« **London Regional Office**, continued

What We Learned:

In the initial data gathering process, boards were asked to comment on specific areas of each project with regard to their stage of implementation. In relation to the JK–1 CODE project specifically, boards responded to the categories of capacity building, collaboration, measuring progress, informing parents, and the collection and use of data to inform practice.

Overall, boards reported being in the implementation stage with regard to the specific areas delineated in the survey. Boards were implementing job-embedded learning opportunities for staff and focusing on the use of evidence-informed assessments to improve student learning. All boards reported to be at the sustaining stage for clear and collaborative process for entry into school and collaboration with community partners. In the area of student and class profiles, however, boards generally reported that they were at the preparation and initiation stages, although the majority indicated that there were planned, precise, and intensive assessments and interventions for some students, along with parent and family involvement. Data from regulated health professions and/or external agencies was being used to inform programming for students entering the school system.

During the second phase of the project, face-to-face meetings were held at each board. The key components of effective practices were identified in several areas:

Assessment Methods: Boards identified the connection to the School Effectiveness Framework process as a key component to successful practices in the JK–1 area. The collaborative involvement of other professionals, such as speech/language pathologists, psychologists, special education consultants/coordinators, and community professionals during the entry–to-school process was deemed to be essential.

Standards: The need for standards and consistency in the delivery of services across all schools in a district allowed for consistent monitoring and the more effective use of data, with guidelines being provided by the board, at the JK–1 and primary levels. The assessment of foundational skills helped staff to know their students and to inform and direct instruction. The results obtained through the gathering and analysis of data enable teachers to provide a profile of student growth and development and to develop responsive programs to meet the needs of all learners.

Training: Training for staff was seen as most successful when it involved doable tasks—tasks that were manageable and meaningful. Embedded professional development with time to practice was seen as most effective. Early Years staff benefited from training on how data informs teaching, with an emphasis on next steps.

Communication and Collaboration: The boards identified the key components of effective communication with families as being open and honest communication, the minutes of meetings being shared/communicated with next steps identified, the modelling of techniques for parents, the sharing of information in a variety of formats, and explanations of terms/programs/procedures. The need for an open and inviting atmosphere was also highlighted.

Partnership agreements and established protocols were seen as effective strategies for working collaboratively with community partners. Open and clear communication processes, and the timely sharing of reports and information, were seen as key components to good working relationships. Some boards identified the use of problem-solving community planning tables as an effective process.

Support: In order to establish effective intervention strategies for Early Years students, several key areas of support were identified. System support mechanisms, such as professional learning communities and system in-service on intervention strategies, were valued. Having the JK–1 area identified as an area of focus in school and board improvement plans was also seen as important for highlighting early intervention.

School-based supports mentioned by boards frequently included the need for school-embedded professional development and the support of system resource personnel at the school level. The use of assessment results in a systematic way to inform teacher instruction in order to meet students' needs was again highlighted, along with the need to have an understanding of intervention strategies appropriate to the identified needs.

Classroom supports identified by boards to support the learning of young students included the use of learning profiles, differentiated instruction, the use of high-yield strategies for instruction, and the use of interventions and remediation strategies in the areas of fine motor skills and oral language development.

Boards appreciated the support of funding made available through CODE to help with the costs related to implementation and the duplication of materials.

Next Steps:

In order to help expedite the sharing of information gathered as a result of the four regional initiatives, a decision was made by the RSEC members to embark on a regional document-sharing project through the development of a regional website.

The website also contains other materials in addition to the information gleaned from the four specific initiative areas. Topics include:

- Alternative program
- Assessment and evaluation
- Assistive technology
- Exceptionalities
- Early learning
- EQAO
- English as a second language
- Individual Education Plans
- Learning for All
- Policies and procedures
- Information shared at RSEC meetings
- Speech and language
- Transitions
- Inclusion
- Literacy
- Mental health and well-being
- Parent resources

Due to the close relationship and spirit of cooperation between the members of RSEC, the member boards and school authorities have generously agreed to share the resources contained within the website to assist each other in the work they do in the field of Special Education. The website will enable them to freely share the resources which until now were developed for internal use within each board. Further, through the sharing of these resources, the members of RSEC believe they will be able to improve the quality of service they provide in meeting the needs of all students. ●

✉ Comments about this article? Email Vicki Corcoran

CODE Ottawa Regional Junior Kindergarten to Grade One Assessment and Intervention Learning Team 2009–2010

Trish FitzGibbon, Superintendent, Hastings Prince Edward District School Board

Dalin and Rolff (1995) and Katz, Earl, and Jaafar (2009) argue "that the only way schools will survive the future is to have the capacity to deal with change because they have a collective understanding of where they are going, what is important, and how to get there. Sustainability of positive changes in education depends on attention to collective development. Individual learning is no longer sufficient. People at all levels of the system need to learn and different parts of the system must be aligned to provide a coherent and consistent picture and strategy for change." (Stoll, in press.)

The Ottawa CODE project was all about collective understanding and collective development. We became "knowledge workers" and in the end, through uploading and downloading knowledge, built new knowledge that resulted in significant recommendations which we believe are the next steps in refining our practices to enhance the achievement of our early learners.

The Ottawa Regional Junior Kindergarten to Grade One Assessment and Intervention Learning Team was comprised of personnel from each of the region's school boards and was inclusive of a range of reflective practitioners from curriculum, special education, and specialized services.

The Learning Team met on five occasions for full-day sessions throughout the 2009–2010 school year, with each session hosted by a different school board. A professional learning team approach was implemented, with the group establishing norms and committing to a project plan.

Each session began with a focus on the goals of the project and a review of the previous work accomplished. This was followed by an activity that activated prior knowledge to prepare for the day's discussion and work on the identified assessment of intervention element (e.g., instructional strategies). Through discussion, team members in mixed school board groups brought forward knowledge and evidence-informed practices or resources that demonstrated results within their school system. Each session concluded with the sharing and critiquing of recommendations for consideration in our final report.

An exploration and recommendation template was provided for groups to stimulate discussion, share knowledge and resources, and synthesize their thinking into key recommendations for consideration in the development of a provincial Junior Kindergarten to Grade One Assessment and Intervention framework. This synthesis of thinking was achieved through a process of deliberate debate to reach consensus.

Team members maintained a project binder which successively built upon the work completed in the previous learning team sessions. In addition, an email network was established to inform members of meeting dates and preparation activities.

The professional learning team members agreed to design a report template similar to the Special Education Transformation Working Table Report, 2006, so that the synthesized learning could be captured in a series of next-step recommendations to support the development of the provincial framework. These recommendations would be grounded in current Ministry initiatives, evidence-informed research, and best practices, and would reflect the consensual thinking of the region.

The Ottawa Regional Reflections April 2010 Report was primarily a "process" oriented report. The recommendations for the five elements (system processes and organization; parent involvement and community communication; assessment and use of data; instructional leadership; and professional learning and capacity building) reflected the best practices and thinking of the regional learning team, with future-oriented next steps recommended, so that all boards across the province could consider their current practice

and potentially scaffold refinements to their processes. Each recommendation clearly outlined a goal, priority focus, rationale grounded in research, and detailed recommendations.

Briefly, the following priority areas were identified for consideration in the provincial framework:

System Processes: renewed guidelines for entry-to-school practices that align with the early learning program and are inclusive of community partners and screening processes, and are easily accessible to parents.

Parent/Community Involvement: renewed guidelines for effective collaboration strategies amongst parents, teachers, early childhood educators, and community partners.

Assessment and Data Use: renewed guidelines for the development of an early learning assessment process and cycle for implementation that supports the transition/entry-to-school process and clearly profiles the learning needs of students.

Instructional Leadership: renewed guidelines for the development and implementation of a student learning profile and process so that it networks the school, parents, and community partners effectively in supporting the learning needs of each early learner.

Professional Learning: renewed guidelines for the implementation of early learning networks that demonstrate a commitment to focused, intentional, multidisciplinary team learning whereby participants are learning from, with, and on behalf of one another.

Participants in the CODE Ottawa Regional Learning Team expressed a significant sense of personal and regional accomplishment as part of our CODE project! Members repeatedly noted, with conviction, that a regional learning team approach permitted them to model collaborative inquiry and enhanced their collective responsibility through a professional learning community. Our sessions reflected research-informed and evidence-based practices, as well as shared philosophies, beliefs, and a consistency of approaches to early learning across the region. As next steps, participants were clear in identifying a need to include critical partners from other sectors to be part of the regional learning team and to enhance the work and learning of the team for the success of early learners. In addition, the team also recommended an opportunity to learn how to enhance their facilitation skills so that they in turn could model such practices within their board and their own learning teams.

As Lead Board for the Regional CODE Project, our team found it an absolute pleasure to facilitate an intentional and shared professional learning endeavor with such experienced and talented colleagues across the region! Without a doubt, the CODE project reaffirms, challenges, and supports the continual evolution of refined professional learning environments and practices, particularly norms related to minimizing the privacy of practice, vague goals, and vague language. It's about precision, personalization, and practice that makes a positive difference in the interaction between students and teachers at the classroom level! ◗

Comments about this article? Email Trish FitzGibbon

JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Framework Evidence Collection Summary North East Ontario

Rossella Bagnoto, Superintendent, Sudbury Catholic District School Board

Regional Process

Over the past several months, eight English school boards of the North East Ontario region assembled through a combination of teleconferences and face-to-face meetings to carry out the collaborative work required by this project.

The focus points of our dialogue included:

- identifying existing JK–1 assessment and intervention strategies presently used within each board
- sharing these board-specific tools through networking dialogue
- enhancing these assessment/intervention strategies with more specific criteria and in doing so improving student success
- supporting each other through discussion about the evidence gathered through the implementation of the tools used in each board

Board practices/tools related mostly to oral language development, followed closely by phonological awareness and finally social skill building. In some instances, the practices and tools were developed within the board, but in other cases practices were linked to research-based commercial assessment tools.

Alignment with the Importance of Early Years Learning

From the information recently published by the Ministry in *The Role of Play in the Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program* (Principles 5 and 6), we see embedded opportunities for learning through play supported by the collaborative work of the members of the ELK team, including special education personnel. The students' need for the development of social self-regulation (focusing attention, following instructions, cooperation, remembering what to do), emotional self-regulation (controlling aggression, awareness of and response to the feelings of others), and cognitive self-regulation

(habits of mind, planning, problem solving) will require special education teachers to complement classroom teachers with additional assessment strategies and interventions to support instruction appropriate for each child's success, remembering that the purpose of assessment is improved student learning. It is the full team that monitors, documents, and assesses learning. In saying this, we believe the CODE project was timely and appropriate to our needs.

Demonstrated Strengths Across the Region

- maximum alignment with the content of support resources and learning
- from initiatives provided by the Ministry of Education
- assessment tools and follow-up interventions collaboratively implemented
- and tracked by school teams
- assessment results inform next steps

Recognized Gaps as a Result of Out Collaborative Dialogue

The identified gaps are twofold:

1. The first gap involved providing sufficient job-embedded training to teachers and ensuring that they would work collaboratively with special education personnel to provide a variety of levels of intervention. This is an area where we believe a model must be created.

2. The second gap related to presenting assessment findings to parents in a consistent way across each district and ensuring that parents were involved in understanding the goals of the intervention process. Our districts must continue to "energize" all of the education partners.

Determined Next Steps and Required Support

As a regional team, we came to a collective understanding of what our next steps must be. To put the following next steps into practice will require additional time and financial support.

- Look at the work of CDA's and support personnel. Inequality among regional boards requires balancing. The impact will be felt by the Early Years learner who has no access to face-to-face speech and language intervention.
- Recent research findings maintain that the classroom teacher "makes the difference." Classroom teacher efficacy will depend on additional funding for continued training to ensure that these teachers implement interventions that are best suited to improve learning.
- Monitoring any initiative is key to its success. Is monitoring a single action, or is it a set of actions? We need to clearly define the term "monitor" at both the system and classroom level.
- Parent engagement is a must! A checklist of ideas for Early Years teachers on how to purposefully engage parents in the early years would be beneficial.
- Curriculum and Special Education departments must be integrated. We need to find and share models that would demonstrate this collaboration.
- What will the expectations look like for the EL–K program? Once we know this, we will require further funding to refine the assessment and intervention process that will be required and to apply the recommendations forthcoming to the classroom setting.

Elements – Best Practices Across the Eight North East Boards

System Process/Organization:

- consistent use of support resources to inform professional learning
- collaborative team work in place—both in-school and out-of-school
- assessment process begins with all students, then focuses on students demonstrating struggles
- increased focus on classroom assessment before intellectual assessment

Instructional Leadership:

- assessment reflects awareness of current research affecting early childhood learning
- increased communication among education partners
- assessment data is collected electronically and is readily available to school- and district-level leaders
- school principals lead in-school teams, ensuring that all team members understand that closing the gap means moving a student to demonstrate actual achievement matching his or her potential for achievement
- clear alignment with goals of both the Board Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plan

Parental Involvement:

- across the region, schools invite parents to engage in activities such as Family Nights, Open Houses, Welcome to Kindergarten Days, Esso Math Sessions, and Student-Led Conferences to ensure the opportunity for all parents to help their children reach their full potential
- opportunities for parents to be informed of implemented assessment tools sometimes include face-to-face meetings with classroom and/or special education teachers, letters, pamphlets and/or school calendars
- most boards provide parents of students with special needs with guides (many of which are posted on board websites) which include information regarding the assessment cycle and links to community agencies

Professional Learning and Capacity Building:

- job-embedded learning opportunities are offered through online/after school book studies, school team release for teaching/learning critical pathway work, network sharing days, PD days
- videotaping combined with coaching feedback improve teacher efficacy
- increased collaboration between Curriculum and Special Education staff/departments