

Making a Difference for Ontario's Students Transformations in Educator Teaching and Assessment for Deep Learning

The Technology and Learning Fund

With the increasing focus on learning linked to technology, educators are challenged to develop rich and deeper learning environments that allow all students to thrive. By placing an emphasis on Professional Development for system leaders and teachers, Ontario school boards remain forerunners in student-enabled technology and learning, and in building broader and stronger foundations for teachers to increase opportunities for their students to be more successful and confident 21st Century learners.

"By providing professional development to all administrators . . . we have built awareness at a system leaders' level of the TLE vision and its direct alignment to work we are already engaged in. Bringing together administrators from phase one schools on a consistent basis provided them with a new network of colleagues and support system."

– Hamilton Wentworth DSB

TO: ONTARIO DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION

FROM: Frank Kelly

DATE: March 31, 2016

RE: **Transformations in Educator Teaching and Assessment
for Deep Learning**

This edition of the Technology and Learning Fund newsletters highlights the efforts of some of your fellow boards as, together, we continue making great strides in mobilizing Ontario's vision for technology and learning.

To briefly recap, the Ministry of Education and the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) have, through the ministry's Technology and Learning Fund (TLF), been working together to support Ontario schools as they change teaching practice, build engagement for technology-enabled learning and increase achievement for students throughout the province.

As you read through this newsletter and learn about the work taking place on a system-wide basis and in individual schools, note that educators are reporting positive changes in student learning and engagement, attendance, achievement levels, and acquisition of 21st Century global competencies.

At the same time, professional learning opportunities are helping educators transform classrooms and schools into engaging and technology-supported environments focusing on deep learning and innovation. This transformation is a responsibility that boards take very seriously. As one board explains, “when formal and informal leaders in a school come to new understandings about teaching and learning, changes in pedagogy and student learning occur.”

New Approaches and Continuing Successes

“Our board’s goal is to have every student leave our school district with the required characteristics and skills to be a 21st Century success story. Instructional Technology Coaches work with elementary school teachers in a job embedded environment to guide them on how to integrate technology and transform their lessons into deeper learning opportunities.”

– Ottawa Catholic DSB

As boards work towards increasing student achievement and developing 21st Century learners in classrooms throughout the province, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and entrepreneurship learning, all linked to school and board plans, are consistently coming to the fore. Accordingly, it is understood that professional development opportunities – focused on technology-enabled learning, teacher growth, and student and teacher “comfort level” with technology – leads to greater teaching and learning of global, 21st Century skills.

To help these efforts, there is a wide range of strategies and activities underway in Ontario’s schools. These include:

- the use of system technology leads, digital learning advocates, student technical assistance teams, and technology learning coaches;
- increased access for teachers and students to technology;
- professional learning communities and networked professional development opportunities that effectively use technology to allow teachers and system leaders to communicate with each other, share ideas and explore new opportunities for student growth;
- extensive use of technology and applications to further innovative thinking and problem solving, and teacher/student use of technology for learning; and
- efforts to embed technology in daily student learning and connect this technology-enabled learning to board and school plans.

“Technology-enabled pedagogy provides opportunities for students to be engaged in purposeful communication and learning that goes beyond the walls of their classroom as they strive to solve complex local and global challenges.”

– St. Michael Catholic School

But there is much more taking place. Boards continue to offer structured and informal professional development activities that involve educators coming together to engage and learn. In some cases, teachers and principals/vice principals commit to regular participation in personal and group professional development throughout the school year.

In addition, job-embedded professional development remains significant to teacher change. In an article by Michael Fullan, **Change the Terms for Teacher Learning** (National Staff Development Council, Volume 28 No.3), he says that “we need to deeply appreciate the meaning of noted educator Richard Elmore’s observation (2004) that improvement above all entails ‘learning to do the right things in the setting where you work’ (p. 73); student learning depends on every teacher learning all the time . . . as teachers work together to continuously improve instruction.”

Local Research Models and Determining Change

During this exciting journey to transform and connect student learning to 21st Century global competencies, many boards are now including a local research focus in their planning that aims to collect specific data to better understand the positive change in culture through the growing use of technology. While there have been wide-ranging and compelling anecdotal comments in support of the changes in student learning and teacher instruction enabled through technology, boards are now collecting evidence of these developments in a more systematic and regularized way. Reports from parents, students, teachers, principals/vice principals and trustees are part of these boards’ stories of systemic and sustained change.

Some boards have decided to more effectively plan for future professional development by conducting staff surveys and focus groups to hear about their experiences and opinions, and to further the use of digital tools to support teachers in creating blended-learning environments focused on inquiry-based learning. This data will go toward helping inform more effective professional development sessions.

“Although change can be difficult, one thing is certain – this particular change (Library Learning Commons) has been very exciting for the students . . .”

– Thames Valley DSB

“Technology (such as iPads, Google Earth, Skype, and blogs) is becoming increasingly ubiquitous in (the) kindergarten classroom . . . and is an essential tool to build learner independence, deep conceptual understanding, and metacognitive skills.”

– Bluewater District School Board

While all boards are able to point to positive change, some boards are now collecting baseline data on student outcomes, including EQAO scores and report card marks. Teacher and student reporting on acquisition of 21st Century global skills and increases in student engagement are also being undertaken. Another example of a local research initiative: the use of a teacher coach to explore over five months of successful implementation of the inquiry questions posed in their 21st Century Innovation research plan.

*As I have noted in previous newsletters, **there is overwhelming evidence throughout the Ontario education sector that boards are scaling up and systematizing technology-enabled learning in their schools** while supporting transformations in educator teaching and assessment for deep learning through well-thought-out and meaningful professional development activities.*

Clearly, the movement to support Ontario students in effectively using technology to become 21st Century learners and innovators is ongoing and sustained.

Transformations in Educator Teaching and Assessment for Deep Learning: Highlights from School Boards

In January 2016, CODE regional technology leads spoke with board leads and superintendents regarding scaling-up and systematizing technology-supported learning projects, and to highlight the innovative strategies and programs that boards are currently putting in place to develop 21st Century global student learning skills.

Once again I am pleased to report on the work of some boards. Representing just a small sample of the exciting, innovative and student-centered learning activities taking place in Ontario today, these boards have kindly shared the work they are undertaking this year (especially in the area of professional development) to help lead the change and create more opportunities to learn for their students.

BOARD HIGHLIGHTS (Note: full board reports are available by following individual links, or by visiting the CODE website www.ontariodirectors.ca)

The board highlights in this newsletter are representative of the fine work underway in all 72 Ontario district schools boards. They clearly show that boards are moving schools and classrooms toward a new culture of deeper learning through the use of technology and innovation. In my next newsletter, I will continue sharing highlights from more boards as we continue the journey to 21st Century learning for all students.

ALGOMA DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Educational Technology Leads

Educational 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.

BLUEWATER DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Professional Development as teachers learn with their students

Two classrooms share how teachers learn with their students. A classroom teacher reports, “I would be lost without the use of technology in the classroom. My students are always engaged in their learning, sharing their ideas and expertise, and always feel a part of the learning environment . . . I have learned as much from my students as they have learned from me.”

CONSEIL SCOLAIRE CATHOLIQUE FRANCO-NORD

Professional development plan transforms teaching for the 21st Century

Professional development reinforces teachers’ capacity to transform their teaching practices aligned to the new pedagogical and technological vision of the Council. This new vision is based on the foundations of deep learning, including the practice of teaching strategies to high yield, learning partnerships, development of the six essential skills, and technology integration.

DURHAM DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Innovative pedagogies support technology in the classroom

Professional training with respect to technology in Durham District School Board is scaffolded and modular in order to build on individual teacher strengths. Educational Technology Facilitators, assigned at the central level, train Educational Technology Leaders (ETFs) early in each school year with innovative pedagogies that support the integration of technology into the classroom.

HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Professional Development through The Innovation Strategy

The board's Innovation Strategy is focused on providing teachers with an opportunity to pursue an innovative project that will benefit staff learning and student learning.

HAMILTON WENTWORTH DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Professional Development: making a difference in Technology and Innovation

The Technology and Learning Everywhere (TLE) initiative provided monthly professional development sessions for all board administrators starting last October. By providing professional development to all administrators, HWDSB has built awareness at a system leaders' level of the TLE vision and its direct alignment to work they are already engaged in.

KAWARTHA PINE RIDGE DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Using communication and collaboration tools for increased parent and student engagement

The board is implementing the use of Edsby, a communication and collaboration tool that allows every teacher to increase parent and student engagement through technology. Edsby provides parents with an interactive means to view student, classroom and whole school information, while giving teachers and students an entry-level, blended learning tool that can be used as their introduction to online learning.

OTTAWA-CARLETON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Leveraging mobile equipment embedded in classrooms

The board continues working towards building capacity in its staff to ensure they can address the 21st Century learning needs of its students. With a focus on coaching, the board is leveraging the mobile equipment embedded in the classroom so teachers can learn how to plan lessons with the technology they have available. Trainers also assist staff on how to use equipment and software.

ST. CLAIR CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Technology-enabled pedagogy provides opportunities for students to be engaged in purposeful communication and learning

A classroom teacher, who has grounded her innovative classroom practice in student inquiry for many years, is participating in the St. Clair Catholic District School Board's "New Pedagogies for Deep Learning" initiative. In her grade 8 classroom, technologies are used ubiquitously to foster critical thinking and creativity.

SUPERIOR NORTH CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD

Student Summits recognize that everyone – student, teacher, principal – is a learner

For SNCDSB's second Student Summit innovation project, a number of students facilitated breakout sessions for their peers and teachers. To provide ongoing capacity building throughout the school year, project funding has released one Digital Learning Volunteer in each school: classroom teachers who have a strength in (and passion for) technology-enabled learning.

THAMES VALLEY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Student engagement is evident when given the opportunity and encouragement to collaborate and innovate

TVDSB's journey to the Library Learning Commons (including a flexible layout, Makerspace, Creative Space, and Communication Space) have allowed the learning that takes place within these areas to expand. The board's schools are finding solutions that fit their physical layouts, their teachers' skill sets, and their students' needs and interests.

UPPER CANADA DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Tech Coach Project, Students Coaching Students

UCDSB's Tech Coach Project was founded on the belief that 21st Century competencies are leveraged through the use of technology in a collaborative, peer tutor model in the classroom. Tech Coach students worked with a variety of classes in a leadership role to assist teachers and students in discovering how technology may enhance their learning and teaching.

WATERLOO REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Collaborative Learning Carousel and Leading Change Symposium

This event focused on providing innovative examples of efforts to achieve the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement, with a special emphasis on collaboration (i.e., 21st Century skills) and student voice and choice being enabled through the use of technology.