CODE Special Education Project Update

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JK–GRADE 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies

Background

Building on the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) Special Education Project 2005–2008, this Special Education Project, entitled the JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies project, is designed to:

- identify existing effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1
- develop a monitoring tool to support boards in implementing effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1
- provide for broad dissemination of evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1
- codify the process of system change used in the CODE Special Education Project: JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies
- The CODE JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies project fosters:
- ongoing collaboration between the Ministry, including regional Ministry offices, and CODE, representing three affiliate supervisory officers' associations
- dialogue and reflection on current practice among lead boards—refining the JK–Grade 1 evaluation process; reaching consensus about key outcomes; and sharing effective, evidence-informed tools and strategies
- dialogue and reflection on current practice by all boards in each region, with further refinement of the tools/strategies and attention to local context
- trusting relationships, sharing of effective practices, and networking among superintendents of special education province-wide
- recognition of the knowledge and experience of early childhood educators

Process

The following section outlines the process used to support the development of a provincial overview of assessment and intervention strategies that reflect the experience and expertise of Ontario educators.

The lead board/regional teams were selected in October 2009 after all boards were invited to submit an expression of interest in carrying out the functions as outlined by CODE Team. After reviewing the expressions of interest submitted, the following boards were selected to carry out the duties as lead board for their region:

1. Hamilton-Wentworth DSB
2. Dufferin Peel CDSB
3. York Region DSB
4. Hastings and Prince Edward DSB
5. Sudbury CDSB
6. Lakehead DSB
7. CSDC des Grandes Rivières

The lead board/regional teams are expected to ensure that the monitoring tool originally developed by the lead boards and refined at the regional level is aligned with Ministry goals, with "Lessons Learned" at the district and school levels during the CODE Special Education Project (2005–2008), and with the K–12 School Effectiveness Framework.The CODE Team and the Superintendents responsible for Special Education in the lead boards met with representatives from all school boards at regional meetings. During these meetings, we explained the project and the expectations for participation.

The lead boards and CODE Team explained that project design must include expectations for:

- implementation of effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for all students in JK–Grade 1
- identification of existing effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1
- sharing of effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1 through leadership networks

Regional team meetings have been scheduled by the lead boards and the project is underway in all seven regions. At the outset, the lead/regional teams are preparing to define the Evidence-Informed Assessment and Intervention Strategies that are used by school boards for students in JK–Grade 1.

Each region is preparing a submission to the team, which is comprised of the CODE Team and lead board members. This meeting is scheduled for May 2010. Results of this meeting will provide a provincial overview of effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1.

We are very excited about the work that school districts across Ontario are doing for this project and we look forward to sharing the process and product in further detail.

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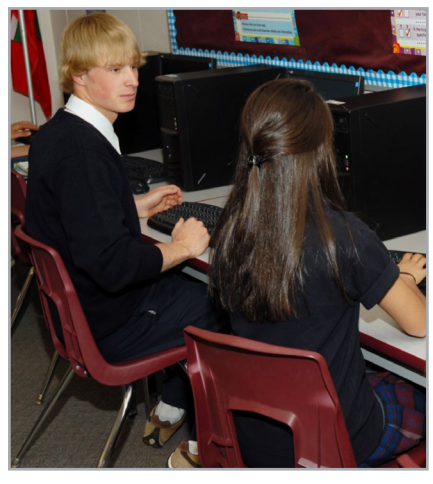
Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board Embeds Assistive Technology and Differentiated Instruction Within Curriculum and Teacher In-service

Dawne Boersen, Coordinator of Curriculum
Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board



The teachers and administrators of Huron-Perth CDSB have worked diligently over the past four years to use differentiated instruction, universal design, and Assistive Technology as key strategies to support our students. Even though HPCDSB is a small rural board that serves a fairly homogenous student base, we recognize that diversity comes in many forms and that our students learn in unique ways that require us to provide instruction and support their learning through various means. We are a hope-filled community with a belief that all students can succeed in a faith-based environment, and this initiative fit in well with our beliefs about student learning.

Using CODE funding, we've extended our work to continue to build capacity among our staff so that they can help our students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to use Assistive Technology. We feel that the latest developments in technology can help students with learning disabilities cope with barriers to their learning, whether they struggle with receiving information or with producing evidence of their learning.

During phase one of this initiative, a program manager was hired to lead a team of teachers in writing lessons for Primary, Junior, and Intermediate teachers to use with Clicker 5, Write:OutLoud and Co:Writer. These teachers were then deployed to support classroom teachers in implementing these programs in their classrooms. In phase two of the initiative, a support person was hired to work with teachers in their classrooms to set up the Assistive Technology and to help the student(s) and the teacher become familiar with the software. The support person worked alongside teachers in the classroom to ensure that the technology matched what was outlined in students' IEPs. As well, workshops were held for Special Education Resource Teachers to understand more about how Maplewood and the IEP engine worked. These teachers were able to take this learning back to the school and assist classroom teachers with the construction of the IEPs. To enhance these efforts, brochures and print materials were created to help teachers troubleshoot issues when support personnel were not available to provide direct support. Educational Assistants and library technicians were also trained to use and troubleshoot the Assistive Technology in this phase of the initiative.

We were pleased to see students using Clicker 5, and evolved from using Write:OutLoud and Co:Writer to Premier Assistive Technology and to seeing IEPs that reflected teachers' comfort level with Assistive Technology. A value-added component of the capacity building was teachers' interest in using these and other forms of technology with all of their students. Certainly the principles of universal design (necessary for some, good for all) have taken root in HPCDSB.

The use of Assistive Technology didn't stop with our students who have IEPs. Classroom teachers have moved from using Assistive Technology only to support their students with IEPs to using it with all students. We see examples of teachers using Clicker 5 with SMART Boards as centres for learning to decode new words, using other SMART Board software to provide an interactive learning environment for all students, and using Audacity software to support students reading below grade level in accessing print texts in oral form. Students now have opportunities to write exams, tests, and complete projects using Dragon NaturallySpeaking and Premier Assistive Technology for speech to text, text to speech, and word prediction. Using these programs for classroom instruction builds differentiation right in. Blogs, podcasts, and moodles are being used to engage students and their parents in the learning taking place in our schools. Voluntary workshops offered in the summer and after school integrate technology and curriculum areas and are always well attended. Teachers are recognizing that Assistive Technology can be used to assist all students, no matter what their need may be.

Future plans include further promotion of the use of Assistive Technology for all students. A full-time board employee has been hired to continue to support students and teachers in implementing Assistive Technology in the classroom. This investment reflects our compassion for all students and our desire to create a level playing field and to break through the barriers that children may face, whether they have special education needs, family pressures, or other challenges. We strive to be Christ-like in our actions and words as we move forward with this initiative to continue to meet our students' learning needs.

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