

LEADING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: OUR PRINCIPAL PURPOSE

Wednesday, August 22 and Thursday, August 23, 2007

SYMPOSIUM

Toronto Airport Marriott
901 Dixon Road, Toronto

DAY ONE

Welcome: Nil Parent, ADFO

Nil Parent explained that the focus of the symposium would be on taking the Leading Student Achievement project to the next level during the coming year.

Included in the introduction was a 15 minute archival video montage documenting the purpose and history of the project. This video will be available on the web at the beginning of September 2007 so that participants can access it for use with their principal learning teams.

Teachers' Professional Learning: Paul Anthony, Director Policy and Standards Branch Ministry of Education

A new provincial Teacher Learning and Leadership Program is in the process of being established by the Ministry of Education. This program (TLLP) will have two objectives:

- To support experienced teachers to undertake self-directed advanced professional development related to improved student achievement;
- To develop leadership skills for classroom teachers who wish to share learning and exemplary practices on a board and/or provincial basis.

Information regarding TLLP will be available on the Ministry website:

www.edu.gov.on.ca

Taking the Project to the Next Level: Dr. Kenneth Leithwood Professor of Educational Leadership O.I.S.E./UT

Concept of 'Project': A project comes with goals and targeted funding, the expectation being that the goals will be accomplished within a timeline that requires fairly intense activity. In addition, there is usually an agent to whom the participants are accountable and who often controls the funding. In terms of educational projects, while principals are generally familiar with such projects, teachers are not; however, the success of the project is dependent on these teacher participants acknowledging and accepting the goals in order

for the project to achieve success. Furthermore, the assumption is that if individuals put in intensive effort, the momentum to continue to build will occur and will keep building once the project ends. The challenge facing the LSA project is building such momentum to ensure the continuation of the work.

Evaluation: Most often, a project has an assessment component. In the case of the LSA project, the assessment component will consist of the following in 2007 – 2008:

- a brief survey to be completed by principals at the start of the school year and again in the spring;
- an on-line survey to be completed by teachers in early fall and again in the spring;
- telephone interviews with a random selection of principal team leaders in mid-winter;
- an examination of EQAO achievement data.

Because evaluation impacts both goals and funding for the project, it is a very important part of the process.

Note: The remainder of Dr. Leithwood's presentation had its basis in his paper which was included in the symposium package and is available electronically through each principals' association, via the link to the LSA website.

The title of the paper is as follows:

Leading Student Achievement: Our Principal Purpose
Taking the Project to the Next Level
August 2007

Objectives to Guide LSA Initiatives over the Next Year: Results of previous evaluation recommend the establishment of the following objectives to guide LSA initiatives in 2007 – 2008:

1. focus the content of the conversations within district principal learning teams and school PLCs on conditions which robust evidence indicates have the most powerful direct effects on student learning;
2. deepen participants' understandings of effective PLC processes and refine their skills in managing such processes in their own PLCs;
3. significantly extend principal and teacher capacities for effective literacy and numeracy instruction.

In his presentation, Dr. Leithwood added a fourth objective to this list, namely, to identify the way in which to continue the momentum of increasing literacy and numeracy achievement in our schools.

Existing Priorities that Warrant Ongoing Attention in the LSA Project: Two existing priorities deserve continued focus. These are:

1. Professional Learning Communities – It is necessary for the collective brain to be greater than that of the individual so that the group produces better goals,

- solutions, and action plans. PLCs become mature when the members' personal and group goals are the same and they find it worthwhile and emotionally satisfying to work within their learning community.
2. Focused Instruction - Improving literacy and numeracy depends on developing productive learning conditions in classrooms and schools. The most critical classroom learning condition is the quality of instruction provided to students. A recent study (Walstrom & Lewis, in press) found significant powerful effects of an approach the researchers labeled "focused". Such instruction is characterized by very active engagement on the part of the teacher in whatever instructional approach he/she chooses to use in the classroom. Focused instruction speaks to the explicitly goal-directed nature of what a teacher is intending to accomplish, the constant monitoring by the teacher of what students are doing, and interventions by the teacher to help ensure that students are as actively engaged in meaningful learning as is possible.

New Priorities for the LSA Project: In addition to classroom instruction, there are five school-level conditions that have powerful direct effects on student learning. These conditions are properties of the group and are "soft" (i.e. socio-psychological states) rather than hard in nature. Moreover, there is little dependence on resources controlled largely outside the school in order to nurture the development of these school conditions, and, in most instances, their impact exceeds that of students' gender, race, prior achievement, and/or socio-economic status. Finally, there are specific leadership practices on the part of principals that can lead to the growth of these conditions within the school.

1. Academic Press: The administration and teachers set high but achievable school goals and classroom academic standards. They believe in the capacity of their students to achieve and encourage their students to respect and pursue academic success. School administrators supply resources, provide structures and exert leadership influence. Teachers make appropriately challenging demands and provide quality instruction to attain these goals. Students value these goals, respond positively, and work hard to meet the challenge.
2. School Disciplinary Climate: The disciplinary climate of the classroom and school has important effects on students. The evidence suggests flexible rather than rigid responses by leaders to disciplinary events and the engagement of staff and other stakeholders in developing school-wide behaviour patterns.
3. Collective Teacher Efficacy: This is the level of confidence a group of teachers feels about its ability to organize and implement whatever educational initiatives are required for students to achieve high standards of achievement. In highly efficacious schools, evidence suggests that teachers accept responsibility for their students' learning. They are also more likely to engage in activity-based learning, student-centred learning, and interactive instruction. As well, teachers have more ownership in school-wide decisions.

4. Teacher Trust in Colleagues, Parents and Students: The nature of trust includes a belief on the part of teachers that their colleagues, students and parents support the school's goals for student learning and will reliably work toward achieving those goals. Qualities that build trust are as follows:
 - 🍏 Benevolence – a person's confidence that their well-being and/or the things they hold dear will not be harmed;
 - 🍏 Reliability – a person's belief that individuals will act consistently in ways that are beneficial to those who commit their trust;
 - 🍏 Competence – a person's confidence in the ability of another to perform consistently and up to standard;
 - 🍏 Honesty – a person's belief about another's truthfulness, integrity, authenticity and openness.

5. Time for Learning: School schedules, timetables, structures, administrative behaviours, instructional practices and the like are designed to ensure that students are engaged in meaningful learning as much of their time in school as possible. Distractions from meaningful learning are minimized. For example, in schools, principals aim to protect the efforts of teachers from the many distractions they face from both inside and outside their organizations so that they spend their time on teaching and learning.

A Synthesis of Instructional Leadership Practices: There are a number of leadership practices that cross contexts. In other words, though the manner in which the practices are enacted may change within a new context, the practices themselves are constant.

These core practices of successful leaders fall under the following headings:

- 🍏 Setting directions;
- 🍏 Developing people;
- 🍏 Redesigning the organization;
- 🍏 Managing the instructional program;
- 🍏 Other practices.

Reflective Activity: Board teams discussed these three questions:

1. Of the three objectives for this year, which will demand the greatest effort by you and your colleagues?
2. What concrete actions might you and your colleagues take to improve the five key school conditions in your schools?
3. In what areas (objectives, conditions) will you and your colleagues need the most support?

Teacher Teams That Get Results – Part I: Gayle Gregory, Educational Consultant

Gregory's presentation was based on the following publication which was distributed to all participants:

Gregory, G. & Kuzmich, L. (2007). *Teacher Teams That Get Results: 61 Strategies for Sustaining and Renewing Professional Learning Communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Strategies shared during the presentation are listed below. Page references are given for both Gregory's book (where applicable) and the booklet of overheads contained in the symposium package given to each participant.

1. Developing Norms for PLCs (p.62 of book and p.3 of booklet)
2. Creating a Growth-Oriented Climate (p.39 of book)
3. School Level Factors – those conditions present in schools that demonstrate academic press (p.4 of booklet)
4. Characteristics of Effective Teachers (p.5 of booklet)
5. Relationship Between Levels of Impact and Components of Training (p.5 of booklet)
6. Pre-Assessment for Determining the Level of PLC in a School (p.6 of booklet)
7. Principles of Androgogy (p.7 of booklet)
 - 🍏 People like to be self-directed
 - 🍏 People learn through experience (hands on learning)
 - 🍏 The teaching content should be relevant (there is real life application)
 - 🍏 Adults are performance-centred (the application is possible immediately)
8. Jigsaw Activity – Building Professional Communities in Schools (p.65 of book and pp.8 – 14 of booklet)
9. Strategy Building Blocks (p.229 of book and pp.15 – 16 of booklet)
10. Importance of Vision (p.13 of book and pp. 17 – 18 of booklet)
11. Research on Best Practices Affecting Student Achievement (p. 19 – 22 of booklet)

Carousel Sessions: Sharing Exemplary Practices: Participants had the opportunity to attend two of the sessions listed below, each of which was prepared by a team of principals who have been involved in the LSA project for some time. Details on content and presenters can be found in the attachment included at the end of this report.

- Sessions:
1. Maximizing Students' Mathematics Potential and Achievement
 2. Building Principal Learning Teams Using a 3 "P" Framework
 3. Principal Learning Teams That Work
 4. Our Principal Purpose: Leading Student Achievement
 5. Principal as Lead Learner: Sustaining a collaborative culture for school improvement – a system approach
 6. Principal Professional Learning Teams
 7. Rencontres regionales par niveau
 8. Encourager la lecture autonome chez les garçons

DAY TWO

Principals' Association Meetings: ADFO, CPCO and OPC

Principals met in their association groupings to discuss the conditions in schools critical to improvement in student learning and achievement as outlined by Dr. Leithwood on Day One of the symposium. In addition, principals completed the principal survey and collected sufficient copies for members of the PLTs in their boards. Dr. Leithwood made himself available to answer questions during each of the association sessions. Participants were also provided with the template for the 2007 – 2008 learning plan for each of their local PLTs. The due date for these plans is October 2, 2007.

A number of resources were distributed:

- 🍎 The new LSA brochure, “Leading Student Achievement: Our Principal Purpose”
- 🍎 The LNS video, “Leadership Matters”
- 🍎 The LNS materials from the “What Works” series
- 🍎 The LSA DVD and facilitator’s guide for the Dr. Michael Fullan presentation, “Turnaround Schools/Turnaround Systems” (May 2007 LSA Symposium)

Participants received information regarding, “Building System Capacity for the Diagnostic Process in School Boards, an upcoming symposium on diagnostic process sponsored by LNS. The LSA SO at each board will be designating board representatives for this event.

Teacher Teams That Get Results – Part II: Gayle Gregory, Educational Consultant

At the beginning of Day II, Gregory reviewed “Best Practices in Our Schools” (template available by contacting one’s principals’ association) and reviewed the study, “Instruction and Achievement in Chicago Schools”. This study contrasted didactic and interactive instruction components and found that the achievement levels of students were lower in cases where a didactic method was used and higher when an interactive one was used. In terms of reviewing material prior to evaluation, the findings indicated that the more students were involved in preparing the review, the better the achievement level. The study also indicated that where principals demonstrate instructional leadership, more interactive instruction takes place in the classroom. Furthermore, where teachers frequently engage in conversations with colleagues about practice, interactive instruction is used more often, while didactic instruction and review is used less.

“Poke and Stroke”: This method can be used by administrators to encourage teachers to use new instructional strategies. It involves setting up an expectation that encourages new behaviours on the part of teachers in a way that is non-threatening. One example of this strategy involves constructing a display area for samples of a specific methodology and providing each teacher with space to put up examples from their work with students. As more teachers display their samples, others feel pressure to incorporate the strategy

into their teaching practice and then display their efforts. Throughout the process, it is important to provide the teachers with the support they need. Teachers should have the opportunity to share what they are doing, discuss the struggles they experience, and have their successes acknowledged. The final component of “Poke and Stroke” is the celebration of teachers’ attempts at new practice(s).

Building Internal Capacity in Schools: Gregory first reviewed the six strategies for building school capacity (pp.23 - 24 of booklet):

1. Knowledge, skills and attributes;
2. Professional learning community;
3. Program coherence;
4. Resources;
5. Principal leadership;
6. Teacher leadership.

Then, participants viewed a video of Montview School in Colorado, noting evidence of these six components within the culture of the school. This video, “Principles in Action: Stories of Award-Winning Professional Development”, is available at minimal cost through www.McREL.org

To conclude this portion of the presentation, Gregory provided a tool to measure school capacity, “Assessing Your School Capacity for Student Learning” (p. 25-26 of booklet). She also presented the “Three D Model for Using Data” (p.27 of booklet) as a method for improving student achievement. The section of her book devoted to data is titled, “Data Chats” and is found on pp.222-224 of the book.

Building Trusting Relationships: Principal leadership has been highlighted in recent evidence as a critical contributor to trust among teachers, parents and students (e.g., Bryk, 2003). Leadership practices that contribute to the creation of a climate of trust are as follows:

- 🍎 maintaining confidentiality;
- 🍎 being visible and accessible;
- 🍎 behaving consistently;
- 🍎 keeping commitments;
- 🍎 sharing feelings;
- 🍎 expressing personal interest;
- 🍎 acting non-judgmentally;
- 🍎 listening reflectively;
- 🍎 admitting mistakes;
- 🍎 demonstrating professional knowledge and skills.

Professional Learning Communities: There are five core characteristics of Professional Learning Communities (p.30 in booklet):

1. shared basic norms and values about students, learning, and teaching;
2. reflective dialogue about teaching practice and student learning;
3. deprivatization of practice through open discussion and problem-solving;

4. collective focus on student learning to drive decisions;
5. collaboration across grade levels, schools, and department groups.

There are numerous benefits for both teachers and students when they work within a professional learning community (pp.31 – 32 of booklet) and definite shifts in the culture will occur as a learning community is established within a school (p.34 of booklet). An assessment tool, “Assessing Your School Culture and Climate” (p.35 of booklet), is useful in determining the quality of the learning community within a school. There are also specific activities to promote collaboration among teachers (p.36 of booklet). What is crucial, is giving teachers a menu for learning so that they select a learning experience that is meaningful for them and will result in improved instructional practice and student achievement.

“Story of the Geese”: This conclusion to the presentation demonstrated characteristics of the behaviours of geese that include support for those in need, a sense of direction, strength from collaborative effort, and distributed leadership. Each characteristic was linked to an important lesson for those working in teams. There is a DVD version of this presentation on geese which is available through one’s principals’ association.

**Closing Address: Dr. Avis Glaze, Chief Student Achievement Officer of Ontario
& CEO of The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat**

The title of this closing address, **“MUSINGS”**, reflects the tenor of Dr. Glaze’s thoughts as she highlighted key concepts, reviewed past efforts and assessed the status of the project at this point in its implementation.

Dr. Glaze began by expressing appreciation to key participants in the LSA project, namely, principals and vice principals, supervisory officers, student achievement officers at LNS, organizers within the three principals’ associations, and the technical support personnel at CSC. She then moved into the body of her presentation and highlighted a number of major topics.

Principals as Learning-Centred Leaders: There are a number of components that comprise instructional leadership:

- 🍎 making student learning a priority;
- 🍎 setting high expectations for performance;
- 🍎 gearing content and instruction to curriculum expectations;
- 🍎 creating a culture of continuous learning for adults;
- 🍎 using multiple sources of data to assess learning;
- 🍎 activating the community’s support for school success. (NAESSP, 2001)

Dr. Glaze emphasized that it is imperative to ‘go deeper’, but advised against accepting any new idea unless it allows one to go deeper on the course toward the purpose that has been established for the project. In other words, it is important to know one’s direction and incorporate only those ideas that will help one go deeper in that direction.

Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership: Instructional effectiveness and instructional leadership are the two main foci of the project. Dr. Kenneth Leithwood (2006) has developed seven claims concerning effective leadership in schools:

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.
5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.
6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
7. A small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness.

There are a number of leadership skills/competencies that will take participants in the project to the next level:

- 🍏 A vision – priorities about what should be done; moral purpose;
- 🍏 Shared leadership in the school;
- 🍏 Consistency in staying the course;
- 🍏 Life long learning.

Nine Key Strategies: In 2002-2003, it had become apparent that strategies were required to move education forward in Ontario, in particular in regards to students' learning and achievement in literacy and numeracy. It was recognized that no students could be left behind, especially in the current reality of a global economy. As a result, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat was formed and the Leading Student Achievement project established. Nine developmental strategies were determined at that time:

1. Set targets with district school boards.
2. Identify teams at all levels to drive continuous improvement in literacy and numeracy.
3. Reduce class sizes in the primary grades to a maximum of 20 students per class by 2007-08.
4. Build capacity to support student learning and achievement.
5. Allocate resources to support target setting and improvement plans.
6. Mobilize the system to provide equity in student outcome.
7. Embark on a process of community outreach and engagement to build support for the literacy and numeracy initiative.
8. Demonstrate a commitment to research and evidence-based inquiry and decision-making.
9. Establish a growing presence on the national and international scene.

Signs of Progress: As a result of the implementation of these nine strategies, many signs of progress are evident. For example, there is a clear focus across the province on improving student achievement, there is more evidence of a team approach to planning and learning and there is more job-embedded professional learning. Furthermore, improvement trends within boards since 2002-03 indicate the following:

- 🍎 99% of boards have improved in reading;
- 🍎 96% of boards have improved in writing;
- 🍎 92% of boards have improved in mathematics;
- 🍎 63% of boards have improved for three straight years in writing;
- 🍎 33% of boards have improved for three straight years in mathematics.

What is important is not to lose the momentum gained, for the mission is not yet accomplished. Movement forward must continue.

Moving Forward: Much has been learned which can be applied to the future. There are many lessons that have been gained concerning ‘Schools on the Move’, namely, that improving schools demonstrate:

- 🍎 collaborative organizational structures;
- 🍎 a focus on learning;
- 🍎 assessment, accountability, and use of data;
- 🍎 links beyond the school.

To continue the momentum achieved, educators must pay attention to the following:

- 🍎 teacher working conditions, especially those that contribute to teacher efficacy;
- 🍎 demographics;
- 🍎 culture - i.e. the values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations and behaviours affecting students and their learning;
- 🍎 equity of outcome, whereby there is a belief that all children can learn and achieve and all students feel valued and appreciated.

Professional Learning Communities: The professional learning community is one important means by which schools can maintain the momentum. The Leading Student Achievement project has established a goal to create such learning communities in schools in order to improve instructional practice, and ultimately, student achievement in literacy and numeracy. The main characteristics these professional learning communities strive to demonstrate are:

- 🍎 shared values and vision;
- 🍎 collective responsibility for pupils’ learning;
- 🍎 collaboration focused on learning;
- 🍎 group as well as individual professional learning;
- 🍎 reflective professional inquiry;
- 🍎 openness, networking and partnerships;
- 🍎 inclusive membership;
- 🍎 mutual trust, respect and support.

Conclusion: In closing her presentation, Dr. Glaze reminded the participants of the following:

A child is the only substance from which a responsible adult can be made. (Berkowitz, 2007)

Closing Remarks: Nil Parent, ADFO

Nil Parent thanked all participants and presenters for their contribution in making the August 2007 symposium a success. He reminded everyone of the dates of the two Leading Student Achievement symposiums that will take place during the coming year:

February 1, 2008 and May 9, 2008