

# LEADING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: OUR PRINCIPAL PURPOSE

Friday, May 9, 2008

## SYMPOSIUM

Toronto Airport Marriott  
901 Dixon Road, Toronto

**Welcome:** Linda Massey, OPC  
Gisele Neil, ADFO

Linda Massey and Gisele Neil welcomed participants and introduced the video, “Leading Student Achievement Highlights, 2005 – 2008”. This video presented the history of the project through a series of clips in which previous symposium presenters spoke to important directions of the project and participants in the project commented on their involvement, the benefits and the progress achieved.

**The Way Forward:** Patricia Manson, Senior Executive Officer  
The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat

**Introduction:** Patricia Manson began her presentation by stating that the work at the Secretariat focuses on improving the achievement level of all students. She then explained that her topic would be the journey that The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) has taken in the last few years towards achieving its goal of improvement in learning and achievement for all students.

**Key Goal:** The key goal of the Secretariat has been to have every student in Ontario develop reading, writing, mathematical and comprehension skills at a higher level by the age of 12. The indicator of success will be that 75% of students reach the provincial standard by 2008. In order to accomplish this, the thrust has been to build capacity in teachers so that the chances for success by all Ontario students have improved.

**Key Purposes:** Among the key purposes of LNS are the following:

- strengthen the focus on literacy and numeracy;
- negotiate targets;
- share successful practices and discuss implementation plans;
- extend the knowledge base of the profession;
- increase capacity to support learning;
- engage parents, school councils, community members and trustees to further support student achievement goals.

**Phases 1 to 3:** The Secretariat progressed through Phase 1, “Building Consensus” and Phase 2, “Building Capacity” during 2005 and up to April 2006. The first phase focused on building common purpose and a sense of urgency, while the second focused on

leadership development and instructional effectiveness. At that point, there was movement into Phase 3, “Sharpening Our Focus”. This phase, which took place from April 2006 to August 2007, saw the establishment of a number of initiatives:

- Ontario Statistical Neighbours;
- Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP);
- Schools on the Move: Lighthouse Program;
- Leadership Alliance Network for Student Achievement (LANSA);
- Continued emphasis on capacity building;
- Ongoing attention to equity of outcomes.

**Highlights of Achievement:** Compared to 2002 – 2003, the following advances are among those that have occurred:

- The majority of assessment areas have improved by ten percentage points or higher.
- All assessment areas have improved by at least six percentage points.
- The percentage of schools achieving 75% in Grade 6 Reading has doubled from 13% to 25%.
- The percentage of schools where less than one third of the students are achieving at the provincial standard in Grade 3 Reading has declined from 19% to 5%.
- OFIP is benefiting those students and schools in challenging circumstances.

Some examples of the improvement that has taken place in OFIP schools as indicated by the preliminary analysis for 2006/07 are as follows:

- 75% of OFIP 1 schools have shown improvement in Grade 6 Reading;
- 66% of OFIP 1 schools have shown improvement in Grade 3 Reading;
- 73% of OFIP 2 schools have shown improvement in Grade 6 Reading;
- 77% of OFIP 2 schools have shown improvement in Grade 3 Reading;
- 60% of OFIP 3 schools have shown improvement in Grade 6 Reading;
- 50% of OFIP 3 schools have shown improvement in Grade 3 Reading.

Compared to 2002 – 2003, Board results in 2006 – 2007 have shown considerable improvement in all assessment areas at both the Grade 6 and the Grade 3 levels.

**Phase 4 – “Intensifying our Collective Efforts”:** In considering the improvement in achievement that has taken place since 2002 – 2003, it is important to recognize that it is not the assessment results that are important, but rather, doing something appropriate with those results (Douglas Reeves, 2005). This realization has led to the decision of intensifying collective efforts as the Secretariat has moved into Phase 4. There has also been a sense of readiness to move to a new level of accountability, an acknowledgement of the need to build internal capacity, and recognition of the importance of implementing a self-assessment process as a means of improving schools.

The result of this thinking has taken the form of the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF). The purpose of the Framework is to provide support to boards and schools in their efforts to build capacity. It is meant to assist boards and schools in becoming articulate at

determining both the strengths within schools as well as the areas needing improvement. The four essential components of the Framework are as follows:

1. Student Learning and Achievement;
2. Instructional Leadership;
3. Assessment and Evaluation;
4. Curriculum and Instructional Strategies.

The Framework was introduced in the fall of 2007 and a review of the initial implementation will be completed by the end of June 2008. Changes in the School Effectiveness Framework will be made as a result of this consultative review process and full implementation will occur in 2008/09.

**High Yield Strategies:** High yield strategies are those which contribute to improvement in student learning. Their effectiveness has been demonstrated through research and evidence from successful classroom, school, and board practices.

Some examples of high yield strategies which impact positively on students' learning in literacy are as follows:

- teacher moderation;
- ongoing assessment and evaluation;
- the “Gradual Release of Responsibility” model;
- the teaching of non-fiction writing;
- use of all types of texts;
- the teaching of critical literacy (higher order and critical thinking).

The document “High Yield Strategies for Improving Classroom Instruction and Student Learning” is currently available. Also, a package of LNS resources is being sent to every board and a flyer with a list of all available resources is being published this spring 2008.

**Fostering a Climate of Collaboration:** As The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat moves forward towards accomplishing its goal of improved student achievement, it is promoting networks as the means of developing collective teacher efficacy. Reasons for this emphasis include:

- educators need to talk about their practices, share their knowledge and skills, and support one another in the specific contexts in which they work;
- effective schools do not exist in isolation;
- effective schools foster learning across networks;
- effective schools are those in which the school community is engaged in discussions and actions for school improvement.

**Conclusion:** The work of The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat has been successful, especially in the sense that the culture of Ontario schools is one that is focused on enabling the success of all students. As a result, there has been sustained improvement in student achievement (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, 2007).

## **What We Are Learning from the LSA Evaluation:**

**Dr. Kenneth Leithwood, Professor of Educational Leadership**

**Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto**

**Nature of the Challenge:** One major aspect of the challenge faced by educators in Ontario who are striving to improve student achievement, is the fact that our students are, on the whole, doing well. This means that the challenge lies in determining how to advance from “good” to “great”.

**Goals and Priorities for 2007/08:** The three goals established for the current year are as follows:

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

The new priorities set for this year focused on the five school conditions with powerful effects on student learning:

- Academic press;
- Disciplinary climate;
- Collective teacher efficacy;
- Teacher trust in colleagues, students and parents;
- Time for learning.

**Results of the First Round of Data Collection in the Fall of 2007:** The principal surveys showed weakly positive estimates of the status of the five key learning conditions. Ratings were highest for *disciplinary climate* and lowest for *focused instruction*. However, respondents ranged quite widely in their estimates. Teachers were weakly positive about their PLC meetings, the learning that took place in these meetings, and their impact on classroom practices. Teachers disagreed that they “*observed each other*” and “*planned together as part of the school day.*” In order to achieve improvement in student learning, teachers have to observe one another and plan together. Another point worthy of note is that many of those interviewed had not heard about the key learning conditions considered priorities for attention this year.

### **Two Recommendations:**

1. The success of this phase of the LSA project depends on ensuring sufficient attention to the key learning conditions. This means continuing to disseminate information about these conditions to all participants and encouraging them to engage their teachers in better understanding of these conditions and how they can be further improved.
2. The key learning conditions need not be viewed as something distinct from other provincial initiatives such as the Effective Schools Framework or the IEL

Leadership Framework. Efforts should be extended to demonstrate the interdependence of these initiatives and to help teachers and LSA participants understand that interdependence.

### **Refreshing our Understandings of this Year's Priorities:**

1. Progress in Developing PLCs – It is imperative that teachers observe one another teaching and interact about what they see in order for improvement in student learning to occur. An effective PLC can support this. Therefore, it is important to concentrate on developing a strong community where PLC learning is greater than individual learning, PLC decisions guide individual actions, and PLC interactions are considered engaging.
2. Focused Instruction – Focused instruction is guided by constructivist understandings about how students learn. In other words, existing knowledge is the starting point, learning is situated, and it is social. What makes instruction focused is the addition of energy and urgency that includes close teacher monitoring. This latter ingredient is essential.
3. Academic Press – The school sets high but achievable standards for learning and each student is challenged to accomplish these standards. As well, the teachers believe each student can be successful. The academic work is the school's priority, especially work in literacy and numeracy.
4. School Disciplinary Climate – Student behaviour is considered a collective responsibility by staff, students and parents. There is an understanding that disruptive behaviour is time away from productive learning. Engaging instruction focused on deep understanding is the most powerful strategy for creating a positive disciplinary climate. It is worth noting that this was the lowest rated condition by teachers in the fall 2007 survey.
5. Collective Teacher Efficacy – An authentic, well functioning PLC should be a powerful developer of collective teacher efficacy.
6. Teacher Trust in Colleagues, Parents and Students – This was the highest (but still moderate) rated of the key conditions by teachers in the fall 2007 survey. It takes time for the level of trust in a principal to develop within a staff.
7. Time for Learning – This is academically engaged time. Disruptions are minimized so that students and teachers focus on learning. It is important to sensitize staff to the power of this condition since it has a more powerful impact on learning than variations in instructional techniques. If a principal has to choose one condition as a priority, this is the one to choose.

### **Locating LSA Work in the Context of Everything Else That Is Going On:**

Leadership is about helping people make sense of their work. With a number of provincial initiatives taking place concurrently, there are eight questions that can be used to glue these various initiatives together.

1. How are our kids doing?
2. Where would we like them to get better?
3. What will we need to change for this to happen?
4. How can we make these changes?
5. Who will do what and when will they do it?

6. What do they need to get the job done?
7. How can we help them to get what they need?
8. How will we know we are making progress?

**What Remains in the Current Round of Evaluation Activity:** In the fall of 2007, teachers and principals completed surveys. Then, a random sample of principals completed telephone interviews during the winter of 2008. In May 2008, principals and teachers completed a second round of surveys similar in content to those conducted in the fall of 2007. These were designed to determine what changed over the course of the year. The final stage of the process, due to occur in the spring and summer of 2008, will involve analyzing all the survey and interview data, examining student achievement data, and preparing a report and recommendations for 2008/09.

## **BREAK**

### **LSA Principal Survey**

During the break, participants filled out the Spring 2008 Principals' Survey and submitted the completed forms. They picked up covering letters and 2008 surveys for the members of their principal learning teams to complete and return at a later date.

### **Setting Directions for LSA Year 4: Barb McMorrow, CPCO**

Barb McMorrow introduced the Year 4 LSA brochure which includes the following information:

- objectives to guide LSA in Year 4;
- priorities for LSA in Year 4;
- the purpose of the LSA project;
- roles at the school, district and provincial level;
- support for principal learning teams;
- role of research;
- participant surveys;
- symposia dates for 2008 – 2009;
- expectations of participants;
- contact information.

Participants were then directed to work in board teams to complete the form titled, "Setting Directions for LSA Year 4, 2008 – 2009".

Page 1 focused on the three objectives established for both 2007/08 and 2008/09 (Leithwood, 2007). Teams answered the following questions:

1. Of the three objectives for this year, which demanded the greatest effort by you and your colleagues? Why?

2. What concrete actions did you and your colleagues take to work on any of these objectives?
3. In what areas of the objectives do you and your colleagues need continued support from the LSA project?

Page 2 focused on the five key conditions that have powerful direct effects on student learning. Teams provided the following information:

1. Describe the structures and practices in place in your school(s) that support you with these conditions?
2. What action steps will you take to create, sustain and/or deepen these conditions in your school(s)?
3. What supports do you need from the LSA project to go deeper in your learning about these conditions?

After discussion regarding the objectives and key conditions, participants provided the following feedback:

- By sharing practice, teachers learn.
- The School Effectiveness Framework is helpful in aligning everything, because the five key conditions that have powerful direct effects on student learning are embedded in the Framework.
- PLTs have evolved over time; in the beginning, they provided the opportunity for personal learning and growth so that individuals developed the ability to articulate what good teaching is; now these teams are setting tasks for themselves that require a return to the team with evidence of actions taken; thus, an evolution has occurred with the aid of LSA.
- The work being done is “messy” not organized and linear; through the process of working together, individuals have developed trust for one another.

## LUNCH

**Carousel Sessions: Sharing Exemplary Practices:** Participants had the opportunity to select two sessions from the following list:

### **1. The Power of the Teaching Learning Cycle (TLC) within the LSA Project**

*Presenters:* Laurie Levay, Joanne Melo  
Toronto Catholic District School Board

Based on the Critical Learning and Instructional Pathway (CLIP) developed by Crevola, Hill and Fullan, LSA principals working within a family of schools model, have developed “The Teaching Learning Cycle” (TLC). The presentation showed how the PLC model was used to implement the TLC within individual schools and how principals and teachers came together to share results and learn from each other.

## **2. School Effectiveness Framework and Principal Learning Teams**

*Presenters:* Susan Bastable, Lynn McAughey  
Keewatin Patricia District School Board

The session focused on the processes the Keewatin Patricia District School Board used to implement the School Effectiveness Framework at the school and district levels.

## **3. Hiring for Student Achievement**

*Presenters:* Laura Summerville, Helen Wong  
Toronto District School Board

This presentation provided concrete strategies for selecting those candidates who will best meet the student achievement needs of their schools.

## **4. Les pratiques réussies et les pratiques en voie réussite!**

*Presenters:* Charlotte Henay, Claudine Martineau  
Conseil scolaire de district catholique centre-sud

This session told one school's story of the use of the "Literacy Plus" computer program. This program provides a profile of every student that includes the teaching and evaluation strategies that best meet the needs of that student.

## **5. Le travail en équipe de collaboration pour favoriser la mise en oeuvre du cadre d'efficacité**

*Presenters:* Francine Chessman, Sylvie Lalonde  
Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario

This presentation demonstrated how a superintendent and consultant used PLCs with principals to facilitate the use of the School Effectiveness Framework.

## **6. Sharpening Our Focus: A Collaborative Approach to Instructional Leadership**

*Presenters:* Frances Garofalo, Lorella Costanzo, Leona McEwan, Barb Van Hatten, Debbie Weiler  
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board

This workshop outlined the journey taken by the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board to embed professional learning to improve student achievement at all levels of the organization.

## **7. Principal Learning Teams – Partnerships in Action**

*Presenters:* Bob Jackson, John Clements  
Thames Valley District School Board

This session explained how the Thames Valley District School Board provided mentoring for new administrators using the PLT as the means for helping these individuals achieve their personal and professional goals.

## **8. Learning by Doing: Sharing our LSA Journey**

*Presenters:* Sue Mark, Graham Shantz  
Waterloo Region District School Board

This presentation by the Waterloo Public School Board outlined the work of the PLTs formed within the district. The session also demonstrated the professional trust that evolved in these teams during their three year involvement with the LSA project.

## **9. L'accompagnement régulier auprès des directions et du personnel enseignant**

*Presenters:* France Lamarche, Nadine Goulet, Gaby Myre, Dyane Bissonnette,  
Lise Kingsbury, Martine-Jeanne Jean-Vezina  
CSDCEO

This session demonstrated how CSDCEO focused on improving literacy and numeracy in their schools by establishing PLCs in every school within the district and providing consultants who attended every PLC meeting to assist teachers in the development of appropriate strategies.

### **Symposia Dates for Year 4**

- Friday, September 19, 2008
- Friday, January 16, 2009
- Friday, May 8, 2009