Districts learning modules, and various dates and locations throughout next school year.
- I plan to spend time reviewing your website to learn from the work of others. I hope you do continue this work and possibly explore various entry points for different boards.

**3. Comments on your overall satisfaction with the module.**

- There is always learning to be had when teams come together to share. The balance of research, discussion and practical sharing is excellent and gives something for everyone. Venues and diverse geographical locations are also appreciated. Working in smaller groups (e.g., TARO ) was one idea we heard may happen in the future. Thanks for all you do!
- Extremely satisfied
- I and my team of S.O.'s are very satisfied.
- This was a very worthwhile day. I appreciated hearing from other boards and I used the time to network and build alliances for further investigations.

## PRESENTATIONS

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT



#### Introduction



Emphasis on development of school-level leadership



Concerned with the development of both individual leaders and the capacity of the school system



Recruitment and selection, development, appraisal, succession planning and leveraging the existing capacities of your leaders



A brief synopsis of relevant research about each of these processes

## Recruitment and Selection



One of the biggest challenges to recruiting teachers into school leader roles is teachers' perception of principal and vice-principal workload

One implication for school leaders is to focus more publicly, with staff, on what makes the job satisfying



(Leithwood & Azah, 2014).



"Tapping on the shoulder" is an effective approach; being identified as a potential leader is a major contributor to leader development. So too is providing leadership experiences.

(verbal persuasion) (Barber et al, ND, pages 9-12).

3

## Development



On-the-job-learning benefits significantly more from mentoring when properly delivered

(e.g., The Wallace Foundation, 2007).



Professional networks show considerable promise as vehicles for ongoing leadership learning

(Leithwood & Azah, 2016)

4



## Direct Effects of Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development

Language	.30*
Math	.26
Well-being	.00
Engagement	.12

5

**District  
Leadership**



**District  
Characteristics**

**Current study**

.74  
.77  
.73  
.78  
.76  
.55  
.64

Mission, Vision, Goals  
Coherent Inst Program  
Uses of Evidence  
Professional Development  
Alignment  
Organizational Improve Processes  
Relationships

**2010 study**

.50  
.34  
.27  
.39  
.44  
.65  
.49

Current study effects are mostly similar and relatively large

6

## Effects on School Conditions

Teacher commitment	.35*
Teacher trust	.51**
Teacher collective efficacy	.47**
Collaborative culture	.41*

7

## Effects of the four school conditions on multiple student outcomes

Dispositions	Language Achievement	Math Achievement	Well-being	Engagement
Collective Efficacy	.56**	.59**	.28	.32
Trust in others	.60**	.62**	.34*	.36*
Commitment	.46**	.50**	.26	.19
Collaborative Culture	.47**	.48**	.23	.34*

8

# Appraisal



Leadership is more complex and difficult in lower performing and high poverty schools

Implication - rely largely on best available evidence about



Effective leadership practices and personal leadership resources



How well leaders know and accommodate both local challenges and district priorities and



Progress with the implementation of school improvement plans

9

## Appraisal (continued....)

Use of value added student achievement data is indefensible & misguided



At best ---very rough estimates of principals' contributions to students

At worst ----biased against principals in lower performing and/or high-poverty schools



(Fuller & Hollingsworth, 2014)

10

## Good succession plans



Prepared long before leaders anticipated departure



Give other people adequate time to prepare



Are incorporated into school improvement plans



Not about cloning yourself



Based on diagnosis of school needs, existing stage of development and future needs



Clearly linked to leadership standards needed for next stage

(Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Zepeda et al, 2012)

11

## Three strategies for leveraging the existing capacities of your leaders



Reduce the time and effort school leaders have to spend on things that do not contribute to student learning and well-being



To maintain and building leadership for school improvement, avoiding excessive leader turnover is key. Leadership churn is a lot like churn in an investment portfolio—it can cost more than you earn



Help school leaders focus on things that matter most for improving their own schools



Mascall and Leithwood (2010).

Leithwood and Azah (2014).

Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi, (2010)

12

A photograph showing the silhouettes of five people standing in a row, facing each other in a meeting or discussion. They are positioned in front of a large window with a grid pattern. A bright orange circle is superimposed over the center of the image.

Comprehensive  
Approaches to  
Leadership  
Development

**For more information**



**[www.strongdistrictleaders.com](http://www.strongdistrictleaders.com)**

**@ K. Leithwood**

## Correlations explained

-1 \_\_\_\_\_ 0 \_\_\_\_\_ 1

- ▶ 1 = perfect "positive" relationships
- ▶ 0 = no relationships or no effect
- ▶ -1 = perfect "negative" relationship or large effect

(e.g., one added increment of time devoted to instruction in the classroom is associated with one added (+) increment of student achievement)

## Correlations and Effect Sizes

- ▶ Effect size: a statistic for better understanding the results of research using different methods

For example:

- ▶ Correlational research
- ▶ Experimental and quasi experimental research
- ▶ Variants on all of these themes

*When effect sizes are based on correlations, the strength of any causal claim depends on the "theoretical" plausibility of the cause and effect relationship*

## Strong District Study

45 districts

2 surveys

(approximately 1400 to 1200 respondents)

Student outcomes including...

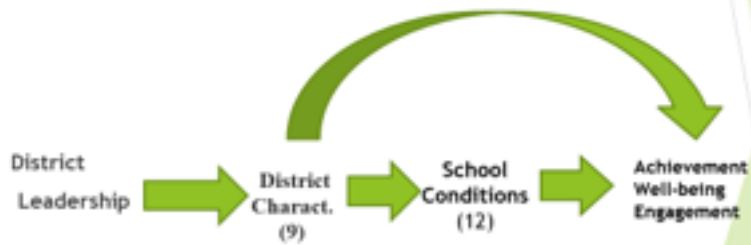
Math and Language achievement  
Well-being  
Engagement

*A Sample of Preliminary  
Results*

Interpreting results for your district as we go along...

- ▶ Open the report of survey data for either your district or the province as a whole
- ▶ Familiarize yourself with the variables measured by the two surveys
- ▶ Locate in the report the mean scores for each of the variables that were measured
- ▶ As I describe the correlations/effect sizes of these variables, note whether the scores for your district reflect the importance of these variables indicated by the correlations/effect sizes

## Study Framework



District Leadership → District Characteristics

- .74 Mission, Vision, Goals
- .77 Coherent Inst Program
- .73 Uses of Evidence
- .78 Professional Development
- .76 Alignment
- .55 Organizational Improvement Processes
- .64 Relationships

*Effects are mostly similar and relatively large*



## District Characteristics

## Achievement

- Vision, mission goals for students
- Coherent instructional guidance
- Use of multiple sources of evidence
- Learning-oriented improvement processes

4 of the 9 district characteristics with largest *direct* effects on math and language (both 2010 and 2016)

*first among equals*

## District Characteristics

## School Conditions

Moderate to large effects (.40 or larger) on ...

- Teacher commitment
- Teacher trust
- Collective teacher efficacy
- Collaborative culture

The same 7 district characteristics had about the same significant effects on all three teacher dispositions (+ or - about .42) *and Collaborative Culture*

- Vision, mission goals
- Coherent instructional guidance
- Use of multiple sources of evidence
- District leadership
- Alignment
- Organizational and planning for instructional time
- Relationships

District Characteristics → School Conditions

Very weak effects (.16 or less)...

- School leadership
- Organization and planning for instruction
- Family educational culture



Leader's influence travels along 4 "paths" to reach students

- Rational path
- Emotional path
- Organizational path
- Family path

*Building on LSA's theory of action*

Leithwood, Sun & Pollock (2017)

**Rational Path** → **Math Achievement**

*Ontario principals vs. (Texas teachers)*

- Classroom instruction = .52 (.02) ???
- Uses of instructional time = .40 (.42)
- Academic press = .69 (.42)
- Disciplinary climate = .53 (.56)

[Texas data are reported in Leithwood & Sun (2016)]

## Emotional Path → Math Achievement

*Ontario principals vs. (Texas teachers)*

- ▶ Teacher commitment = .50 (Texas = .30\*\*)
- ▶ Teacher trust in others = .62 (Texas = .50\*\*)
- ▶ Teacher collective efficacy = .59 (Texas = .52\*\*)

## Organizational Path → Math Achievement

*Ontario principals vs (Texas teachers)*

- ▶ Organization and planning of instructional time = .50 (.24)
- ▶ Safe and orderly environment = .56 (.44)
- ▶ Collaborative culture = .49 (.25)

*Family Path*



*Math achievement*

*Ontario principals vs. (Texas teachers)*

► Family Educational Culture = .38 (.64)

The strongest relationship  
with Math Achievement...

School Leadership = .61

?? → Student well-being

None of the 9 district characteristics

School conditions with significant effects include:

- School leadership .49
- Academic press .56
- Collective teacher efficacy .39
- Teacher trust .36

[See *Strong Districts Working Paper #1* for explanation of how both well-being and engagement were conceptualized and measured]

*a new concept*

## Power Indices

Effect of school condition on student achievement

X

Effect of leadership on school condition

=

An estimate of how much influence leadership is likely to have on students.

Sun & Leithwood (2017)

## The “*big five*” Power Indices using strong district results

#1 Academic Emphasis = .52 (#5 Texas)

#2 Teacher trust in others = .45 (#1 Texas)

#3 Collaborative Structures/ Cultures = .36 (#7 Texas)

#4 Collective teacher efficacy = .35 (#2 Texas)

#5 Classroom instruction = .33 (#10 Texas)

## MODULE SEVEN

### PRODUCTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

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# PRODUCTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

## MODULE DESCRIPTION

This module was on how to nurture productive working relationships with staff and stakeholders.

## INTERNAL DISTRICT AND SCHOOL STAFF

Participants engaged in focused discussion on the most current research around developing relationships at all levels of the organization and with our parent communities. During this module one provocative case study was presented that examined how one district over the course of several years put in place processes to foster positive and trusting relationship at all levels of the organization. The preliminary research findings from the research component of the study were also shared and discussed during our morning session.

The afternoon focused around the personal leadership resources and more specifically the social resources and its emotional intelligence foundations.

The Strong Districts characteristic on developing productive relationships describes leaders who:

- Develop communication systems and processes throughout the district to keep all members informed
- Develop open, accessible and collaborative relationships with principals
- Encourage reciprocal forms of communication with and among schools
- Promote high levels of interaction among school leaders. These interactions should include all school leaders and be driven by a shared sense of responsibility among school leaders for system improvement;
- Create structures to facilitate reciprocal forms of communication. These structures and norms should result in deeply interconnected networks of school and system leaders working together on achieving the system's directions.
- Buffer schools from external distractions to the district's and schools' priorities and goals.

## ADDITIONAL RELATIONSHIP DIMENSIONS AND PRACTICES

Local community groups

- Routinely consult with community groups on decisions affecting the community
- Encourage staff to participate directly in community groups

- Demonstrate the importance the district attaches to its community connections

#### Parents

- Hold schools accountable for developing productive working relationships with parents
- Influence the work of schools toward fostering improved educational cultures in the home environments of their students

#### Ministry of Education

- Develop/maintain high levels of engagement with provincial department/ministry of education
- Engagement with department/ministry is frequently proactive rather than only responsive
- Make flexible, adaptive use of provincial initiatives and frameworks, ensuring that they contribute to, rather than detract from, accomplishing system goals and priorities

## CASE STUDY: NEAR NORTH DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

### PRODUCTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

The Near North District School Board (NNDSB) is located in Northeastern Ontario and currently operates 28 elementary schools, 7 secondary schools, an Adult and Continuing Education Centre and two Alternative Schools within its jurisdiction.

The NNDSB is an English language public school board that also provides, French Immersion and Extended French as well as Native Language programs in some elementary and secondary schools. Secondary schools also offer a diverse range of Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) courses and an International Baccalaureate (IB) program at one of the North Bay secondary schools. In addition, the Board provides alternative, adult and community-based programs.

The boundary of the NNDSB covers the majority of the Parry Sound and Nipissing Districts, along with a small portion of the Muskoka District. The Board's western boundary is the French River. Bordering on Georgian Bay to the east, the Board boundary runs south east around Algonquin Park. The east boundary follows the Quebec border along the Ottawa River. The Board's northern boundary runs across numerous unorganized townships south of Temagami. The area the region covers is approximately 17,020 square km with a perimeter of 958 km.

While the amalgamation of past school boards is 20 years old, the wounds and historical slights remain quite significant with the physical board office and the majority of the population centered in North Bay. Those outside of the city suggest they can sometimes feel as if they are afterthoughts or that the reality of the rural school situation is not clearly understood. How the board office is seen to support these rural schools is of concern to those in the rural areas.

This case study focuses on the decisions made by the executive team to seriously and thoughtfully look into these significant feelings and ask ourselves if we should be addressing relationships in a more purposeful way. In particular, this case study addresses internal system and school relationships, local community groups and teacher federation relationships.

#### Initial Conditions:

The Board has had a number of directors over the past ten years

As well, the Board of Trustees had undergone significant changes with 1/3 new members joining the team in the past election. Two new trustees joined the team due to the passing of one and the retirement of another within the first year of the new director's time.

Upon the hiring of the new director, the Board worked diligently with the executive team to complete the following plans over the past two years. (These planning frameworks had not been updated or implemented in a number of years).\_

- Multi year plan
- Capital plan
- Strategic plan

The Board had just completed two significant accommodation reviews with two new elementary schools opening within a year of each other in both North Bay and Parry Sound.

As with most northern boards, the NNDSB has been hit hard by financial reforms and the imperative need for a capital plan and a significant accommodation reviews in the City of North Bay to address three high schools and three elementary schools.

#### Why this Characteristic?

The trustees asked that conditions for learning and culture be a priority. It was decided that an environmental scan by an outside facilitator be completed in order to start this process of change with the most honest feedback possible. All executive level staff, including trustees, were open to dealing with the feedback honestly.

The Senior Team chose to respond to the observations and recommendations of the scan and focus on the following priorities and premises as outlined in Kenneth Leithwood's Characteristics of High Performing School Systems in Ontario Part 3, 2011:

#### Internal system and school relationships

- Central office roles are interconnected; work is undertaken collaboratively in the service of a widely shared set of purposes. Communication among staff is frequent and cordial.
- School staffs often participate in system decisions, are in frequent contact with central office staff for support and assistance. Central office staff is in schools frequently and know most school staff members by name.

- Networks and professional learning communities are well established at both school and system levels and have become the established way of solving problems and taking care of other business.

Summarized on the following pages are the findings of this scan. (With permission Advent 10 Management)

#### Environmental Scan - Near North DSB

- Mandate
- ✓ Gather confidential stakeholder input regarding perceptions about the current working environment and organizational structure.
- ✓ Solicit perceptions regarding what might be done to work more efficiently and effectively while providing a high level of service delivery to the schools and enhanced outcomes for students.
- Healthy Working & Learning Environments Include:
  - ✓ Genuine two way communication
  - ✓ Fair and consistent treatment for all
  - ✓ Acknowledgement of accomplishments and contributions
  - ✓ Staff work co-operatively with each other
  - ✓ A “Team approach”
- Healthy Working & Learning Environments Include:
  - ✓ Shared goals
  - ✓ Authentic listening and valuing the ideas of others
  - ✓ Clear role definitions and expectations for all
  - ✓ Dialogue which includes praise
  - ✓ People who enjoy being at work

- ✓ Pride in service delivery...doing a good job for clients.

## Lines of Inquiry

1. What is working well now and should not change in our service to our clients in the schools?
2. What would you change if we could to enhance our service delivery?
3. What suggestions do you have for consideration?

- Process Followed

Personal private interviews were conducted:

- Monday September 8, 2015 - Friday January 15, 2016
- With the Superintendents
- With the Chair & Vice Chair
- With Executive Assistants
- With Principals from Representative Schools
- With other Board Office Staff

## STRENGTHS:

### Director's Approach and Initiatives.

There was unanimous agreement that the new Director was removing barriers within the system, improving communication, relationships and staff morale. Monthly meetings with staff after Board Meetings were seen as worthwhile and were appreciated.

### Competent and Skilled Staff.

There was clear consensus that a solid team of professionals with diverse skills to draw upon were employed at Central Office and in the schools. Staff members exhibited a pride in service delivery and believed they extended sincere effort to do the best job possible and were professional at all times with clients.

### Marketing Education and Celebrating Successes.

Most were proud of the communications to the community and to the media that put forward the Board and staff accomplishments and events to the public. Many commented that this is an area of high achievement for the board.

#### Skilled and Hard Working Supervisory Officers and Managers.

There is consensus among the staff that the Supervisory Officers and Managers were well qualified and juggle heavy workloads and multiple conflicting priorities on a daily basis.

#### Change Orientation.

- Many staff members, (both management and union) expressed excitement in the fact that a dialogue has begun on the need for change and that excitement and support is building. They expressed hope that the opportunities that present themselves be realized to bring about positive and constructive change for the better.
- Issues for Resolution
- Culture of the Board
- Lack of Updated Policies & Procedures
- Silos within the Board Office
- Atmosphere in the Board Office
- Governance Model
- Issues for Resolution
- Accountability
- Supervisory Officer Presence in Schools
- Fair and Equitable Treatment for All
- Resistance to Change
- Lack of Strategic Alignment

#### OPPORTUNITIES

##### 1. A NEW SHARED VISION

The Near North District School Board has an opportunity to re-brand itself by engaging in a process to develop a Strategic Plan with a vision for the future.

This process should involve all stakeholders including; students, parents, community members and leaders, trustees and staff in schools and central offices.

## 2. A MORE CARING APPROACH

The opportunity to prove to all clients in the schools and the community that we care in the board office is of critical importance.

## 3. A MORE EFFICIENT SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

The opportunity to right-size the support staff in the Board Office is one of substantial importance.

Each Department should be challenged to look at their service delivery model and come up with ways to be more efficient.

## 4. MORE SUPPORT FOR THINKING AND LEARNING

The opportunity to collaborate with school staff on how to better support the learning process and the development of students into independent thinkers and problem solvers is exciting. The support structure for schools should be looked at with the view to enhance support for schools.

### Recommendation #1 Updating Policies & Procedures

That each Department set as a priority the development of updated policies, procedures and protocols for all current practices.

The focus must be on equitable, fair and consistent treatment for all.

### Recommendation #2 Creating a New Image Through Collaboration

That each Department has an open dialogue and create an action plan to improve the image of their department. Any practices that are not welcoming in their message should be discontinued. A survey of school staff and staff from other departments should solicit suggestions for improvement in this area.

### Recommendation #3 Leadership Imperatives in the Board Office



That open door policies, authentic listening and consideration for the ideas of others be encouraged in order to build trust and a healthy working environment. There has to be clear, timely and consistent communication by all staff and administration.

#### Recommendation # 4 Accountability Structures

That the performance appraisal policy be reviewed by a committee of staff, support staff and administrators. Consistency in the application of the performance standards ensures that the performance of all staff is acknowledged and reviewed in a respectful and professional way.

#### Recommendation # 5 Human Resource Realignment

That the staffing at all levels of each department (and schools) be reviewed with the view to find ways to realign staff strength to support Strategic Plan Initiatives and Improving Student Success.

#### Recommendations # 6 Financial & Material Resource Realignment

That the budget process be streamlined and that the budget be aligned with the new Strategic Plan and initiatives that support this Plan.

#### Recommendation # 7 Strategic Plan Alignment and Term

That the Strategic Plan focus be for an 18 month to 24 month duration to enable timely implementation .

The Strategic Plan should be the basis for any other Plans the board or schools may have to avoid overlap and conflict.

#### Recommendation # 8 Project Teams

That initiatives that fall under the Strategic Plan be placed under the leadership of interested individuals who will chair Project Teams to achieve quick results in an efficient way. Supervisory staff and Managers should delegate the leadership to interested individuals to allow them to develop as leaders and become engaged and invested in the Strategic Initiatives

#### Recommendation # 9 School & Department Plans

That each Superintendent report on a quarterly basis to the Director on the progress made towards achieving milestones set for the initiatives they have put in place to achieve goals set towards the Strategic Plan.

#### Recommendation # 10 Environmental Scan Recommendations

That the recommendations in the Environmental Scan be forwarded to the Executive Council for action and that those deemed appropriate be forwarded to the Strategic Plan Process for consideration.

#### What did you do to improve the condition of this characteristic?

Much work had already been undertaken by the executive team to strengthen existing relationships, but the recommendations allowed for the team to delve into the “how” and “why” and to acknowledge the need to speak honestly and with compassion about leadership journeys. Some of the changes put into effect include:

1. Highlighted work that was done by senior staff through presentations shared with the trustees focusing on the voice of principals, staff and student.
2. Instituted a new format within our public board meetings to bring attention to student achievement and well-being with plaques of recognition to be featured on our web page.
3. The director had instituted board office morning meetings after monthly public board meetings to recap significant information from these meetings and to highlight the interconnectedness of board office staff efforts with schools.
4. All postings be made transparent (unless special circumstances made this impossible, in which case the circumstances were shared with stakeholders).
5. The director instituted a “Director’s Council”- three meetings a year to meet with anyone within the organization who wished to have voice and audience. Participation was voluntary and meeting were held in geographical areas for ease for staff. (Participants included: superintendents, principals, board office staff, student services staff (e.g., O.T) education assistants, teachers and custodians). Meetings were started with: What does the director need to know and address and what are staff concerned and talking about?

6. Director utilized the audience of all principals at principal monthly meetings to present information and set tone, talk about culture, speak to expectations and share information (e.g. the findings of the environmental scan and next steps).
7. Director emails to “All staff” with the desire to help address alignment, speak to changes within the system, open dialogue with all staff (many of whom respond with more questions and insights), and push and welcome dissonance through questions about roles, responsibilities, readings, Truth and Reconciliation ponderings, news items, etc.).
8. Executive meetings changed from one a week to two a month with a stronger focus on breaking down silos, sharing responsibilities and keeping all conversation centered on the multi year plan and core business.
9. Implementation plans were designed as an executive council, completed by staffs via portfolios, and shared with trustees, including ongoing updates has improve the depth of knowledge of trustees of our core work and the workload of senior staff.
10. Meetings with federation presidents three times a year to address concerns and speak frankly about professional collaboration – where are we – how do we improve? Discuss any hot topics with HR superintendent and director.
11. Planned professional development with federation presidents to demonstrate respect for roles and address key combined focus on student achievement.
12. All guidelines vetted by a group of dedicated and interested principals as well as our union reps.
13. Communication protocols were reviewed – who has what information when and how can we improve to demonstrate that our staff need all information first (they shouldn’t receive it as a parent before the channels for staff).
14. Feedback loops built in through principal anonymous surveys and director to principal/staff meetings. All information gathered is shared back out to respondents.
15. Senior staff went out to schools involved in the accommodation review to respond to concerns and outline the ARC process etc. inviting all points of view to be shared with ARC members.

16. Exec council members work with school staffs re: budget, hiring processes, etc. breaking down miscommunications and misrepresentations through face to face meetings – dedication to new sense of availability (e.g. Superintendent of Business meets with principals, staffs and assistants to review fund raising challenges and outline guidelines and regs).
17. Refocus on building leadership amongst all staff centered on a belief of a “spirit of generosity” (Simon Sinick) and non-judgemental conversations.
18. Deep conversations about the work that will take us to the next level with strengthened belief systems of system leaders and alignment of all practices from board office to student desk – utilizing the OLF and coaching.
19. A concentrated effort to remove “noise” for all key stakeholders and hold accountability to defined work.
20. Director met with all First Nations chiefs and education counsellors to ask how we could improve relationships and conditions for all students. Open communication channels are encouraged.
21. First Nations team alongside First Nations partners took part in conversations regarding shared work, addressing how to best prepare and plan for transitions for Anishinabek Education Agreements

This work was started at the same time strike action was taken throughout the province. This provided the senior team with ways of addressing new relationships. This time also afforded the team a focus on how to do our work differently with new levels of accountability.

Many points of the laundry list above were quick wins and allowed the system to see a deep commitment to new processes and invitations for voice. The work though, came through the authenticity and necessity to understand and discuss the value added to this process amongst all staff. Many conversations centered on the importance of voice and honoring the expertise of staff. The executive team had to remind and catch themselves when frustrated or harried about this new stance of learning together and accept truths as presented.

This work is remarkably fulfilling and the feedback that has come forth tells the team they are on the right track. Conversations about change and how to accommodate, and plan for upset within the organization are being had throughout the organization. There is a newfound respect for all of the work and workload

that each team member carries. The streamlining of senior staffs' efforts have been felt by all staff and principals alike as it has created an atmosphere where conversations about student achievement and well-being can now be the real focus.

Staffs, trustees and communities are feeling more valued outside of North Bay recognized by the many comments about optics, visits and meetings that are actively set up and attended, and the many conversations leading to action that have taken place. Staff members continue to express gratitude regarding this new focus and appreciate the sense of comradery. There is a new and deep sense of trust and appreciation for the work that we all do together.

#### What advice would you provide others?

This is work that is necessary for any organization. Starting with an outside agency demonstrated a desire for anonymity and honesty. It was hard to hear about some of the feedback, especially considering how hard everyone was working, but it was necessary to start with this mirror to reflect discussions internal to the team, regarding relationships throughout the organization.

It is important to have an outside person be the facilitator of this initial work if at all possible; particularly if one thinks a culture isn't one of honesty and transparency. If, however, the scan lies with an internal team then explain to the organization "why now," "why this work," "why this focus," "who was chosen to lead the work and why," and "what is expected to be done with the findings, within what timeline."

It must be understood that this is hard work and takes much planning and strategizing. It takes a huge dedication of time and commitment and cannot ever been seen to waver in intent. If one piece of the organizational puzzle falls out of step it will cost the movement forward significantly. To embark on this work is to truly look hard and long at structures, old ways of doing things, and the barriers that are built for ease and speed. Nothing about addressing trust can be done quickly. The team at the top must hold itself to a high state of accountability and demonstrate an openness to hearing criticism about the true health of the organization at all time. Authentic feedback loops must be built in and feedback must be addressed actively - not just collected.

Ensure that all messaging is from this song sheet – every communication must address a transparent "why." For instance, communications to all stakeholders now starts with the preface – "In an effort to address our commitment to excellence in communication we are..." and then an outline as to why the information was sent.

As an executive council make time to talk about this work. Make sure “culture” is on the agenda. Talk to the changes that are being experienced and celebrate them (or question why something isn’t moving). Be prepared to have conversations about the power of vulnerability and unpack what “control” looks like (and what is the worst that can happen if you let it go). One of the phrases the team is starting to explore is **“humility versus hubris.”** The more one starts the conversation surrounding these premises and continues to circle back to them as words and ideas, the more one can have conversations about how difficult it is to remain true to this ideology - but how important.

Not ironically nor a surprise as to timing, these discussions are very much aligning with the board (and Ministry) discussions on professional collaboration (PPM – 159) and establishing collective understandings and expectations.

New relationships with our federation partners have been a priority despite our different roles and responsibilities and ways of interpreting the Collective Agreements. There is a commitment to a shared fundamental belief that all educators work best when respected, heard and allowed to be part of planning. The best environments for learning occur when teachers feel supported and cared for in a system of trust and respect.

Time will define our work and set the true tone and long-standing culture change. For example: how deep are the changes within the culture itself against who is giving lip service and using a hierarchical place of power behind doors, is of concern.

There hasn’t been as much movement on policies as was hoped but a commitment to this has been made. There is much chatter in the organization about how things feel different but also people have raised their expectations about best practices (e.g., I thought if this organization were being transparent you might have done this differently)– a lovely problem to have but for which you need to be prepared. The senior team have also had to “take on” challenging conversations with all staff if they present poor behaviours that don’t fit with a culture of trust and respect, and to really explore the concept of “what your permit you promote”. This is work that is being watched carefully.

To engage in this journey, one must have an open mindset/stance, be willing to set personal feelings aside when feeling attacked, and dig deep when feelings of unease surface. The focus of leadership amongst the senior team, and to principals has been to try to see oneself honestly, and adopt a strong and ethical position on leadership. If one is not willing to hear the harsh criticism then no movement forward will be attained. The greatest achievement right now is to celebrate when our staff at all levels come forward to

express a concern about their own culture of work, and to address it head on. How the team stops, look internally and responds to the criticisms helps define our next level of work.

#### Next Steps:

A lot has been done in a short amount of time but as mentioned above it is important to pay attention to any themes of feedback that indicate dissonance of understanding or places where this culture has not been allowed to flourish.

Not everyone in an organization looks at leadership the same way. There are many who can grow weary of “selling the farm”, “giving away power” or “letting them get what they want”. Continuous conversations need to be had to talk about healthy choices for the organization. The team hold many, many conversations about intent and impact and try to model, as a senior team, what it means to take ownership for transgressions, authentically apology and to acknowledge when an error in judgement has been made.

A need to press forward on how to do portfolio work through this lens remains important. Discussions circle around how to find new ways to break through old, established ways that uphold power structures that don't help build relationships. It can feel as if some portfolios lend themselves to this work easier but that is actually not the case. If this is the organization's fundamental belief then how does the senior team help all within our organization see and experience the benefits; and see themselves as leaders? One will also find that there are some folk who don't want to take part in these types of conversations – they want to be told what to do and when, and actively propel away from this new level of accountability and responsibility. The team must actively address this and decide the fundamental levels of support that are needed in each case.

The discussions that are had at our exec council at this time center on how to actively outline the next level of work that builds on our existing successes and honor the team's learning. A continue focus is to ensure the team's relationships are safe and trustworthy and that we address when the team doesn't actively walk the talk.

It is pleasing to know that through focused efforts the organization is in a new and healthier position regarding relationships because a new reality is requiring a new way of doing business. If these relationships hadn't established some strong fundamentals the organization would not be able to invite the

creativity of problem solving that is necessary and required to address some interesting and significant issues.



# EVALUATION

## MODULE SEVEN (MAY 10<sup>TH</sup>, 2017)

### PRODUCTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

**What new insights do you have as a result of your participation in the Strong Districts and Their Leadership module?**

- How can I ask questions to my staff to dig deeper into how to improve our school district achievement as well as improve relationships with my staff so that I can get to the professional learning piece.
- Reminder of importance of relationships, trust, distributed leaderships. I learned the connections between what we do as a district and the effect it has on schools and student achievement.
- The discussion on relationship building affirmed my experiences.
- I am interested in the work that was done in Near North. It will lead to a new line of questions for Principals and system leads when I am visiting schools.
- I so enjoyed Near North's case study. There were many connections to supporting and developing leaders and many ideas to move forward to improve district work.
- I enjoyed Catherine's session on how to give effective feedback.
- I learned the importance of professional reading and considering ways to engage everyone.
- Parental engagement "getting into their homes". One size fits all does not work with parents and find ways to connect that suit their needs and on topics that are relevant to them.
- I was really interested in the research on teacher perceptions and principal's perceptions.
- I found the final section on emotional intelligence to be very valuable.
- Change is possible. Emotional intelligence is a large part. The involvement of Superintendents and Directors are key and make a difference.
- Case study made the theory real and tangible. It can be done and not just talked about. Actually successfully implemented.

- Coming to the district with a learning stance.
- Reaffirmed for me the importance of relationships, openness and trust. Well-developed EI enhances leadership abilities and relationships.
- What makes something more effective is developing a connection.
- Our board is on the right track with an efficacy review done in the last few years.
- This gave me an opportunity to reflect on my practice and compare it to what others are doing. The case study sharing gave me lots to think about.
- Validated the importance of research underpinnings to build growing relationships (beyond intuition)
- Awesome presentations.

**How would you like to see this work and learning continue to be supported?**

- Continue to add provincial perspective and have other district school boards share their narratives.
- Continue sharing the work from Ken Leithwood and Catherine in the north, especially for administrators in schools.
- Continue to provide research/evidenced-based material (Ontario data) to support systems, schools and individuals.
- More work on Emotional Intelligence and how to improve those skills for leaders.
- So valuable from the district perspective to school administrators and teachers.
- Deal with the practical aspects of growing each condition and how to gage each condition you need to address in your school.
- I would love to hear more accounts of the learning from other districts and the impact this has had on them.
- Senior Administration needs to review the reports and the learning modules.
- This is such important work. We need continued professional development modules on best practices.

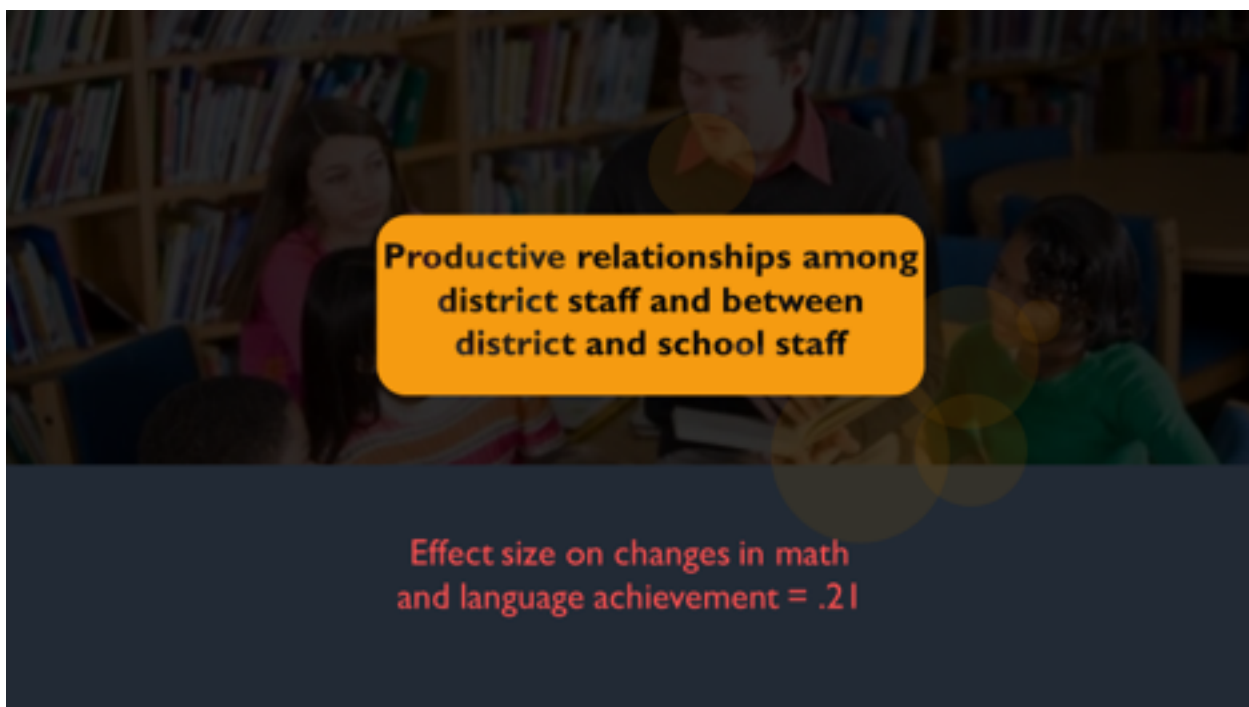
- How do we help build relationships within the organization with people that have difficulty with the social part of the role? Especially when we talk about the importance of them with stakeholders and parents.
- Would like more follow up sessions on how to provide feedback to individuals that would build organizational trust.
- How can we use emotional intelligence information for our recruitment process?
- I would like support on how to build the emotional intelligence capacities.
- I would like to ask even more questions on the case studies provided.
- Ongoing opportunities to hear about other districts and how they brought about change in their organization.
- There was so much learning here that can be weaved into the practices at my board
- It would be a great opportunity to embark in this work again next year at the same time.
- Looking forward to getting the summary notes and feedback from the session.
- I would like to see the “conditions” Leithwood discusses expanded on.
- I hope Strong Districts and their leadership will continue to be supported. The “hub” is helpful.
- Continue communicating with boards by diving into the research and help us build these networks
- Develop a graphic similar to the OLF but with criteria of effective districts.
- Continue to cultivate relationship building and learning at all levels (Senior Administration, Principal, and Teacher. Student.

#### **Comments on the overall satisfaction with the module**

- Very informative and engaging workshop that was well thought out and well presented. Thank you (7 times)
- I am looking forward to how I will continue to incorporate this work into my practice.

- Great opportunity for discussion with my colleagues from my board. I also like the fact that Directors, Superintendents, Principals and coordinators were sitting in the room.
- Interesting and thought provoking and I am excited to go back and share this with our administration group.
- Great to see this learning be mirrored at the SOQP course.
- Inspired my thinking of changes to my practice and a reminder to review certain issues.
- It was a great balance of learning from the data to real life and how we can apply it to various leadership roles. I valued the audience participation.
- Was so well organized and the opportunity to review research and have discussion
- We would appreciate having another session in the north
- A great reminder on the Ontario Leadership framework and the personal leadership resources and I would like more sessions on how to enhance the personal leadership resources.
- The time flew by and I was so engaged in the learning with others. The table talk was rich and offered a perspective from across the province.
- Very impressive information and a great day.

## PRESENTATION



## A From Strong Districts...

- 1 Central office roles are interconnected, work is undertaken collaboratively in the service of a widely shared set of purposes.
- 2 Communication among staff is frequent and cordial.
- 3 School staffs often participate in system decisions, are in frequent contact with central office staff for support and assistance.

3

## A From Strong Districts...

- 4 Central office staff are in schools frequently and know most school staff members by name.
- 5 Networks and PLCs are well established at both school and system levels and have become the established way of solving problems and taking care of other business.

4

## Good relationships.... A ubiquitous quality of effective leadership --

Leadership research from 1940s to 1960s: **all about tasks and relationships**

More recently: **Leader member exchange theory (LMX), Transformational leadership theory**

5

## Social Resources: A Key to developing good relationships



Perceiving  
emotions



Managing  
emotions



Acting in an  
emotionally  
appropriate way

(Ontario Leadership Framework)

6

## Emotions

### Perceiving Emotions



Able to recognize own emotional responses and their effects on others

Able to discern the emotional responses of others

### Managing emotions



Understand reasons for own emotional responses and reflect on consequences

Able to persuade others to be more reflective about their own "intuitive" emotional responses and their consequences

### Acting in an emotionally appropriate way



Able to control which emotions guide their actions

Able to assist others to act on emotions most likely to serve their interests

7

## in addition....

Evidence indicates that leaders' moods or displays of emotion are contagious.

They "rub off" on those around them.

Positive leader emotions have a significant influence on both the mood and the performance of their colleagues

From: Kafetsios, K., Athanasiadou, M., Dimou, N. (2014). Leaders' and subordinates' attachment orientations, emotion regulation capabilities and affect at work: A multilevel analysis, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25, 512-527.

8



## Productive Relationships with Parents

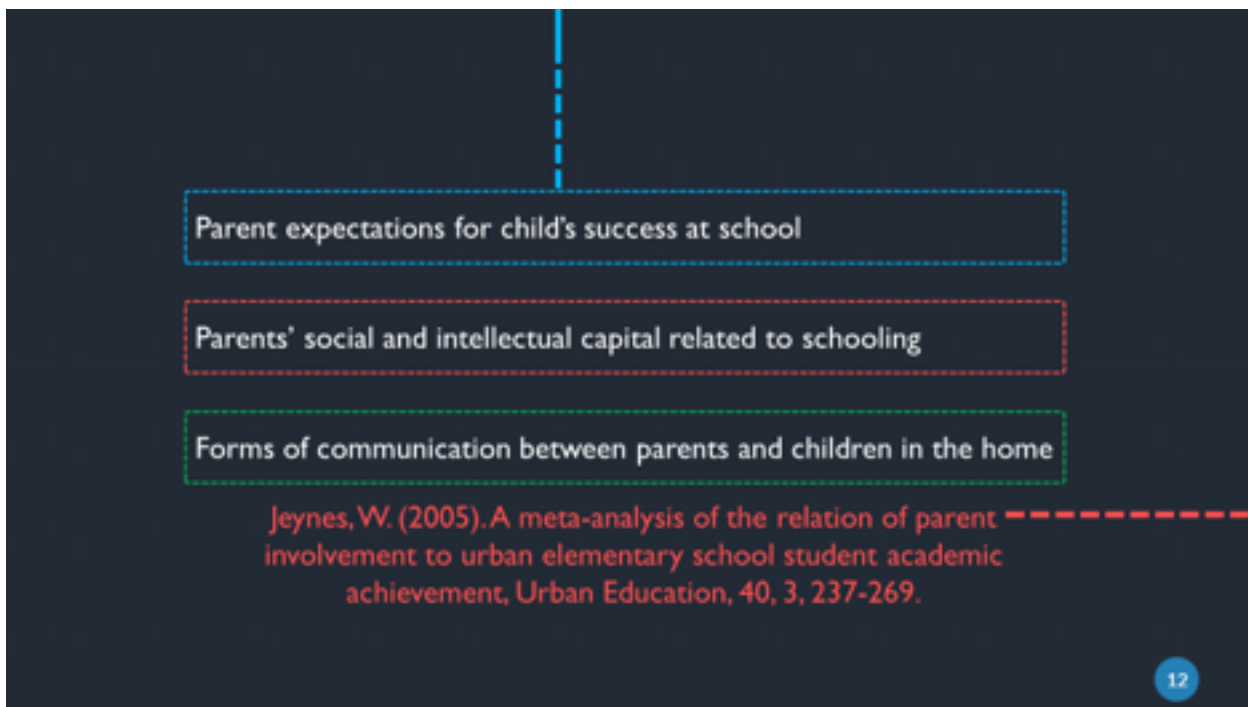
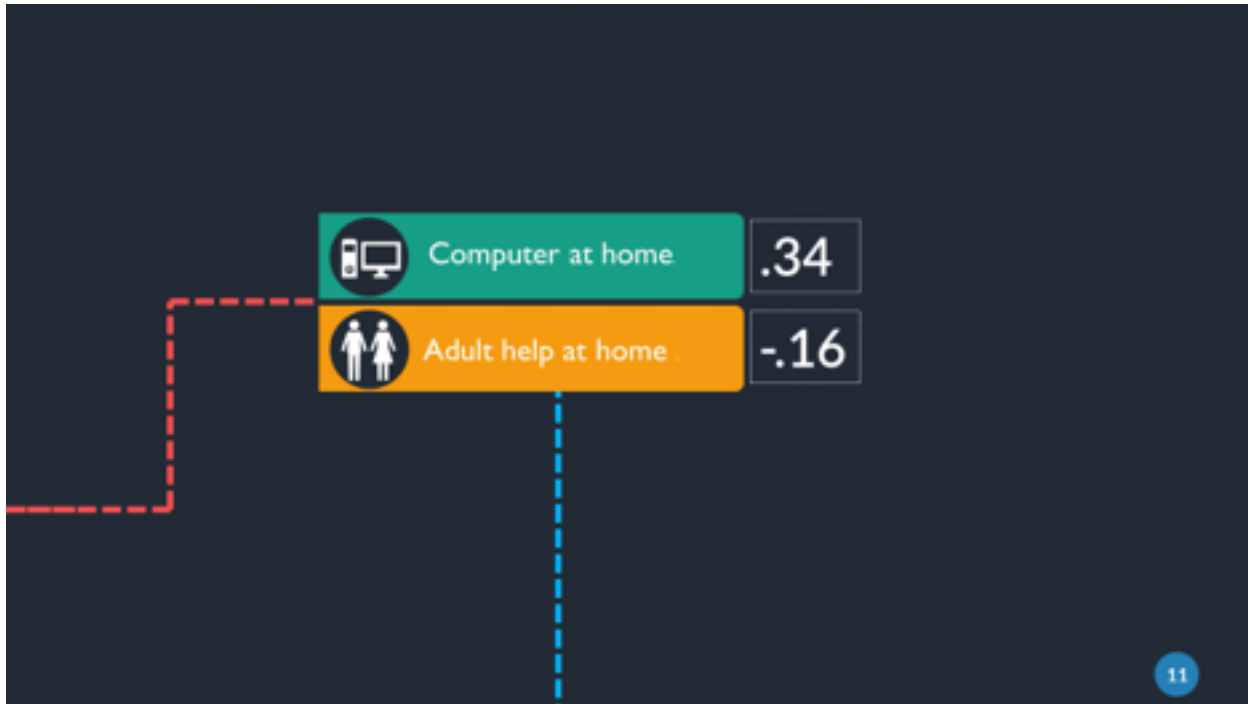
Effect size on change in language and math achievement over 5 years =  
.26 to .37

## Total Effects on math and language achievement (LSA data)

Of the total of 43% explained variation as a whole...



Leithwood, K., Patten, S., Jantzi, D.  
(2010). Testing a conception of how  
school leadership influences student  
learning, *Educational Administration  
Quarterly*, 46 (5) 671 -706



## For example, the Ontario Directors' Parent Engagement Project

Leithwood, K., Patrician, P. (2015)  
Changing the educational culture of the home to increase student success at school,  
*Societies*, 5, 3, 665-685.

13

## The districts

1  
Greater Essex County  
District School Board

2  
Durham  
District School Board

3  
Hamilton-Wentworth  
District School Board



4  
Superior Greenstone  
District School Board

5  
Limestone  
District School Board

6  
York Region  
District School Board

7  
Waterloo Region  
District School Board

14

## 7 Lessons for districts

Engaging parents is hard and different work for school staffs

The duration of engagement is less important than the intensity and focus of engagement

Plan for lots of time at the outset to build trust

Expect the implementation process to be dynamic and to demand considerable flexibility on the part of staff

A handful of meetings with parents won't do the job

Engaging the parents of secondary school students is very different than engaging the parents of elementary school students

First Nations parents are highly motivated to increase their capacities to help their children be successful at school.


15

Can you change the word First Nations to Indigenous

As leaders let's engage in authentic and engaged learning and collaboration aimed at this common goal.



16



Productive working  
relationships with  
staff and other  
stakeholders

**For more information please go to**



**[www.strongdistrictleaders.com](http://www.strongdistrictleaders.com)**

## MODULE EIGHT

### A POLICY ORIENTATED BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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# A POLICY ORIENTED BOARD OF TRUSTEES

## MODULE DESCRIPTION

The focus of this module was to emphasize that Growth in student achievement and well-being is encouraged when elected boards of trustees focus most of their attention onboard policy and concern themselves with ensuring the district mission and vision drive the district's improvement efforts.

During this module, we adopted a different approach. Dr. Kenneth Leithwood shared the most recent research on effective governance.

Strong Districts and their leadership dimension on effective governance with trustees define this as a board who

- Develop policies and support staff decisions aimed at providing rich curricula and engaging forms of instruction for all students and eliminating those that do not.
- Contribute to the development of productive relationships with and among senior staff, school staffs, community stakeholders and provincial education officials.
- Provide systematic orientation opportunities for new members and ongoing training for existing members.
- Develop and sustain productive working relationships among members of the elected board.
- Respect the role of director and senior staff in their responsibilities for school system administration.
- Hold the director accountable for improving teaching and learning in the school system.
- Hold its individual members accountable for supporting decisions of the board, as a whole, once those decisions have been made.

A panel of Directors of Education was put together to share their approaches to effective governance. These Directors led boards from differing sizes, demographics and geographic locations and a shared a diverse range of approaches.

Panel participants were individually asked a series of questions on

- How their board of trustees focused on strategic planning and ensuring the mission and vision for student achievement and well- being drive the district's improvement efforts.

- How their Board of trustees help to create productive relationships in engaging an engaging, supportive climate of excellence.
- How boards of trustees hold the director accountable for improving the teaching and learning in the system.
- How Board members respect decisions reached by the board as a whole.

The afternoon session engaged boards in a discussion with their board team on their board's results. In addition, preliminary results of the research phase of the strong districts and their leadership project was shared and discussed.



# AGENDA

1. Objectives
  - To identify those characteristics of elected boards of education that the best available evidence links with improvements in student achievement and well-being.
  - To learn more about how other senior leaders are working to develop those characteristics with their trustees.
  - To increase awareness of the challenges and opportunities arising in working with a policy-oriented board of trustees.
2. Introduction and overview of Strong Districts and Their Leadership Project ( Catherine McCullough )
3. Review of research ( Ken Leithwood ) ( Appendix A )
4. Panel Presentation and discussion – Governance experiences and perspectives

Facilitator (Laura Elliot – Director of Education, Thames Valley District School Board)

## Panel Presenters:

Erin Kelly ( Director of Education, Greater Essex County District School Board ) Dan Parr ( Director of Education, St. Clair Catholic District School Board ) Brenda Blancher ( Director of Education, Grand Erie District School Board ) Jim Costello ( Director of Education, Lambton Kent District School Board )

5. Summary of highlights and insights ( Ken Leithwood)
6. Lunch
7. Preliminary results of the current Strong Districts research project – Board Teams
8. Closing Remarks
9. Evaluation

## EVALUATION

### MODULE EIGHT (MAY 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2017)

#### POLICY ORIENTED BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**What new insights have you had as a result of your participation in the Strong Districts and Their Leadership module?**

- All the information shared gives pause for reflection on current practices. The encouragement to share across districts through this project has increased collaboration overall.
- Ken is always a wealth of information. His synthesis of current research regarding strong districts was informative. I learned the importance of bridging and bonding. (7 times)
- Reaffirmed the importance of relationships, communication and trust.
- The panel discussion gave practical tips and experiences. The perspectives were excellent and I got some great ideas. (7 times)
- The 5 Power Indices and doing a few things well. Does this need to be communicated to the EDU Well Being Advisory Committee?
- New insight into Board governance and board leadership practices.
- Broadening the concept of Leadership for Learning to include: Instructional Leadership, Leadership management and the Personal Leadership Resources.
- Enjoyed the kitchen and the dining room analogy in the role of trustees and senior admin working together.
- Good reminder that school conditions impact learning outcomes.
- Common challenges in dealing with trustees.
- Results and how they were shared and the application and relevance to our work.
- It was so helpful to be exposed to the most recent research and I appreciated the sharing from my fellow Directors.
- Connections to the Operational Plan were emphasized and the importance of academic press.

- Disconcerting that the efforts of senior administration do not have a significant effect on Principal leadership.
- Relationship with the board of trustees highlighted the need for positive relationships and the need to maintain this
- Board and governance best practices were excellent.
- The importance of strong academic press for all students should be a priority ( 4 times)

**How would you like to see this work and learning continue to be supported?**

- We need further explanation and learning on the school conditions and the district conditions.
- Moving forward highlight boards and schools that have had success with the concept of “academic press”
- Modules for new S.O’s and Directors to emphasize the supports and structures to move the conversations from the kitchen back to the dining room. (What good governance should look like)
- Strong Districts work assists us with planning and next steps. We need more of these learning modules. ( 5 times)
- We need more direct work with the Ministry on Bill 177 with trustees.
- Incorporate this more directly in to the new SO and Director mentoring program and SOQP. With the significant turnover of senior leadership across the province, these modules are necessary (6 times)
- I would appreciate hearing from other regions across the province
- Would like to drill down deeper into the perceptions of our administrators with respect to their responses on the surveys.
- Enjoyed the learning by repetitive.
- Posting resources on the website. Annual conference (possibly include other membership/ stakeholders)

- Continue the work in the modules that has been done and go deeper. Don't move away from it and please continue what has been started as we need these networks of learning. ( 5 times)
- We need to be re-grouped to have a preview of the final report and the results. (3 times)
- Looking at practices in a different way helps us to drive change.
- Promotion of equity and support for leadership from racialized backgrounds
- Is the messaging about trustees today getting back to the trustees in a coherent and organized way. How do you intend to bring these modules to trustees. ( 3 times)
- Comments by Australian Delegation in attendance: The strong districts module provided for us clear, researched based professional learning from the boards of Ontario. We could see evidence of strong alignment for the boards across the province. We would like for this work to come to Australia.

We enjoyed that it was deeply embedded in research.

#### **Comments on your satisfaction with the module**

- An excellent day with important information, research and presentations ( 4 times)
- Appreciated the Directors panel and the opportunity to network with system leaders from across the province ( 7 times)
- We love it and thank you ( 6 times )

# PRESENTATION



## A selective sample of the empirical evidence



Local school boards under review: Their role and effectiveness in relation to student achievement (Land, 2003)



The role of school board social capital in district governance: effects on financial and academic outcomes (Saatcioglu et al, 2011)



Characteristics of High Performing School Systems In Ontario (Leithwood, 2011 & 2017)



Effective board leadership: Factors associated with student achievement (Johnson, 2013)

## From Land (2002)

A review of  
both  
“expert”  
and  
“empirical  
sources

“although increasing attention is being given to the school board’s influence on student achievement, limited research exists to substantiate the importance of this role and provide guidance to school boards regarding how to perform this role effectively (p. 249)



3

## Broad guidelines (Land, 2003)



Establishing a vision for  
educational excellence



Providing the resources  
and structures  
necessary to achieve  
the vision



Advocating for this vision  
inside and outside the system



Holding programs and  
people accountable for  
for success.

4

## Key challenges for boards



Policy not  
administration



Effective and  
efficient policy  
procedures



Relationships  
with senior staff,  
especially  
director



Honoring the  
community's  
voice



Aligning  
budgets with  
visions/strategic  
plans

5

## Strong Districts and their Leaders (2011 & 2017)

**A reminder about the 2 studies:**

49 districts (2011), 43 districts (2017)

surveys (2) of district leaders and school leaders

EQAO achievement in math, reading and writing (and more in 2017)

three in-depth case studies (2011 only)

6

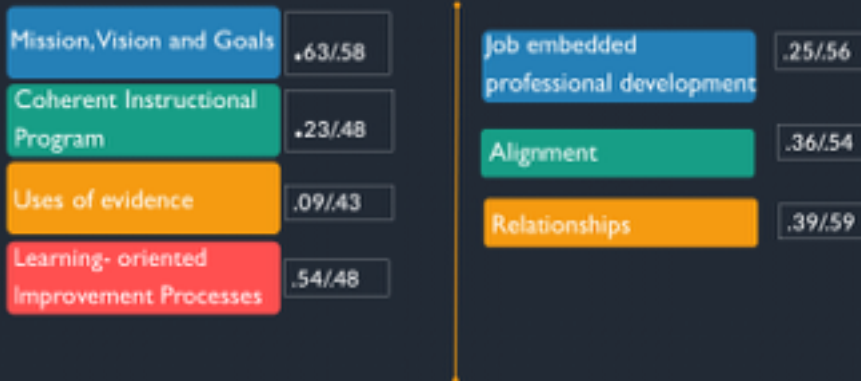
## Identified 9 Practices of an Effective Elected Board

Steps involved in zeroing in on these 9...

- 1 Began with land (2002)
- 2 Deepened and refined with evidence from the three in-depth cases
- 3 Replicated empirical tests using the surveys and student achievement data

7

## Elected Leadership Effects On Characteristics of Strong Districts (2011 / 2017)



8



## Effective board practices



Use the district's beliefs and vision for student learning and well-being as the foundation for strategic planning and ongoing system evaluation;



Focus most policy making on the improvement of student learning and well-being consistent with the system's mission and vision;



Develop policies and support staff decisions aimed at providing rich curricula and engaging forms of instruction for all students and eliminating those that do not.

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## effective board practices (cont.)



Contribute to the development of productive relationships with and among senior staff, school staffs, community stakeholders and provincial education officials ;



Provide systematic orientation opportunities for new members and ongoing training for existing members;



Develop and sustain productive working relationships among members of the elected board (bonding vs. bridging);

10

## effective board practices (cont.)



Respect the role of director and senior staff in their responsibilities for school system administration;



Hold the director accountable for improving teaching and learning in the school system;



Hold its individual members accountable for supporting decisions of the board, as a whole, once those decisions have been made.

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### Saatcioglu et al (2011) *Effects of School Board Social Capital on Financial and Academic Outcomes*



175 districts in Pennsylvania



Surveys of board chairs (re bonding & bridging)



State achievement data over two years



Current expenditures per average daily membership

12

## Acquiring social capital through.....



Establishing cooperative internal relationships

--"Bonding"--



Interacting with diverse outside group

--"Bridging"--

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### Bonding



Tight-knit connections which foster trust, cooperation, and mutuality among members. Enables agility and harmonious functioning for all members.

--Hindered by--

Competing interests  
Using role for career advancement

### Bridging



Weak external connections providing access to feedback, innovation, resources and support

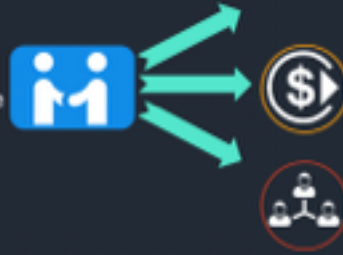
--hindered by--

Isolation  
The big board problem  
("we have nothing to learn from others")

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## Bonding results (shared vision, information exchange, trust)

- 1 Bonding appears to have larger effects on both achievement and finances than bridging. But cannot neglect external ties.
- 2 Lack of opportunism and a common sense of purpose are linked to improved expenditures for students
- 3 Largest effect on achievement are from trust



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## Bridging results (formal and informal ties)

- 1 Informal bridging has larger effects on finances (about 22%) and on reading achievement (about 40%) than formal bridging.
- 2 Effects of information exchange barely significant



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## In sum, important factors for improving achievement...



Informal ties to external groups



Lack of opportunism (due to higher trust)



High levels of information exchange



Common sense of district goals

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## Johnson (2013) *Effective board leadership practices*



Latest of the very few studies linking elected board practices with student achievement  
34 boards in Ohio



Trustee ratings of district practices associated with district performance on state achievement tests.



12 specific practices identified from review reduced to 6 underlying practices

18

## 6 “underlying” board leadership practices



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A Policy-oriented  
Board of Trustees

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@ K. Leithwood



## SUMMARY OF RESULTS: STRONG DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)

The survey was administered June 2017 after the Strong District PD Modules. There were five short questions and a total of 74 respondents with complete responses to the questions. Simple descriptive statistics (percentages and weighted means) were used to present the summary of results as shown in the graphs and table below.

Figure 1: Strong District PD Modules Attended

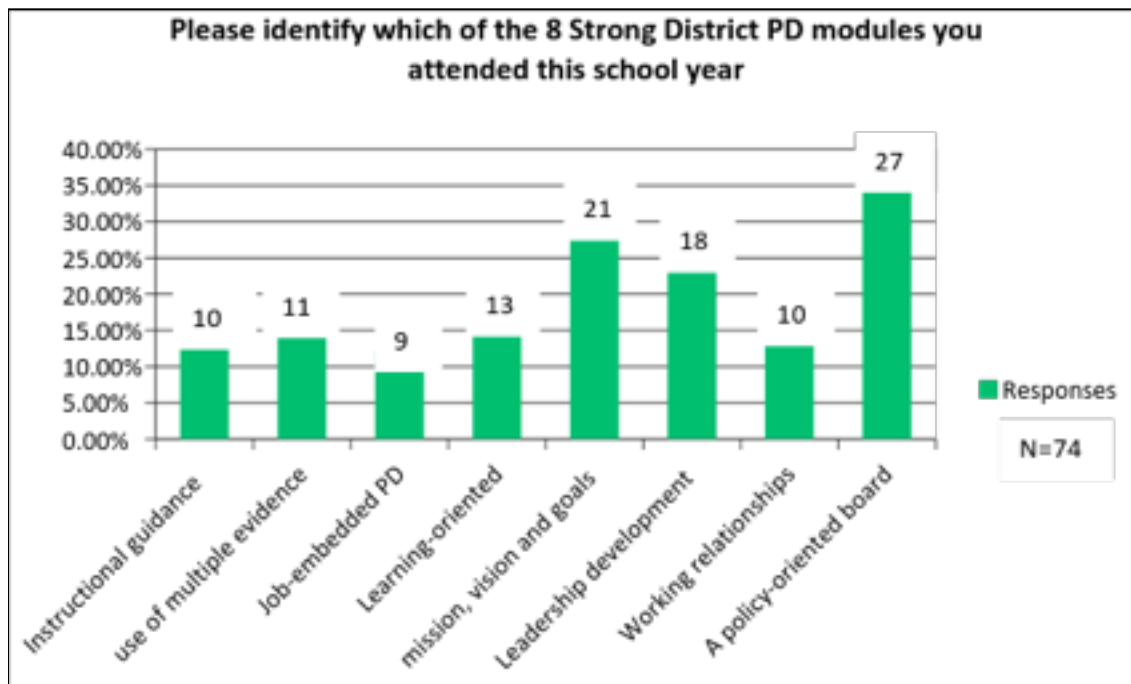
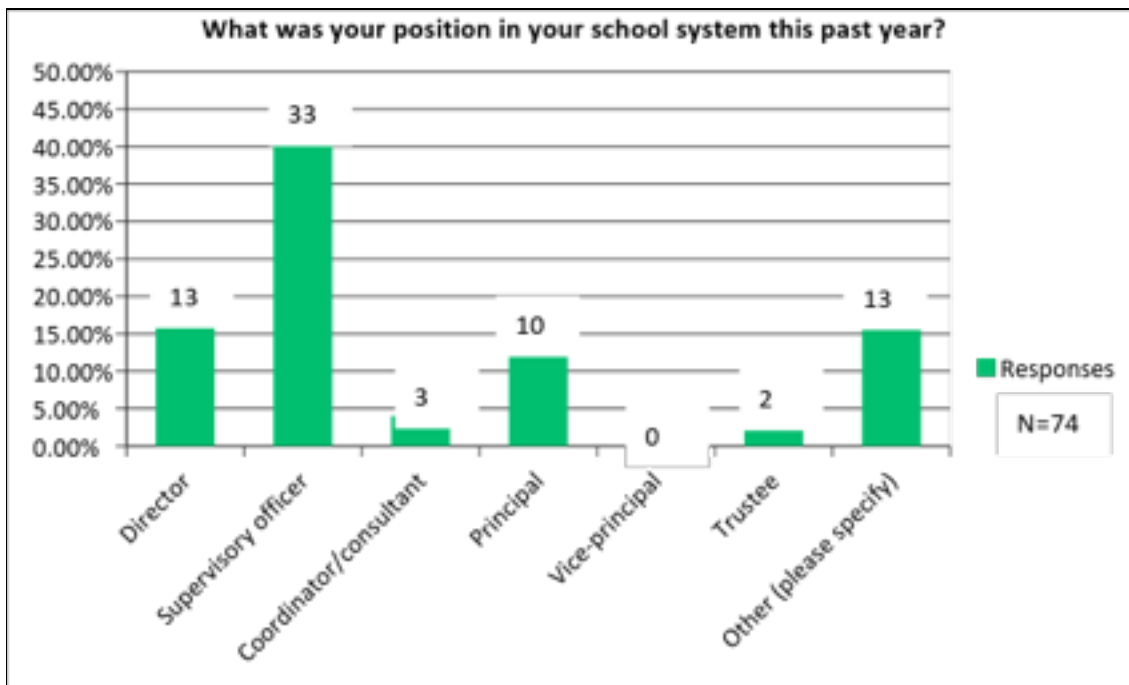


Figure 1 illustrates that the most attended module was the Policy oriented board of trustees' session (35.90%), followed by the Broadly shared mission, visions and goals session (28.38%) and the Comprehensive approach to leadership development session (24.32%). The least attended session according to those who participated in the survey was the job-embedded PD for all members (12.16%). Less than 20% of the participants attended each of the other four sessions; learning oriented organizational improvement processes (17.57%), Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence (14.86%), Coherent instructional guidance (13.51%), Productive working relationships with staff and other stakeholders (13.51%).

Figure 2: Position in School System



As can be seen in Figure 2, majority of the participants in the Strong District Modules who participated in the survey were supervisory officers followed by directors and then principals. Less than 5 respondents identified with the Central Coordinator/consultant role (3) as well as the Trustee role (2). Of the 74 respondents to this question, 13 identified with various roles including: Executive Officer, Governance and Board Services, OPC consultant, SEF lead/admin, Professional Association representative (3), System principal (3), Arts Specialist, Executive Director, Central Student Success Lead and research. Given the recent changes in senior administrators in the province it was not surprising that the majority of those participating in the modules were supervisory officers and directors of education.

Figure 3: Modules Contributions



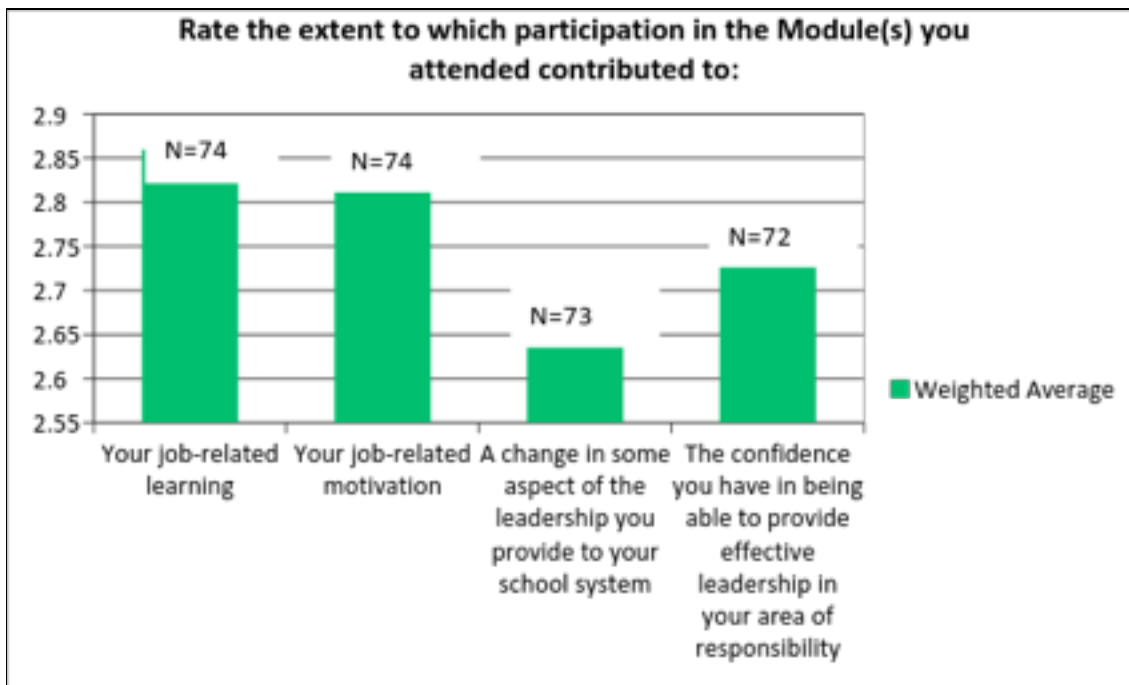
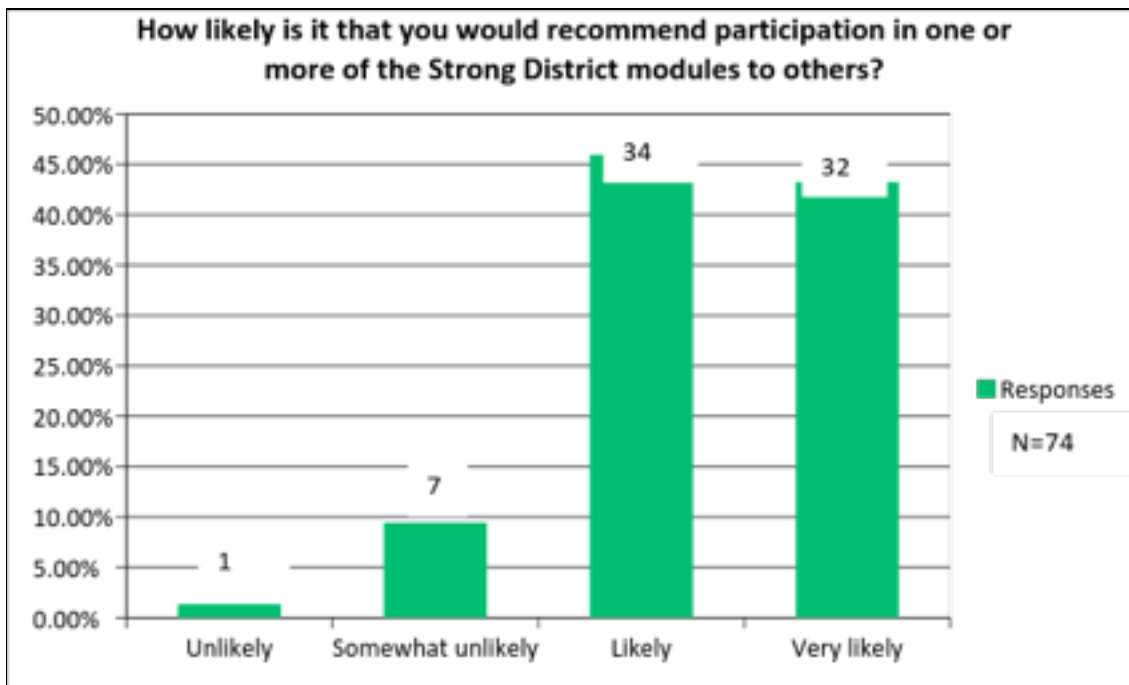


Figure 3 shows, on average, participants rated each of the items above 2.0 implying that the majority of them felt that the Module(s) contributed to some extent, to a large extent and to a very large extent to their job-related learning, motivation, change in leadership and their confidence to provide effective leadership in their positions. The contributions to their job-related learning and job-related motivation were rated highest (2.86 and 2.84 respectively) closely followed by confidence to provide effective leadership (2.75) and then change in leadership (2.67).

Figure 4: Recommendation Possibilities for participation in the Strong District Modules



Of the 74 people who responded to this question, 89 percent (66) said they will likely or very likely recommend the participation in one or more of the Strong District Modules (see Figure 4). Only about 10% (8) respondents said it will be unlikely or somewhat unlikely for them to recommend participation in the Modules. The overwhelming positive response to this questions shows the significance of the module(s) on the participants.

Table 1: Other Comments

No.	Other Comments	# of respondents
1.	<p>Networking opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Opportunity to connect with other educational partners and colleagues,</li> <li>-Opportunities to connect with others in same role,</li> <li>-Leadership networking and knowledge exchange opportunities,</li> <li>-Exceptional learning and excellent opportunity to collaborate with colleagues across the region/province</li> </ul>	6
	<p>Importance of the Modules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Valuable</li> <li>-Outstanding PD</li> <li>-Powerful learning opportunities</li> <li>-Ground-breaking information that will take Ontario to the next level -Necessary sessions given the recent changes in the province</li> </ul>	5
	<p>Research and practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Found research very interesting</li> <li>-Great to have the balance between research and practice</li> <li>-Excellent professional learning based on research, best practices and dialogue among boards</li> <li>- Loved the format combining Leithwood's statistical support and board's examples of possible practice</li> <li>- The link and research was shared with the entire senior team to influence next steps within the district</li> </ul>	5
	<p>Suggestions for future sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sessions were informative and engaging but need more during the afternoon session</li> <li>-Needs opportunities to dig deeper into local level data</li> <li>- More opportunities to interact with teams from other boards will be appreciated</li> <li>-Enjoyed sessions in Thunder Bay but hoped some of the modules were offered in NWO</li> </ul>	4

<p>Suggestions for participation in sessions</p> <p>-Attended one session only (Module was well done, loved it) but will like/hoped to attend other sessions</p> <p>-Hard to evaluate the impact after only one session; more frequent participation would have greatly influenced responses to the survey</p>	2
<p>Suggestions to presenters</p> <p>- Leithwood's components of the module were most helpful compared to the other presenter– there needs to be give and take and an understanding of the needs of those participating versus “lecturing”</p> <p>-Leithwood should be mindful of the types of language/stereotypes used in examples to be more sensitive to a variety of races, cultures, genders and experiences</p>	2
<p>Other positions/roles in need of such PD</p> <p>-Deliver PD to senior level business people in public education otherwise clearly indicate in course content it's entirely school/academically focused</p> <p>- Need to get this information out to the trustees</p>	2

A total of 24 respondents contributed to the information provided in Table 1. The comments ranged from statements about the importance/richness of the Module(s) to suggestions for future sessions.

Overall, the participants found the PD modules valuable to the work they do and would likely recommend the modules to others.

## VIDEOS