

Leading Student Achievement: Our Principal Purpose

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The Leading Student Achievement: Our Principal Purpose (LSA) project continues to be a tremendously exciting and successful example of tri-level collaboration involving the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, the three provincial principals' associations and Ontario school boards. The project is well into its second year. This innovative partnership has resulted in a clear unprecedented focus of a shared vision and a common language regarding the role of the principal as instructional leader.

School boards across Ontario have created principal learning teams for developing principals' skills as lead learners and collaborative leaders. This has deepened their knowledge and expertise in areas such as assessment literacy, action research, emotional intelligence and high yield instructional strategies in literacy and mathematics. Their learning opportunities have been supported by CPCO workshops, resources at the local level and the LSA tri-annual symposia. These learning teams are a powerful vehicle for building capacity at a provincial, board and school level.

The lead principals and superintendents that have been engaged in the project since August 2005 have continued to learn and to grow. They have acted as mentors and coaches for the new teams that came on board in August 2006. The genuine sharing of knowledge and expertise has provided a rich, multi-layered approach to job-embedded professional learning. The opportunity to dialogue with colleagues from other districts has been truly inspirational and transformational.

The lead superintendents and principals are overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of the benefits of this ambitious and comprehensive initiative. At the most recent symposium on January 26, the sense of growing confidence and accomplishment in building and sustaining authentic learning communities both locally and provincially was evident. Many participants expressed a deep appreciation to the principals' associations and to the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. Joanne Melo, one of the lead principals from the Toronto Catholic DSB stated:

The alignment across the system has been so positive and the moral purpose behind the project so powerful that people feel they are really making a difference for the individual student. The vision is such a positive one that there is hope this will be sustained and that the project will continue into year three.

Dr. Avis Glaze delivered the opening address. Her dedication and passion for ensuring that all students receive equity in education was infectious. She reiterated her support for the project and the work of principals.

The symposium featured a presentation on *Leading and Learning: Student Achievement in Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances*. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat of Ontario has sponsored this project with the goal of sharing these successful practices across the province. There are six modules: Building Literacy Capacity; Using Data Effectively; Distributing Leadership; Building Parent and Community Relationships; Creating Opportunities Beyond the Classroom; and Supporting Professional Learning. For each module, there is an overview and key research findings. Each module may be used for individual learning or as a facilitated group session. To access this valuable resource go to www.curriculum.org/leadingandlearning.

Dr. Ken Leithwood, professor of educational leadership and policy at OISE/UT presented the preliminary findings of the research surveys that he has conducted with the LSA lead principals and teachers. Dr. Leithwood offered that LSA has yet to demonstrate much impact as a strategy for improving student learning. He said that it is still too early in the life of the project for this to be a reasonable expectation. However, he feels that as an approach to leadership learning on a large scale, LSA shows promising signs of significant impact.

Student achievement officers Mary Lou Kestell and Kathy Kubota-Zarivnij guided participants through activities, demonstrations, and explanations that focused on mathematics instruction and teacher training. They emphasized the importance of activating prior learning, providing an opportunity for students to talk to one another, encouraging students to solve problems in a variety of ways, and learning the skill of being able to make sense of students' thinking.

Lieutenant-governor James Bartleman closed the symposium with a very moving and heartfelt sharing of his life experiences. He highlighted how these have shaped his passion for literacy development, especially within the aboriginal community in northern Ontario. He shared several of his projects including the twinning of aboriginal schools with schools in central and southern Ontario. He also spoke about the establishment of summer literacy camps for high-risk students. Frontier College and the Ministry of Education in partnership have established the Young Readers' Program, which has a membership of 5000 youth in the fly-in communities situated in the far north. It was a profound and powerful close to a very worthwhile day. The next symposium is scheduled for May 4, 2007.