

CODE Director of Education Innovation Fund 2015/16 Toronto District School Board Summary Report

A team of Senior members of the Toronto District School Board were selected to visit schools in Miami-Dade County, Florida as part of the Director Innovation Fund initiative.

Our purpose was to investigate how a large system takes technology innovations to scale. Miami-Dade County is composed of 350,000 students in 300 schools. The Toronto District School Board counts 250,000 students in 600 schools. We were hoping to gain a deeper understanding of the system approach that Miami-Dade had developed for staff training and how that collective commitment was received and delivered.

The agenda included visiting 2 schools – one large K-5 elementary school and one grade 6-12 secondary school with a focus on Mathematics And Science Technology (MAST). It was followed by a meeting with both the Assistant Superintendent of Innovation and School Choice and the Chief Information Officer to discuss the county's current strategies, initiatives and goals on learning. We concluded the day with an executive meeting with Dr. Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Miami-Dade and his Senior Staff team.

Our learning from the visit was significant. Our team was able to observe a very high level of engagement of principals in their schools and learning teams and how they influence the development of conditions to guarantee global competencies throughout their buildings. The conversations with students were rich and focused on the task through technology. In our conversation with the senior staff we heard a clear emphasis on central acquisition of a technological platform that supports teacher and student needs, and the applications (content and productivity) used to deliver on those objectives, along with training and the necessary infrastructure. For instance all schools in the county use one portfolio tool (OneNote) to manage student work, teacher work, and to track progress. Their digital convergence plan was clear and shared with all staff as was explained by Dr. Carvalho.

Our team was fortunate to meet and collaborate with the School District of Surrey BC while in Miami-Dade. Their focus was on leadership development and on the adaptive challenge of what to look for when hiring school leaders. They have quickly become valued critical friends to our system. With them, we would like to explore the question of "how do we go about selecting principals that will launch a new generation of learners for whom today's global competencies are fully integrated into their lives both inside and outside of the school walls?" What are the conditions required to make this happen? We are looking forward to working with them again to discuss further.

Our next steps will involve focused conversations with our learning teams on the need to be extremely clear on the connection between the global competencies and how to create conditions in classrooms that guarantee their development, such as the adoption of an inquiry stance (leaders in system, school, classroom); collaborative communication; design thinking (of process, product); the habits of iteration and reflection built into the classroom norms; and implementation science. We recognize that the perspective of equity brought about by the persistent reflection on the current state of need and the assessment of the current leadership move is an important part of creating those conditions. As well, a focus on the recognition of what deep engagement looks and feels like for learners in the classroom and beyond is necessary.

We will leverage the knowledge shared during the visit to look at scaling innovation and building teacher and leader capacity within our large system.

Visiting another school board and learning from their leaders was extremely valuable and enriching for us. We returned to Toronto with many ideas, questions and models on how to bring integration of technology to scale while leveraging change in teachers and principals.