CODE Consortium

Leadership and Innovation

Leading from the Middle:

Spreading Learning, Well-being, and Identity Across Ontario

Council of Ontario Directors of Education Report

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

The Canadian province of Ontario is an established global leader in educational change, with widely-acclaimed results on student achievement and equity on international large-scale assessments.[1] Only one country—Finland—exceeds Canada in terms of equal opportunity combined with positive outcomes for low-income students.[2] More than this, Ontario has either stronger democratic self-governance, or greater multi-cultural inclusion than other high performing jurisdictions, or both.

Ontario is successful but not static as a system. Over the past 15 years, its priorities have shifted, its goals have broadened and deepened, and the education profession has transformed how it has taught and led with increasing levels and sophisticated forms of collaboration. As a group of researchers at Boston College, with longstanding connections to Canada and Ontario, we have observed and investigated much of this evolution and progression in policy and practice through two key studies of 10 school boards – almost one seventh of all the province's 72 boards – and their development and implementation of system-wide reform.

The first of these studies took place from 2009-2011 and produced case reports of up to 10,000 words in length for each board.[3] Consisting of senior policy interviews and survey data collected from teachers and principals, this study analyzed the province's strategy and its impact with regard to a reform known as *Essential for Some, Good for All* (ESGA). This intervention was organized under the auspices of the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE), which gave it a measure of autonomy from both the Ministry and from the individual boards.

The 2011 study had a quantitative component that recorded gains for students with learning disabilities in the schools, and also charted educators' perceptions of changes in their practice. This was supplemented by interviews with educators in 10 school boards (the CODE Consortium for System Leadership and Innovation) about their board-based ESGA strategies, along with interviews with provincial policy makers.[4] These revealed the existence and effects of a reform strategy that, after one of the project leader's interpretation, we named *Leading from the Middle* (LfM). LfM described how Ontario's 72 school boards used the Ministry funding that fit the province's philosophy of inclusion and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies but that also suited their own local circumstances and student populations. At the same time, these were systematically networked with each other in a culture where, at collective events and through a steering and coordinating team, teachers, schools and boards took collective responsibility for each other's success. LfM began to be part of Ontario's provincial government policy, especially in its leadership, and it attracted the attention of other systems around the world such as California and Scotland.

After the conclusion of the 2011 report and the end of government funding, 10 boards (mostly the same ones as in the original study) decided that they would like to continue working together and also with the Boston College research team to continue their professional learning, inquiry and development. They were especially taken with the idea of LfM and wanted to see how it might be advanced further. LfM somehow "caught people's imagination" and lit a "significant fire" about how they might continue to work together.

Paradoxically, in the words of one of the project directors, educators in the 10 boards "really didn't know what 'Leading from the Middle' was." They only knew "it's not top-down and it's not bottom-up. It's middle level people getting in there and taking a leadership role, taking responsibility."

The CODE Consortium continued even in the absence of government funding. At first, the Consortium and its meetings were funded by the participating boards. In 2014, this funding was supplemented by Ministry support to CODE. This time, though, unlike ESGA, there was no targeted government funding for specific interventions or initiatives. The project directors of the CODE Consortium and the board members, whose expertise was largely concentrated in special education, wanted to try out improvement and innovation projects and to see how they might further explore the concept of LfM. This resulting study therefore documents a much more open-ended and improvisational process than that which had occurred under ESGA. In a way, the project itself became the new LfM for these boards.

Along with other studies of Ontario policy initiatives and innovations, this report contributes to the provincial, Canadian and global debate about the nature, direction and meaning of educational change within complex systems.[5] Because this study builds on the previous 2011 report and presents current as well as retrospective data, it is able to offer an overview of change over time as experienced by teachers, principals, boards and provincial system leaders. This longitudinal perspective, encompassing the dozen years from 2005-2017, opens up new findings about how Ontario has developed and transformed its approach to achieving equity and excellence at a time when the province, the nation and the world are in the midst of a profound shift from one age to another. These two ages are what we call the *Age of Achievement and Effort* and the *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity*.

The Age of Achievement and Effort

Ontario, like many of the world's societies and educational systems, has started to move between two ages in the last dozen years, and has been one of the main leaders of that movement. Until 2014, one of the most prominent policy priorities for many jurisdictions, including Ontario, was improving educational achievement and simultaneously making it more equitable in terms of measured attainment. Ontario proclaimed that it would "reach every student" through "three core priorities" of "going deeper on literacy and numeracy," "reducing the gap in achievement for those groups of students who, for whatever reason, need extra help," and increasing "public confidence in publicly funded education."[6]

In this *Age of Achievement and Effort*, Ontario's educators combined cyclical reviews of performance data at the provincial, board, and school

level with more intensive interaction and problem-solving among teachers, to monitor and accelerate the measured progress of every child, class and school.[7]

Internationally, large-scale educational reform in this age was driven by four compelling questions.

1. How are we doing?
2. How do we know?
3. How can we improve?
4. How can this benefit everyone?

These questions led educators to think harder about performance, measurement, improvement, and equity.

The *Age of Achievement and Effort* was successful at raising expectations, especially for some vulnerable groups whose challenges were not well captured by aggregated data for students as a whole. In Ontario, labour peace was also established after years of blame and shame had been heaped on the teaching profession. Funding poured into the system so that, in Ontario, for example, student success coaches provided additional support for struggling students.

But the focus on *Achievement and Effort* also incurred problems. Its data-driven approach led educators to concentrate more on students' deficits than their assets. Teachers felt constrained by policy pressures in a rapidly changing environment. Some complained of a narrowed curriculum, particularly for students in the tested grades, and felt that the pressure to reach system-wide Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) scores – known as the "Drive to 75" where the target was for 75% of students to reach proficiency – led some administrators to press teachers to give undue attention to students just below that threshold in order to increase their proficiency scores.[8]

The driving questions of the *Age of Achievement and Effort* must stay with us, even if some of the ways to address them need to change. It is important that every child has opportunity, that the possibility of social mobility is there for everyone, and that schools are relentlessly committed to all students' success. But even if excellence and equity could be accomplished perfectly on provincial assessments, this would no longer be enough. The world is in turmoil. Our schools and school systems have to respond.

The Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity

The defining questions for our societies and our schools now are even more serious than ones of achievement, opportunity and competitiveness. They cut to the very core of who we are. There are three of them.

1. Who are we?
2. What will become of us?
3. Who will decide?

These questions emerge from several international trends. First, there is a global epidemic of mental health problems among young people. In Ontario, one in seven students has reported "a serious level of psychological distress" and over one-quarter indicated that during the past year there was a "time they wanted to talk to someone about a mental health problem, but did not know where to turn."[9] One in eight students expresses "worry about being harmed or threatened at school."[10]

Second, we are in the midst of the greatest international refugee crisis for 50 years.[11] When

refugee children arrive in classes of the countries to which they flee, they do not only have to learn a new language or make up for many years of lost schooling. Many refugee children have also been exposed to multiple incidents of post-traumatic stress involving family deaths, violence and dislocation.[12] Refugee children have often had interruptions in their schooling for not just months but years. With over 25,000 refugees accepted into Canada in 2016, their integration into schools and societies is being followed around the world.

Third, there are harmful effects of digital technologies on children's learning and lives. When we went into schools less than ten years ago and asked teachers about technology, apart from worries about misuse of smartphones, they would point to benefits such as increased and independent access to information, capacity to network with experts and other schools, and support for students with learning disabilities. Now, the first issues that educators and mental health specialists often mention are the anxieties that occur among adolescents because of cyber-bullying, especially among girls. They worry about short attention spans, digital distraction and lack of depth or focus resulting from excess screen time. Teachers are also increasingly concerned about the digital dis-inhibition that emerges in online interaction as insults and rage exceed anything that might be said face-to-face.[13]

Fourth, an accumulating body of research has documented harmful effects of large-scale standardized testing on learning, equity and well-being.[14] In the face of challenges from parents' and public advocacy organizations, policy-makers in national systems and global organizations have called for reviews of and revisions to the assessments and in some cases abolished such testing altogether.[15] The US Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2015, for example, acknowledged that there had been excessive uses of standardized testing to the detriment of children's learning.[16] The OECD's 2017 report on global metrics concerning child well-being and quality of life noted that many nations that had high achievement scores coupled with low scores of well-being or happiness were the same nations most often criticized for extensive uses of standardized testing.[17] The 2017 Global Education Monitoring report on accountability, led by the United Nations, also concluded that "There is extensive evidence showing that high-stakes tests based on narrow performance measures can encourage efforts to 'game the system,' negatively impacting on learning and disproportionately punishing the marginalized."[18]

Last, who are the "we" who compose the population who make up the public that will send their children to public schools? Nice, Berlin, Stockholm, Helsinki, London, Manchester, Ottawa, Barcelona, Aleppo, Las Vegas, Orlando, Charlottesville, Mumbai, Myanmar, Edmonton, Quebec – these are not a list of destinations in *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego*? They are instead cities and nations bound together by incidents of hatred, exclusion and violence. Brexit, Catalonia, and the threatened wall on the US southern border, define a world where people are more clear about what they want to get out of or who they want to get away from, rather than how we can and should learn to live together.

For years, a majority culture held uncontested sway over Canadian society, but now, many groups are seeking recognition and inclusion in the public sphere. These include Black Canadians,

Muslims, Franco-Ontarians, immigrant newcomers, and other groups who are harassed and bullied because of their actual or imputed sexual orientations and identities or other attributes that define them as somehow different. First Nations are also asserting their Constitutional rights to develop their own education systems. And in all this, White working class identities are also easily overlooked or stigmatized in ways that incur feelings of resentment from being left out and left behind. In this new *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity*, how, in education and elsewhere, do we recognize, engage with, include and bring together different identities in an uplifting, common quest and struggle for greater humanity and prosperity?

Achieving Excellence

The world is changing and Ontario education policy has been changing with it. For many years, Ontario's Ministry of Education seemed to have its feet firmly planted in the *Age of Achievement and Effort*.[19] Government policy had "three core priorities." The system aspired to "high levels of student achievement," aimed at "reducing the gap in achievement for those groups of students, who, for whatever reason, need extra help," and pursued "increased public confidence in publicly funded education."[20] This approach yielded measurable improvements in literacy achievement and high school graduation rates, including among a number of vulnerable populations such as students with learning disabilities.[21] However, with the emergence of concerns about young people's well-being, social cohesion in general, and also the sophisticated skills needed in a rapidly transforming economy, the concerns that defined *The Age of Achievement and Excellence* were ready for reassessment.

In May 2013, the Minister's Student Advisory Council brainstormed the future of Ontario's educational system. Their work was captured in the following image:

Figure 1: Students imagine their future school system[22]

In the autumn of 2013, the Ministry convened meetings with "representatives within the education system, including parents and students, teachers, support staff and school and system leaders" in order to "consider and discuss the skills and knowledge Ontario learners will need in the future."[23] The "result of their feedback" was a "renewed vision" for the province that was published in a report entitled *Achieving Excellence*.[24]

The renewed vision had "four goals" that "are interconnected—success in one contributes to success in the others."[25] These are:

1. "*Achieving Excellence*" in academics for "students of all ages";
2. "*Ensuring equity*," so that all students "will be inspired to reach their full potential";
3. "*Promoting well-being*," in order that all "students will develop enhanced mental and physical health"; and
4. "*Enhancing public confidence*" in Ontario's "publicly funded education system."[26]

While *Achieving Excellence* stated that the four goals built upon the previous priorities of increasing student achievement, closing achievement gaps, and enhancing public confidence, there are three striking changes that reflect the emergence of a new *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity*.

First, it was recognized that "foundational skills for academic achievement (that) include reading, writing, and mathematics," would now be "combined with creativity and critical thinking" to "lead to excellence." The school system should not just focus on improvement, but also on "innovative teaching practices and instructional methods enabled by technology." This, in turn, would require that educators "give students more flexibility and ownership in their learning" by "allowing them, for example, to determine whether they want to spend more time on e-learning or learning outside of the classroom." Schools should also "promote the arts" to help students develop their "critical and creative thinking skills that support success in school and in life."[27]

Second, "equity" was defined in a way that was far broader than "closing achievement gaps." *Achieving Excellence* "recognizes diversity as a contributor to success, not a barrier," and stated that schools "need to be places" where all students "see themselves reflected in their learning." While the report noted Ontario's excellent ranking on equity in international assessments, it also acknowledged that "some Aboriginal students, youth in care, students with special education needs, and some students who are navigating a transition continue to struggle." Effective equity strategies would need to attend to the identities of these and other groups of students and to "intervene in a timely and effective way to help children and students who are struggling."[28]

The third change had to do with the new attention being given to student well-being. "Developing child and student well-being means supporting the whole child," according to *Achieving Excellence*.[29] This requires addressing "not only the child's academic achievement but also his or her cognitive, emotional, social, and physical well-being." While "Ontario already has taken important steps to support the whole child," through previous policies, the report stated that "further action" must be taken. "By elevating child and student well-being as one of our core priorities, we recognize its fundamental

importance to our learners and their futures," the report insisted.[30]

Achieving Excellence aspired to bring about improvement and innovation in Ontario's schools in three ways. First, schools would define academic excellence more broadly to include the arts, critical thinking and creativity. Second, the Ministry redefined equity policies beyond closing tested achievement gaps to include address students' varied identities and to enable students to be able to see themselves more in the curriculum and life of the school. Third, well-being would be treated with the same importance as academic achievement.

With the publication of *Achieving Excellence*, Ontario educational policy moved decisively from an *Age of Achievement and Effort* to an *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity*. "The world is changing rapidly," the report stated. It was time for schools to help all students to "reveal their hidden gifts and spark new passions."[31] Ontario's schools would produce "well-rounded individuals who have not only strong basic skills, but also the critical thinking skills, imagination, and resilience to excel in—and create—the new jobs of tomorrow." A paradigm shift had occurred.

Being Bold and Specific

The movement from one age to another represented by *Achieving Excellence* is not just a progression on a single continuum from one ranking to another, like good to great, or even great to excellent. Nor is it a switch from one value system to another, such as achievement to well-being. It is more an issue of how Ontario education is able to bring together, address and integrate two different dimensions that are sometimes conflated and confused in educational policy: being bold or less bold, and being specific or broad. The nature and ambition of a system's goals and purposes are as important as the degree of success in accomplishing them. What does this mean for Ontario?

First: While there is a time and place to be bold or less bold, at this point in history, how *bold* is Ontario now in terms of providing breadth and depth of educational experiences and outcomes, compared to being *less bold* in the *Age of Achievement and Effort* when the province placed its priority on specific achievement goals in literacy and numeracy?

Second: Does Ontario define and document what has been learned, and does it monitor the progress and success of its bolder strategy in broad and general terms, or does it use clear narratives or storylines along with *specific* metrics to assess progress and implementation?

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Ontario set out to raise the bar in making measurable improvements in literacy and numeracy, and to approach equity in terms of narrowing achievement gaps in these areas. It was less bold, but highly specific.

Since 2014, Ontario has been moving from being specific about progress but less bold in its learning ambitions, to becoming bolder while trying to ensure it does not lose public confidence or the ability to see how well schools and students are progressing. *Achieving Excellence* and three of its pillars – excellence, equity, and well-being – represent the boldness needed in economically dynamic and culturally diverse societies. The fourth pillar – public confidence – currently rests

on ways of being specific and measuring progress that have not kept pace with the other changes and movements in curriculum, and with the growing importance of well-being.

Ontario's challenge is to pursue its bold vision of deeper learning, broadly defined achievement and inclusive well-being, while modernizing its assessment strategies so it remains possible to support the capacity to track, monitor, demonstrate and sustain progress in these newly prioritized areas.

Organization of the Report

This report provides a detailed presentation of the major findings of this research. *Chapter Two* describes the methodology of *collaborative appreciative critical inquiry* used in conducting the research in relationship to its original aim and objectives. It describes how the research questions were generated and how participants became involved. The data analysis combines elements of collaborative inquiry, appreciative inquiry, and critical friendship. This chapter also describes how detailed case studies were written on each of the 10 boards and how these were then reviewed through a detailed cross case analysis.

Chapter Three presents the research team's findings in regard to students' academic learning. It describes how the work of the 10 boards has evolved since 2011 and focuses on two boards that focused their CODE projects on improving students' mathematics learning in the early years. It shows how those boards sought to improve achievement by concentrating on developing number sense among young children and on the use of collaborative inquiry processes to build teachers' confidence and competence in mathematics teaching and learning. This chapter concludes by presenting educators' perspectives on the EQAO assessment in terms of its impact on learning and achievement.

Chapter Four is dedicated to the 10 boards' work in the area of well-being. It describes how educators in the boards analyzed and applied definitions of well-being in contrasting policy documents from New South Wales (Australia), England, and Ontario. It identifies the ways that different boards have pursued the well-being agenda and points to the widespread nature of well-being activity. The chapter concludes that it is time for well-being to be more closely interwoven with the academic work of the schools.

Chapter Five sets out findings in relation to students' identities and how these are being supported in order to advance inclusion and equity. It provides a policy context with reference to Ministry of Education reports, and to ongoing efforts to establish equity and access in schools. The chapter describes how some kinds of identities are being supported in the LfM project schools but also how others are being overlooked. It concludes by arguing that the well-being and achievement strategies should recognize multiple and intersecting identities, should increase engagement, empathy and integration among these identities, and should also strive for common visions and purposes that unite and transcend them.

Chapter Six describes a new model of *collaborative professionalism* that has been advanced by the Ministry of Education and discusses how this is being realized in the CODE Consortium boards. It finds that collaborative professionalism on the ground has progressed significantly from where

it was in 2011. *Professionalism is more collaborative* in formal and informal ways, and *collaboration is also more professional* in its use of evidence, protocols, and structures of dialogue and feedback.

Chapter Seven describes the ways that educators understand the concept of *Leading from the Middle* today in comparison to how it was used in the 2011 ESGA report. It also finds that, except in the case of this project and its involvement of the ten boards, the original idea and strategy of *Leading from the Middle* across boards that take collective responsibility for shared success has largely disappeared due to loss of continuing vision and financial support for the strategy at the top.

Finally, *Chapter Eight* presents conclusions and recommendations from the entire study.

Ontario's educators understand that the world has changed and that the province and its educational system must continue to evolve accordingly. They want to respond by helping their young people to thrive in a new *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity*. They also realize that whatever supports are provided from above, or whatever movements emerge from below, ultimately, to benefit all students in every school, they must lead from the middle.

Chapter 2:

Methodology

This research was designed to contribute to the academic achievement and well-being of students in Ontario by informing educators and the public about the evolution of changes in the province's schools and school systems. Because of Ontario's success in attaining high levels of student achievement and equity, along with its quest for continuing improvement in relation to these goals, the findings from this research are relevant to educational change leaders across the province, Canada, and around the world.

Original Aim and Study Objectives

This research was developed in collaboration with the 10 CODE Consortium boards. The study was initially guided by the following goals:

1. To understand and articulate the model and theory of action undergirding the CODE Consortium's current LfM projects, so they can be communicated clearly to project participants and diffused more effectively to other jurisdictions.

2. To gather perceptions of the projects' strengths and limitations, impacts and effectiveness, from individuals who participated in the project through individual interviews and focus groups.

3. To connect these findings to an analysis of the existing evidence–base of leadership models, in order to determine associations between the conditions of leadership and implementation on the one hand, and student and staff learning on the other.

4. To share the interim and final results with participating boards in a manner that supports board improvement planning and invites other boards to consider how they might join together in new forms of collaborative professionalism that will advance student achievement, equity, and well-being.

Development of the Project

As the project developed in collaboration with the boards, it became clear that, compared to the period when ESGA was being implemented, there was less orchestrated effort or investment on the part of the Ontario Ministry of Education to support a coordinated and continuing strategy of LfM across the boards. In effect, our project turned into what remained of the strategy, but across the 10 boards, not all 72. There were other ways to connect school board innovation efforts, of course, including the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning Project that develops deep learning initiatives accelerated by digital technologies[32]. But, as a strategy of coherence and cohesion, LfM was no longer center stage.

This led to two developments as we worked in collaboration with the boards. First, we asked participants to describe their own understandings of LfM as they experienced it now and in the past, and we describe and analyze these responses in relation to the original strategy in Chapter 7 on LfM. Second, as the province's policy on *Achieving Excellence* began to unfold, it became apparent that the boards and their projects provided a real-time experiment for examining the impact of the new government direction on a seventh of the boards in the province in relation to the four pillars of broadly defined excellence, increased equity, the importance of well-being, and continued public confidence.

Given the emphases of the boards' current projects, and the ways in which they were approached, we were able to gather findings in relation to the implementation of mathematics achievement in two of the boards, the development of initiatives to improve student and teacher well-being across almost all of them, the importance and manifestation of various facets of student identity as an increasingly central part of the well-being strategy, and the progression and deepening of collaborative professionalism as a way of implementing and circulating these changes around the province.

The emergent design of the project, including a period of suspension of some research activity due to work-related actions involving the teacher unions across the province, enabled us to see and to sample board projects with different emphases across the boards. These do not, however, represent a sample or spread of all reform and improvement initiatives in the province. Because the representatives of the boards within this collaborative design were largely special education specialists, the projects they selected usually fell into or included their own domains of expertise and activity. These included strategies for attaining equity in mathematics achievement in the elementary grades, developing student self-advocacy for instructional modifications, strengthening relationships between special education and curriculum staff, and introducing programs of emotional self-regulation in schools. By comparison, we saw little of other areas of improvement and reform, such as uses of technology to stimulate innovation. The result is a sampling of practices in the province without any indication of their overall frequency or representativeness.

However, emerging indicators of accountability elsewhere are now concentrating on whether systems and their teachers use practices that are supported by research or their impacts.[33] This CODE project complements this shift towards policies that are informed by research. It points to practices emerging in and spreading across the province, with indicators of how they are being used by teachers, principals, and board leaders. It provides a portrait of what the system is doing in response to this new policy direction at a key moment in time.

Materials, Methods and Analysis

Our research team was led by Professors Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley and supported by research assistants Chris Bacon, Mark D'Angelo, and Shanée Wangia, all based at the Boston College Lynch School of Education. Our team conducted initial visits to CODE Consortium meetings in 2015 to begin collaboration and develop our research design alongside members of the CODE

Consortium as well as the Ontario Ministry of Education. In May 2016, our team conducted site visits to all 10 of the participating boards across the province. At least two team members visited each board. Team membership was mixed and rotated in order to enhance cross-validation of interpretation. Team members conducted interview-based mini-case studies over 1 to 2 days with each school board. We undertook 222 interviews with educators, selected project leaders, and project coordinators at the board and Ministry level. Interviews lasted approximately one hour each and were conducted in private locations in each board office or school building. Interviews were audio recorded with the knowledge and informed consent of the interviewees.

Further interviews were conducted with a small sample of administrators, teachers and support staff from a range of elementary and secondary schools. These were chosen in consultation with board leaders who participated in the CODE Consortium. Separate interviews were conducted with CODE Consortium leaders and a group of senior Ministry of Education staff.

Lyn Sharratt served as *rapporteur* for Consortium meetings. She kept copious notes on board presentations and discussion highlights. She took photographs of professional development activities and shared her insights and wisdom with the Consortium throughout its gatherings.

As part of the site visits, the Boston College team collected artifacts such as powerpoint presentations of the boards' strategic plans, memorandums pertaining to LfM projects, flip chart paper and analyses done during board site visits and covering all of the 10 boards, as well as guidelines for things like pedagogical documentation of student learning. We also visited schools and took photographs and films in the process of participating in class activities. After our site visits, many boards sent copies of internal memoranda or staff development materials upon request, or when they judged that these would be helpful for analyzing the research.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interview protocols (See Appendix B) were developed collaboratively with members of the CODE Consortium, beginning with an initial meeting in January 2015. Questions were constructed to elicit information on the design of the improvement initiatives, as well as to obtain evidence of educators' perceptions regarding the implementation and the impact of LfM and LfM projects. Questions were piloted during the initial collaborative meetings in the spring of 2016 and then implemented during the May 2016 data collection period.

Participants and Methods of Involvement

The sample was a volunteer group of nine boards that had participated in the earlier study of ESGA that was reported on in 2011, with a substitution of one Franco-Ontarian board by another. As the 2011 report confirmed, this sample is quite representative of boards across the province in terms of geographical spread, urban and rural distribution, religious and non-religious schools, and EQAO scores. The boards volunteered to participate in the research and to provide funding through the CODE Consortium.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, assisted by the CODE leaders. This form of recruitment was selected because the CODE leaders have no power or authority over participants. No conflict of interest, coercion, or undue influence was involved. CODE is a non-governmental, third party entity. It provides services with which participants choose to engage.

Members of the research team were trained to perform the informed consent procedure in accordance with the Boston College Institutional Review Board's (IRB) standards for research ethics. Before participating, as well as before each interview, participants were given copies of the informed consent procedure guidelines. They were encouraged to ask questions about the procedures and the study in general. They were given the option to decline to participate in the interviews if, for any reason, they did not wish to proceed.

All participants signed informed consent forms before the interview commenced, once they decided that they were willing to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

Our methodology for data analysis combines three approaches taking the form of what we call collaborative appreciative critical inquiry. These are:

1. ***Collaborative Inquiry*** – To design and develop the research methodology, and then to interpret the data with both the Boston College research team and CODE Consortium participants working together.
2. ***Appreciative inquiry*** – To uncover and explain the successes within organizations and their practices, which is particularly appropriate for making explicit the principles and achievements of high-performing systems and institutions.[34]
3. ***Critical inquiry*** – To identify tensions, dilemmas, struggles and threats to sustainability in a spirit of identifying and constructing more effective means for fulfilling the goals of a system – in this case, the CODE Consortium and the public education system of Ontario.[35] In this spirit, we include critical dialogue drawing on relevant literature about how key concepts and strategies such as well-being and emotional self-regulation are being employed in the field. We discuss how factors such as assessment frameworks or the composition of collaborative inquiry teams can affect the implementation and interpretation of efforts to enhance achievement, equity and well-being.

The team analyzed interviews using the constant comparative method to identify salient themes within each of the 10 boards – a process which includes actively searching for disconfirming data as interpretations of themes begin to emerge during the analysis.[36] The themes were derived from an interaction between the original research questions, the policy emphases and four pillars of *Achieving Excellence*, the projects that the boards selected as their foci, consultation of relevant literature in areas such as emotional regulation, and issues that emerged from the evidence itself. This was followed by member-checking with participants at meetings of the

CODE Consortium (see Appendix A).[37] After initial coding, the team wrote individual case studies of 5,000-10,000 words each for internal use only, describing findings from each individual board, based on the themes and also on the emerging narratives inherent to each board. After this, the team conducted a cross case analysis to examine patterns, similarities, and differences across cases, participants, and policy initiatives.[38]

Finally, the research team studied the 2011 *Leading for All* report compiled by Hargreaves and Braun to investigate how each of the 10 boards had evolved in the 12 years since the original ESGA projects were launched.[39] This enabled the team to acquire an unusual degree of insight into the nature of educational change over time in Ontario—a subject that is not available to the majority of researchers who study only relatively brief short-term interventions or projects.[40]

Chapter 3:

Learning

In *Achieving Excellence*, the Ontario Ministry of Education emphasized that achievement is not completely separate from either equity or well-being. "Success in one contributes to success in the others," it said.[41] In addition, the report went on, achievement "also means raising expectations for valuable, higher-order skills like critical thinking, communication, innovation, creativity, collaboration and entrepreneurship."[42] However, the policy document expressed particular concern about mathematics achievement because "like many other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world, Ontario has also seen a decline in student performance in mathematics."[43]

Mathematics Learning

Declining mathematics performance is a pre-eminent concern of public education in Ontario and many other parts of the world. "Ontario Maths Scores Started Declining as Kids Took to the New Curriculum," said the *National Post* in 2016. "Ontario's Low Maths Scores Suggest an Education Crisis," proclaimed *The Toronto Sun* in September 2017. Behind these bold headlines, what are the statistical facts concerning Ontario students' mathematics performance?

Overall, Canadian students rank among the highest performers in the world according to PISA, which assesses the performance of 15-year-old students in reading, math, and science every three years. Of the 72 jurisdictions that participated in the 2015 PISA, Canada ranked second in reading, behind Singapore, and in the top 10 in science and math, similar to its performance in 2012.

However, on the mathematics section of that test, although Ontario remained in the top 25% of all participating jurisdictions, the province's students performed slightly below the Canadian average. Indeed, Ontario's math performance on PISA has steadily declined over the last decade.[44]

On the *Pan-Canadian Assessment Program* (PCAP) of 8th graders, on the other hand, Ontario performs significantly better than most Canadian provinces in reading, science, and mathematics. In 2013, Ontario students led the country in reading and science, but placed third in math. Ontario was the only province in the country to exceed the Canadian average on the 2013 PCAP in reading, which some have attributed to the province's past emphasis on literacy over math.[45]

On the provincial EQAO, math scores have been in steady decline across the province since 2013, while reading scores have increased. From 2013 to 2017, the percentages of primary students meeting provincial standards in math have decreased from 67% to 62%. Similarly, among junior students, the percentage of those meeting provincial standards has dropped from 57% in 2013 to 50% in 2017. In contrast, percentages of primary and junior

students meeting provincial reading standards between 2013 and 2017 has steadily increased from 68% to 74% and 77% to 81% among primary and junior students, respectively.[46]

Bringing together the local, national, and international measures of achievement in reading and mathematics, Ontario is undoubtedly one of the highest performing jurisdictions in the world in all three academic domains, and the top performing province in Canada when reading, science, and mathematic scores are averaged. Nonetheless, the steady decline in mathematics scores over time on these assessments compared to the continuing rise in literacy achievements has prompted the province to invest $60 million in its math reform strategy.[47]

Then and Now

In our 2011 report, the 10 Code Consortium Boards had taken a range of approaches to improving equity and excellence in educational achievement. These were circulated among the other boards at the CODE meetings as part of the ESGA strategy for lifting the achievement of students with learning disabilities.

ESGA strategies had many dimensions. Some of them concentrated on improving literacy through coaching, consultancy, and developing new materials, as well as professional development for teachers and principals to support differentiated instruction. Others used student performance data and data walls to monitor individual progress and make interventions where necessary. A number of boards introduced new measures to help students with identified learning disabilities by providing additional support in the use of assistive technologies. Student voice was addressed by teaching students the skills of self-advocacy. Many of the boards promoted closer in-class relationships between classroom teachers and special education support teachers.

By January 2015, the 10 participating boards were focusing on an array of strategies addressing issues of student well-being and achievement. In relation to achievement, the main focus of projects that were shown to us by two of the boards was to improve achievement in mathematics.

Mathematics Projects

Two boards in traditionally manufacturing areas of Ontario made mathematics achievement their major focus in the context of their LfM projects. We will look at each of them in turn, then draw some common conclusions about them at the end of the chapter.

Board 1

When a new director arrived in this board in 2015, she found an atmosphere of being "free to speak up" in a climate where there was "a lot of creativity, a lot of innovation" – more than she had seen before. People, she felt, were "very bright" and collaborative in a "social" way, but professionally, they were "a bit territorial." Some were "competitive," especially in terms of the relationship between some of the curriculum and special education staff. To promote collaboration, she "moved people around" "to "pool their monies" on matters such as targeted services for Indigenous students and the improvement of the board's mathematics achievement.

This director found the board's operational plan for raising achievement was "not very precise," so she set about making sure that people at the board office "wrote the board improvement plan together." This included setting targets for improvement that were "results-focused." She applauded the Ministry for "doing something around mathematics," as there had been "no numeracy" in the Literacy-Numeracy strategy in the earlier period of reforms that we have described as an *Age of Achievement and Effort*.

A major direction called *Reaching Every Learner* provided professional development for this board's schools in literacy, and later, mathematics, in a way that concentrated on building a program for every student. Several sessions supported student self-advocacy and its links to mathematics achievement, so that students would have more opportunities to speak up when they had trouble understanding mathematics lessons. The program consisted of three sessions of professional development per school with Grades 1, 2 and 3, with Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) and administrators attending.[48]

In relation to CODE projects, the Board established a Learning Disability (LD) Steering Committee. This comprised teachers, special education consultants, administrators, a school psychologist and speech/language pathologist, and the director of the local chapter of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. Their theory of action for change was that:

1. IF we document to better understand the conditions that are making successful experiences possible for students who learn differently… THEN we can mobilize knowledge regarding the interventions, strategies, and activities.

2. IF students who learn differently are to be supported to meet their learning needs… THEN teachers need professional development and resources which have been developed collaboratively between Special Education and Program Departments in consideration of all learners.

3. IF we provide direct instruction so that a student has an understanding of how they learn, their learning disability and their right to accommodations…THEN they will be effective self-advocates from junior kindergarten to school exit.

The result was a set of interrelated strategies that involved

- collecting test score and attitudinal data concerning the learning and achievement of students with learning disabilities, then repeating these data collection processes annually in order to monitor progress over time. Targets were also set for all students by June 2017 in literacy and math.
- providing professional development support and establishing collaborative inquiry teams, especially in math, to improve the quality of instruction for all students.
- making students aware of and also helping them become more involved in their individual education plans (IEPs), and spreading responsibility for the IEPs to more and more classroom teachers, not just those with special education expertise.[49]

In 2009, the chief focus in the board, as in the province as a whole, had been on improving and reducing achievement gaps in literacy. Data-driven decision-making, data walls, and diagnostic assessments were used to focus energy and attention on students who seemed at risk of not reaching proficiency on province-wide tests of literacy competence. Professional development accompanied by coaching developed teachers' competencies in new literacy practices.

Along with the province, this board has now switched its emphasis to improving mathematics achievement. The board's *Reaching Every Learner* initiative provides support and professional development. This is especially targeted for "teachers who are new to the system, with assessment, classroom management, instruction, anything you can think of."

It is now generally recognized that under the literacy and numeracy strategy of the early to mid 2000s, mathematics achievement received less attention and showed less growth than literacy achievement. Between 2010 and 2012, Grade 3 mathematics scores at proficiency for students with LD stood at 32% in 2010, 38% in 2011 and 33% in 2012%. Grade 6 mathematics scores stood at 16% in 2010, 31% in 2011 and 11% in 2012. For June 2017, targets had been set for increases in math achievement of 10% to 37% in Grade 3 and 41% in Grade 6.

In addition to target setting and data analysis, the Mathematics strategy in the board rests a lot on the work of a *Mathematics Task Force*. The Task Force was not part of the board's LfM project but provides a wider context of support for improving excellence and equity in student achievement.

> There's this selection of teachers, administrators and various other people that are involved and go around to all the different schools. We talk about how math is learned, how we teach it, how we look at it in various ways, special reasoning, and all of those sorts of things. What we're basically looking at is: What do educators need for more support in terms of different math teaching? What do students really need when we talk about any aspects of problem solving for how they learn? How can they articulate their reasoning when they answer problems or solve anything? Do they understand how to use all the tools and resources that we have? What are the resources from various math professionals in the world that individual schools can dig deeper into, such as comprehending math, and using all those different strategies within individual schools based on the school's needs?
>
> The Math Task Force goes around and they introduce some of those things, and talk about all of that within each school. The Math Task Force is also involved in creating surveys for students, parents, teachers and administrators, as well as support staff, to get a feeling of the system where we are in terms of instruction, in terms of assessment, in terms of how students feel about their learning, things like that. We put together recommendations for the Board of Trustees in how our board should move forward, based on our learning from these surveys, as well as our learning from research and some of our partners outside of the board.

Some educators grasped that effective math strategies built on what had already been learned about the effective teaching of literacy. "I like to use all of the things we learned for an effective literacy program, and use those same strategies, as a wrap around, because they go hand in hand," one teacher member of the LD Steering Committee said.

At the same time, learning how to teach math more effectively was also different from teaching literacy, in key respects. In terms of professional development, "it felt like literacy was very teacher focused, and I feel like math is more student focused. We're focusing more on observing students and trying to figure out how they learn, and what they understand, and that's driving the professional learning versus here's how literacy works." For teachers, this meant thinking differently about mathematics itself, as well as how to teach math differently. One principal commented how she and her colleagues "realized we don't know a lot about math ourselves, because of how we were taught." After returning to the Grade 1 classroom, one teacher noted how

> One of the things that I noticed that was different was just incorporating the 3-part math lesson into every day, where kids are able to explore and explain their thinking. They're not necessarily looking for the correct answer, but just showing how they thought their problem-solving through. An example of that, just in my little Grade 1 room, was taking the carpet and how many books can cover the carpet. I think when I was in the classroom before it was, "Okay, this is the lesson, here is the book to prove it, here is the page that we're going to do." Now, it's really about their learning and owning their learning. They can tell us what they need to solve those problems, as opposed to us giving them the right answers all of the time.

Administrators from the Board supported the work of the Mathematics Task Force by communicating a vision for mathematics learning and teaching.

> A team of administrators has visited every school to speak about the math vision, and make sure every teacher, every administrator, and the board is aware of the math vision, where to find the math vision, as well as, they engage teachers in doing math, and administrators in doing the math. That's the big difference between the literacy learning and the math learning. We're really trying to learn as co-learners and engaging in the math.

One of the main strategies for improving mathematics teaching and learning has been collaborative inquiry among teacher and administrator teams. Time was blocked off for educators to talk with their colleagues about math learning. We discuss how this was done in more detail in Chapter 6 on Collaborative Professionalism.

Support for student achievement was also developed through accessing student voice via surveys and by trying to develop more effective individual education plans (IEPs). Student interviews were conducted in June 2015 by the LD Steering Committee and will be repeated annually to measure growth and change. The members of the Committee "went out to ten different schools"

to do interviews with "about 70 students." They were "quite taken aback" by some of the results. While over 85% of students who were interviewed could label their weaknesses, few spontaneously identified their strengths. Almost no students "actually spoke directly to asking the teacher to provide an accommodation," and no student made any mention of their own IEP.[50] These survey results "have prompted people to think about 'Why haven't I ever included that in their own Individual Education Plan?"

A learning support teacher criticized the inaccessibility of IEP statements. "The IEP has not been for anybody but those with a doctorate degree," he said. "It's too convoluted, too complicated for the student and for the parent to understand, let alone for the teacher to input."

This was part of a more general problem with the education profession and its bureaucracy, he felt:

> We write things for adults, but nothing for students. There's nothing that comes out from the Ministry of Education that is written and communicated for children to understand. All the research that we do, all the monographs that come out, there's not a student version of any of that stuff. If you want people to be engaged, you have to talk to them at their level of engagement.

As a way of addressing this problem, some teachers wanted a self-advocacy page in the IEP, "so that it's documented, it's committed to, and it will be fully understood by the student and the teacher, because they'll develop it together." The board was moving "more towards classroom teachers being responsible for the development of IEPs for their students" "to help them speak for themselves, and see what they need to be successful." Improving mathematics in this board was not just about the academic content area, but also about student voice and agency. "As a board, we recognized that that's an area that we have some work to do in terms of having students own their IEPS a little bit more, know what their IEP says, and be able to advocate for themselves." "Even with my little guys," one educator reflected, "I'll tell them that 'some kids are best at what they hear and what they say, and some with their eyes and with their hands. This is how you learn best.'"

The LD Steering Committee and other leaders in the board were trying to increase awareness of students' strengths, and not just their weaknesses. As a result of the *Reaching Every Learner* professional development series, teachers were "always able to include and talk about student self-advocacy." One organizer of the series said that

> a lot of teachers were saying, "You're right. It is important to be sharing the IEP with the student. It is important to be sharing pieces of it. It is important to have a strength-based perspective and share with kids what they're strengths are, which they know, to boost their self-confidence; to make them feel good about being learners."

The series also built students' confidence by bringing them in to "teach the teachers how they were using" assistive technologies to support their learning. Students explained, "how it was beneficial for them, how it can be used in a classroom." The emphasis now was on training all students in the use of assistive technologies. What was

"essential for some" truly had become "good for all" in this board.

To conclude, this board has shown intensive efforts to be responsive to a population with high diversity and higher than average levels of disadvantage and poverty. It has tried to focus its vision and direction, break down the silos and improve professional collaboration between curriculum and special education functions at the board office level, and increase informal trust while tightening the structures and protocols of collaborative professionalism. It is attending to the needs of students with learning disabilities and other parts of the diverse student population by, among other things, soliciting student perspectives through surveys and focus groups and involving students more directly in understanding and developing their own IEPs.

Board 2

A second board was also improving mathematics achievement as its LfM priority. Like the first board, it approached this through collaborative inquiry involving interdisciplinary teams that helped teachers develop children's number sense in the early years. This involved addressing teachers' lack of confidence in mathematics. Teachers learned new ways in which they could keep better track of students' progress in number sense. These specific improvement efforts took place within a broader strategy to build a vision of *Transforming Learning Everywhere*.[51]

In 2011, the Board's CODE project had concentrated on implementing differentiated instruction to improve literacy achievement. The board had worked hard to make more effective use of diagnostic assessments in elementary schools so teachers could identify areas in which students were struggling and respond with precision and speed. Enormous work was accomplished in making greater use of assistive technologies for students with learning disabilities.

Professional development supports for these strategies consisted of visits to selected demonstration classrooms in the board so that teachers could learn from one another. Evening dinner-and-a-movie sessions featured videos and discussions on differentiated instruction. Book clubs were formed in which teachers studied ways to improve the teaching and learning of reading and writing for students with learning disabilities.

However, as elsewhere, the emphasis on literacy—and teachers' own greater comfort with literacy over mathematics—meant that mathematics was comparatively neglected. By May 2016, there were therefore significant shifts in focus from literacy to numeracy/math that also incorporated inquiry-driven innovation in diagnostic assessment for math.

Educators in the board realized that in the days of literacy reform, teachers might have been overwhelmed if they had undertaken mathematics reform at the same time. An elementary principal reflected how, ten years ago, things "needed to be a little quieter because it was all about how much can we put into the life of a teacher." The board's educators wanted to avoid what the research describes as "initiative overload" that promises too much at once and burns out staff, so that improvement is not sustainable.[52] The priority at that point in time was to "get that comprehensive literacy piece rocking and rolling. Let's get these reading scores where they need to be and then we will move into the math."

When numeracy became the next priority, leaders in the board and the schools believed teachers could learn a lot from what they had already accomplished with improving, intervening in and differentiating literacy instruction. The board's Superintendent of Leadership and Learning explained how "the plan around the math was from literacy." The board subsequently put a plan in place that called for using "an interdisciplinary team of coaches" to improve mathematics teaching and learning. These coaches were not math specific in terms of their prior preparation in the discipline. They were experienced classroom teachers who now were connected to "families" of schools.

The challenge, in this interdisciplinary approach, was to figure out the parallel "in mathematics, of a speech and language pathologist." The board needed to find and use diagnostic assessments as tools to track progress and identify gaps that would be equivalent to the use of the DRA (Diagnostic Reading Assessment) in reading. What they were seeking was "screeners" or screening tools for numeracy that would be as effective as the ones they had employed for literacy.

A significant issue in implementing numeracy reform compared to literacy reform has been teachers' own math identities. There was, educators felt, something different and unique about mathematics. Some teachers felt they were "not a math person," as one of them put it. One principal noted that their "teachers tend to be exemplary humanities-driven professionals." "We all were amazing readers and writers," she said. "Did we share that similar passion and appetite for numeracy?" "A person will never admit they can't read," she continued. "There's a real stigma to that, but math – you sit in any room and people will say to you, very openly, 'I don't do math."

These assertions are based in the reality that the last time many elementary teachers had encountered math was when they had left it behind in high school. Their own past experiences with math when they were students could sometimes hinder how they approached new understandings of math now. "It's harder for teachers to let go of how they learned math, how they were taught math and how they succeeded, or didn't succeed, in math," one principal said. However, elementary teachers were more than ready to acknowledge their own struggles with the subject as learners in a way that would be unthinkable in literacy.

These issues with math aversion create a barrier that board leaders have to understand and to work with their teachers to overcome. One board leader observed,

> People can say, "I'm math-phobic" and laugh about it and it's OK. That's an accepted excuse, in a way. Actually, at my staff meeting last week we were talking about anxiety that teachers have. I said, "How many of you in my school here took a math degree?" Nobody did. Then, "How many of you took a degree in English or language or humanities"? Many. We had a few science or phys ed and other things like that. So I said, "Everybody's coming to the table feeling like they left math behind in high school." You had to take English all the way through high school. You didn't have to take math. I think society has allowed us to say we're afraid of math. I think sometimes our kids come hearing that from their parents.

For some teachers of younger children, their own past struggles with mathematics were an impetus to becoming more effective in helping their own young learners to be confident and competent in the subject. The teacher who acknowledged she was not a math person, for instance, explained how

> I struggled with math always! Unfortunately, my children got their math genes from me. I see this as an opportunity to get them a really good start. It's an opportunity for them because I see it helps them. I am really motivated to help them. I feel like I don't have that same baggage about literacy. If I can help a kid not struggle like I struggled in math then I'm willing to do anything to make that happen.

Of course, the reference to "math genes" is just a figure of speech. But it highlights the deep-seated nature of this teacher's sense of inadequacy. Yet, she is keen to learn how to teach math better so that her students can experience success in a subject in which she has always struggled.

A coach who had worked with this teacher and others noted how these teachers' own acknowledged struggles with mathematics helped them be "open to change." One elementary principal felt that teachers of children in the early years were more able to "have a comfort level with mathematics at that level in terms of the curriculum." It helped that the approach to improving math instruction was understood as "organized play" involving a range of activities and games that established number sense and skills such as *subitizing* in the earliest years of public schooling. *Subitizing* – a widely adopted strategy to develop early number sense within the board and across the province – involved developing "understanding of the how much-ness like the number of grains in a jar; how much is really 700, if that was your estimation; or maybe how much space would 10 take up." Math was not regarded as a way of imposing drill and kill on very young children but developing a balanced approach to their learning. "That works. It's fun. They think they're playing," declared the teacher who said she was "not a math person." "They don't know that they're really doing math. I think in that way it's really motivating for me," she said.

This board's professional development strategies supported its teachers. The board aspired to take a balanced approach to mathematics and, with program materials and basic techniques like 3-part teaching strategies, to engage teachers in collaborative discussions about mathematics. The board's math coaches encouraged teachers to explore their own mathematics identity, and to grow in confidence in their teaching of mathematics to younger children.

One principal described how the focus at her school had involved "lots of talking about math. That's been a board direction as well. Our staff meetings or learning times together, our PD days, have very much been focused in on math thinking." The emphasis now was on "teachers talking to teachers," including "staff who are not math teachers," so they can also "feel engaged."

An instructional coach described the use of professional collaboration, reflection and a degree of inquiry as a way they had approached math improvement in the following terms:

> In our math strategies at the beginning of the first PD session, teachers were brainstorming what an effective math program looks like with the relationships, and the opportunities to learn and the environment. Then in this session they had to reflect on things that they've tried out, or are trying out and certain things that they'd like to learn about.

As children progressed into the higher grades, principals and others were more prepared to acknowledge that there was more need for math instruction to be delivered by teachers with specialist expertise. One principal, for example, had adopted the solution of employing high quality math specialists with knowledge of and passion for the subject in Grades 7 and 8. She noted how their own confidence and competence in the curriculum was indispensable if quality instruction was to spread to others.

> It's completely changed my building in a really good way. It's removed some of that anxiety (about math teaching). I find my teachers are comfortable and fairly confident until about grade 6. I was finding 7 and 8 is when you could feel there was a stress. (So) I've created that math specialty teacher.

As a result, even though this principal's school is in an area of high disadvantage, she now had some students who were taking Grade 9 math credits as "reach ahead" credits in their Grade 8 year.

A principal of one small school only had one class in each of Grades 7 and 8, and only one math specialist teacher, so she teamed up her teachers so the math and science specialist was available to the whole of the intermediate (7 and 8) level along with his partner who was a history, geography and language expert.

> You get a motivated teacher who's comfortable and that spills over. There's that understanding of the subject. I've got only two Grade 7 and 8 classes this year. The teacher (of math) there is able to differentiate for the kids and their learning styles because he understands the subject. He knows there are many access points.

In the context of the CODE LfM project, this board has, within its overall strategy and vision, focused on improvements in numeracy that build upon its prior successes in literacy. It has done this through using systems and networks of instructional coaches and consultants who have disseminated the value and details of a balanced approach to mathematics teaching and learning. Through adopting a collaborative interdisciplinary approach within and across schools, the board has built confidence among elementary teachers in the teaching of mathematics by addressing teachers' own concerns

about their own math identities. The board's strategy has empowered teachers to explore new and deeper ways of thinking about mathematics learning and number sense that are appropriate and important for younger children as a foundation for later learning, and it has, in the cases we learned about, capitalized on specialist expertise in mathematics, where and when it is available in Grades 7 and 8.

Educators in this board have also built on their prior experience in literacy of using diagnostic assessments to identify struggling learners. One of the ways that kindergarten and grade 1 teachers – who were the focus of the improvement efforts that the board set before us – sought to improve mathematics achievement among early learners was by employing DIBELS assessments (see below) as part of a process of screening children for difficulties with number sense. The availability and use of these assessments for helping them pinpoint learning issues with their students was well received by these educators, as by many of their colleagues in other boards.

Educators took diagnostic assessment, early screening, intervention and decisions about resulting teaching strategies seriously. But they did not simply adopt an approach for early mathematics assessment and screening without evidence and innovation trials. In 2014-15, the board worked on developing an Investigating Assessment Tool and Intervention for the early years. They developed two pilot projects and compared them in terms of their impact and practicality. [53]

The first pilot was in an assessment tool (DIBELS – created by the Dynamic Measurement Group) that had been developed in math from an earlier tool that assessed literacy.[54] The DIBELS pilot involved 62 students in kindergarten and Grade 1. Teachers learned DIBELS math, built their early numeracy content knowledge, and explored next steps they wanted to take. They used an indicator known as Beginning Quantity Discrimination (BQD) that measured subitizing and engaged in "explicit teaching" strategies to increase early number sense. The tool was used on iPads.

A second pilot worked on a digital numeracy screener tool developed and tested in partnership with a university professor. The numeracy screener was used with 397 students in kindergarten and Grade 1. Professional development time with teachers was devoted to learning the screener and connecting it to students' early numeracy knowledge.[55] These strategies yielded no significant differences between them and it was found that "there was growth in both groups."

This board was therefore working with different ways of improving mathematics instruction and testing them out empirically against one another. In 2015-16, feedback collected from teachers on DIBELS found that it was regarded as time efficient, easy to use because it was standardized, and straightforward in how it enabled monitoring of children's progress. On the other hand, teachers regarded the paper-and-pencil numeracy screener as time-consuming and difficult to administer. Since the screener produced no significant differences, and DIBELS was viewed as having been successful in supporting literacy

improvement, board educators were eager to see if the same benefits would be evident in the case of DIBELS math. One of the board's consultants explained how they then got started with DIBELS math:

> We had been using DIBELS as a pilot for literacy, and then we saw this DIBELS math. We thought, "I wonder what's in that?" because we found the DIBELS literacy very useful. A team of us went off to Pittsburgh, and we were trained in this DIBELS math assessment. We learned about the DIBELS math, but when we were working with teachers, we really combined the tool with the content knowledge around mathematics and talked about what were some possible next steps for students.

One of the principals recalled how, 15 years ago, the DRA (a reading assessment tool) led to reading interventions which meant that that "now, as a board, we're all committed to reading by the end of Grade 1.' "Almost 15 years later," she said, this was "going to be what we're doing in math." Likewise, one of the consultants felt that a progress-monitoring tool built into DIBELS was seen as very valuable by teachers. When teachers "looked at the assessment data," he said, some of them could say, "Oh, here's my whole group instruction. Here's my Tier 1 program, and here's my small group instruction for some of these kids that have a need in those areas."

Teachers appreciated how specific and detailed the tool was. One of them described how "it's timed the same way, one minute – subsets, subtasks. Like in literacy, it's broken down to all the different pieces that make up a proficient or fluent reader. The math is similar."

A colleague commented on how the tool was both specific yet flexible in how it informed different parts of her instruction:

> I'm just doing it with my grade 1s and I'm pulling my kids that I see are having some difficulties right now. Looking at where they're starting from, it gives me an end goal that they should be at as a benchmark. We're just implementing weekly assessments with them but I'm also finding time to do some little mini groups with them throughout the day as well.

DIBELS is an assessment tool without any stakes attached to it for students or for teachers. It is popular among these teachers because it identifies precise areas that they can work on to rectify learning difficulties immediately with targeted interventions.

But overall, even teachers of early years students where play and exploration often prevail, welcomed structured, detailed, diagnostic assessments that helped them identify their students' learning needs, informed their interventions, enabled them to monitor progress, and inspired them to improve their own teaching.

This board makes a significant contribution to emerging understandings about how to improve learning in mathematics from the very earliest years of schooling. It is seeking to build on and modify its earlier experiences of improving literacy results, yet it is also grappling with elementary teachers' struggles with their own math identities.

This is not an easy process because, according to teachers' own statements, their confidence in their mathematics knowledge is insecure. Processes and protocols of collaborative inquiry have deepened significantly in the last five years as a result of much hard work. Even so, the nature of collaborative activity and the architecture of how it is undertaken still need continuing attention to further fortify teachers' comfort level with the discipline.

In this board, a structure of consultants and coaches work together to engage teachers in inquiry and reflection about mathematics teaching and assessment in the early years. They also provide important support in implementing technology through added professional development days. Nonetheless, providing largely inquiry-based and reflection-driven non-specialist coaching and support to teachers whose confidence in math may be weak, may need to be supplemented by and enhanced with explicit coaching and more specialized expertise in mathematics.

These two boards were not the only ones out of all the ten that were undertaking mathematics reform. Others also mentioned aspects of their mathematics strategy in the course of highlighting other CODE priorities. But the two boards discussed here were the ones that chose to highlight their mathematics work as LfM projects. Also integral to that work was the approach the boards took to assessment and monitoring of progress – an issue that arose in several other boards as well.

Diagnostic Assessment

Teachers welcome effective and useful assessments, including and especially quantitative and diagnostic assessments, when they find that they can help them support children to learn and develop in real time. The teachers in the board we just discussed welcomed the development of DIBELS assessments and initiatives that enabled them to track their children's learning in real time with the help of smart-phone technology. In another board, teachers gathered qualitative data about student behavior as well as the quantitative data that they analyzed in the 6-week teaching-learning cycles – although some did have concerns that the cycles were too short to permit meaningful judgments.

In addition to these examples of diagnostic assessment, one board has developed a system of assessment, monitoring and tracking known as "pedagogical documentation." The Boston College team observed teachers filming clips on iPads of students working with math manipulatives, organizing letters on magnetic boards, or building with blocks. The teachers were able to do this in a non-intrusive way they shared with colleagues and parents, or were used as points of discussion with the students themselves. These notes, photographs, and films of classroom interactions of their students are all placed on Google docs immediately so that the information is shared instantaneously with colleagues.

As part of these processes, the teachers created substantial on-line documentations of student learning that could be referred to and built upon throughout the school year. One elementary school principal said that they now "had stuff that they could share with parents, that they could share with the children, and that the children could share with each other." If there is any question about what precisely transpired during a lesson, the films can be reviewed to track changes in children's abilities.

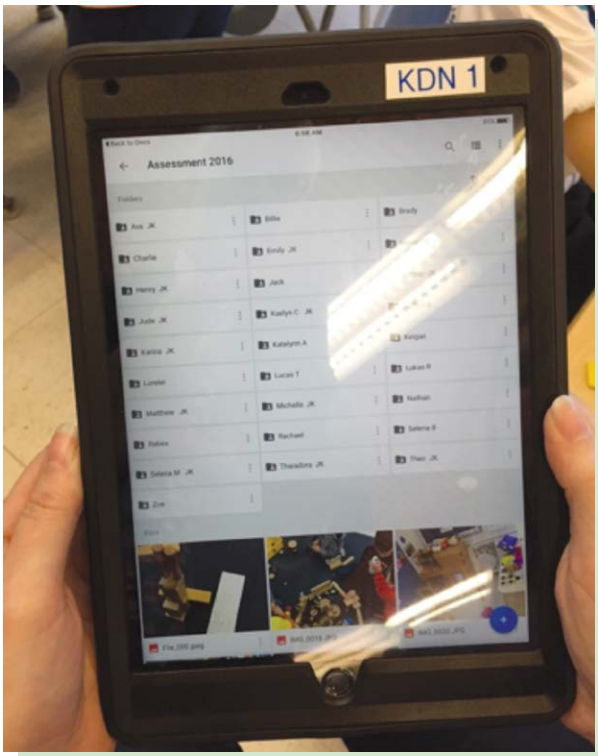

Figure 2: Every student has a file on this kindergarten teacher's iPad

Pedagogical documentation with technology enables educators to circulate evidence of student learning throughout the system. This in turn helps the adults to develop their own learning so that they can draw on the collective expertise of all of the educators in the system.

While educators in this board were grateful for a summer enrichment program to prepare kindergartners for grade 1, some were concerned that what was promised as play and outdoor learning became "connected to early literacy skills and early math" that would be measured on "this standard test pre and post." They do not want to return to definitions of children that labeled them as "level 2" or "level 1" students. These are rejected as "very impersonal. They really didn't capture the need to know your learner deeply."

Instead, a system administrator stated, "we've moved to putting a face and a name" to a student's data. This key transformation "comes from a stance of curiosity, and that's how we want to approach teaching and learning." Through these processes, professionals get better at analyzing data and getting to know their students and their progress more fully at the same time.

Pedagogical documentation is not confined to this one board but is known throughout the province. An administrator in another board, for example, described their take-up of iPads to focus on "pedagogical documentation, observations and conversations." "The comments that we're hearing from teachers, is that I see the value in this, in using my iPad to record, and having students record their own responses and being able to do voiceovers."

To sum up, educators' views are highly supportive of how diagnostic data helps them to know their students better and advance their progress in real time. They welcome effective tools and processes that can support them in this respect.

During a year of teacher action when the EQAO tests (the large-scale assessments in Grades 3, 6 and 9) were suspended, teachers in one board expressed how much they benefitted from looking at other data. "Wow, I think I really understand my school community now," said one. Another put it this way: "Not having that [EQAO] data this year made our school improvement planning much richer, because we were looking at different data, which we should have been doing all along."

A principal in another board agreed with the importance of data that teachers gathered

themselves as part of their ongoing, daily interactions with students:

> I get the need [for the EQAO], but we have Grade 2 and Grade 7 testing already that to me gives us a much better profile. The CAT testing, the insight testing, gives us a much better picture of the students and how they learn and is not nearly as stressful.

Large Scale Assessment

Ontario is moving towards a twenty first century curriculum in inquiry-based learning, new pedagogies for deep learning, technology assisted instruction, and attention to children's overall well-being within a province of manifest diversity. But in many ways, Ontario's large-scale assessment system in the form of the EQAO has not kept pace with these developments.

In 2011, in the *Age of Achievement and Effort*, school boards were in the midst of the "Drive to 75" – getting the province to a point where 75% of all students reached Level 3 proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Large-scale assessments raised expectations about the necessity and possibility of improved student achievement, especially among vulnerable groups. But, as our 2011 study revealed, the policy also had the consequence of focusing educators on some students—those with cut scores just below the desirable threshold—and sacrificing others who really struggled at levels 1 and 2, for example.[56] Similar consequences have occurred as a by-product of the international accountability movement in many other parts of the world.[57]

In 2011, our survey and interview data revealed that system administrators had been supportive of the EQAO because it enabled them to track progress, to know where their schools and their systems were, and to be able to intervene when necessary. Principal responses were more mixed, but many still welcomed how EQAO helped them in focusing teachers' attention on performance and improvement, and on the needs of vulnerable populations. Special education resource teachers sometimes felt that the EQAO ironically led some classroom teachers to recognize and appreciate that students from disadvantaged homes in challenging circumstances could indeed succeed. Teachers were more critical, however.

Our 2016 report includes evidence about the impact of EQAO assessments from half of the 10 boards. Where LfM projects did not include grades in which EQAO assessments are administered, educators were less likely to mention the assessment as a factor that impacted learning, achievement and well-being. We had less access to teachers compared to educators in administrative roles than we did in 2011. There was also no survey of educators' perceptions of factors affecting their work, including large-scale assessment factors, as there was in 2011. For these reasons, our findings on EQAO, like our other findings, cannot be generalized to the whole system.

Senior administrators today, as in 2011, feel that EQAO has "helped with accountability" and "helped drive standards," in one director's words. A Superintendent of Special Education concurred, asserting that it has a "place in terms of accountability." Improvements in test scores give senior staff confidence they are moving in a positive direction. A member of the professional

services staff in one board proudly referred to the success of an early literacy project in terms of how "the EQAO scores have steadily gone up and maintained." A superintendent in another board acknowledged that EQAO is "not the end-all and be-all but I would argue that if our EQAO scores are lower than they should be, then overall our achievement is perhaps not representing the potential of the children in the system."

Some principals were also supportive of the value of EQAO. They were proud when they showed gains on EQAO literacy scores for students with learning disabilities. EQAO also provided them with a way to know their students. One said,

> When I was teaching, it was certain I would have been saying "No" but, as an administrator, I see the need for it because it's that piece of the puzzle that you wouldn't have had if you didn't have that data. You can certainly see those students and where they're struggling. Sometimes you didn't even know they were struggling until you have that data.

A principal in another board felt that EQAO "drives the conversations." Another principal commented that her team was "feeling pumped and excited. They think that they're going to see some improvements."

At the same time, a system administrator in one board acknowledged that despite the advantages of EQAO for accountability, "we need to look at it through a different lens." In the words of a fellow administrator in that board:

> Is it the perfect way to measure that? No, but can a standard like that drive the way that I might teach better and help kids be clear around expressing their thoughts? I don't know. I don't think it's a bad thing. The fact that it causes anxiety for kids or that our kids with language, ESL students – that our kids with learning disabilities – are challenged by that; does that bother me? Yes, it does. It bothers me immensely, but I don't know a better way.

In 2016, among teachers we interviewed, there was little support for EQAO other than one teacher who conceded that "it's just part of my job; we just do it." When asked whether the test should be continued, teachers generally indicated that the cons outweighed the pros. In one teacher's words, "I don't think I could think of a teacher that would say, 'Well, no. We need to keep it. It's so useful and great.'"

Several problems with the test were mentioned in terms of its impacts on student learning. First, in terms of cultural bias, teachers criticized test questions that had culturally specific content, such as those about Canada's internationally famous ice hockey star, Wayne Gretzky, who might be unknown to a newcomer child from Africa or the Middle East. Items that referred to vacations in Florida may make sense to children from affluent professional families, but not low-income families in poverty. Children from Mennonite homes would be unfamiliar with many references to popular culture. Even efforts to represent greater cultural diversity like including an item we saw students responding to on Tai Kwon Do, may have little meaning for some Indigenous or immigrant students. Finally, the choice of appetizers on a

menu does not consider the reality that for many children, especially those growing up in poverty, eating out is a rare or unknown activity.

One teacher explained that testing items do not account for the differences in verb usage or other grammatical constructions used in Indigenous languages. Educators in the same board also noted that some students are more expressive when allowed to type their responses, but they were not able to do this on the test when they had to write their answers longhand.

Second, educators were also concerned about students, such as recently arrived immigrants with language or trauma issues, who had no chance of succeeding on the test, yet whose scores would be counted in the school's final profile. A coordinator explained: "They don't report on the participating students. They report on all students. The kids with developmental disabilities who do not write are still in the denominator. Students who don't write the test and who are exempt are then given a zero." These worries about fairness and equity were echoed by a teacher:

> I have Grade 3 and Grade 6 students that are non-verbal and autistic, that there's no way, shape, or form, they can write that test. It's ridiculous that they would even get on the list. It doesn't take into consideration the poverty in my school. It doesn't take into consideration the CAS involvement, the families that are living in motels. All those things that set my families back are not even considered. It's hugely detrimental to my kids when we get into those scenarios. It's very stressful for them. It's very stressful for the teachers. And, quite frankly, it seems to be unfair.

Third, a common argument against high-stakes or even mid-stakes standardized tests is that they incur excess instructional time devoted to test preparation rather than new learning. In a board serving large numbers of high-needs students, even though the director suggested that neither he nor his teacher should perseverate on the EQAO, because the most important thing was the focused time on learning, every year they still move the desks into rows. Students dutifully get out practice books to get used to the testing atmosphere. In a class where EQAO practice had been part of the school's weekly routine from the start of the school year, students were redoing a practice test on reading comprehension from the previous day because many of them had performed poorly. The principal stated that the purpose of this school-wide practice is to get students accustomed to testing.

However, some educators are content to focus on test preparation. One board leader said that

> EQAO really sets the bar. I find when you put grade 3 questions on the table in front of a group of primary teachers, K to 3 … "Let's talk about, as a community here, how can we support the grade 3 teachers in the building. This isn't about one year captured on a test. This is an accumulation of the years." We started to talk about what are the things that you can do in Grade 4 to support your Grade 6 teacher? We talked about doing daily, if not weekly, multiple-choice experiences in your room so that the children learn the strategies to conquer those types of questions with ease. I think EQAO has been a driving force.

A teacher of Grade 2 in the same board was also aware of what she needed to do to prepare herself and her students for the test in Grade 3.

> I did give them a question from the EQAO because I have a couple of the Grade 2s, just to see how they did. Then I sat with them and looked at what were the barriers. Was it the language? Was it the vocab? Was it that it was written? Was it that they had to communicate it? That they had to write it in that box? I made notes as they did it. To me, that helped me understand maybe what I need to do next year to be able to have them be successful.

Last, constraints of large-scale assessment can adversely affect efforts to innovate. Two of the boards we studied were undertaking significant innovations. One participated in Michael Fullan's *New Pedagogies for Deep Learning* (NPDL) network, where concern was expressed outside the board office that its promotion of innovation was at odds with the demands and constraints of the EQAO. "I feel like EQAO is preparing students for a very antiquated version of education," one grade 3 teacher said. A grade 5 teacher agreed. "The standardized testing is so far removed from what we're doing. There's nothing standard about what we're doing. We're taking each child where they come from," they said. "All the things that we establish in our classrooms, the accommodations, all the tools that we give our students cannot be used on EQAO," another grade 5 teacher observed. "I do have EQAO pending as a grade third teacher," another teacher in the same focus group added. "I do have content that I'm expected to teach and assess. Hopefully some of the critical thinking skills would come through when the students are presented with a pencil-paper test for three days in a row. There's a complete disconnect."

Teachers outside the EQAO tested years did not experience the pressures and constraints of EQAO to the same degree. In the boards that showed us projects in the early years, for example, EQAO was never raised as an issue. When teachers moved out of Grades 3 or 6, they could suddenly feel liberated from the strictures of EQAO. "Last year I was in grade 6 when I did my New Pedagogy project and I was like, 'Come on, I've got to get it done. EQAO is coming," one teacher remarked. But "this year," in a different grade, "it was like, 'Let's fly with this!' It's a big difference. If we didn't do math today, it doesn't matter. We'll catch up with it. The kids are engaged."

Another board resolved the tension between innovation and traditional large-scale assessments systemically. It seemed to avoid Grades 3 and 6, and even Grades 2 and 5, as places to introduce major innovations such as inquiry-based learning, mathematics reform, and NPDL. It is tempting to put innovation aside when EQAO comes closer, but this can hinder the pursuit of broader and deeper learning.

One of the original purposes of EQAO was to be an instrument of educational accountability. An equally important question concerns the need to monitor and track progress and performance with sufficient and reliable information. The key issue now is whether this particular instrument

for tracking and monitoring is still, twenty years later, the best available. Also, to what extent are the benefits of this instrument for monitoring progress and stimulating higher expectations for achievement outweighed by any harmful consequences for excellence and equity in teaching and learning in today's world? The words of one of the senior Ministry staff sums up the issue:

> Every child deserves us to be on our A game every day. There is no second best. I don't want to be at provincial average for EQAO. Our kids deserve the very best we can bring them every day.

The evidence in this report is not a representative study of the implementation of Ontario's four priorities in excellence, equity, well-being and public confidence. It is a glimpse into projects shown to us by one seventh of the province's school boards that cast light on these priorities and their interrelationship. At the same time, in the absence of other province-wide evidence concerning the impact of EQAO, the perceptions of large-scale and also diagnostic assessment and their impact recorded in this report should prompt further systematic research and inform discussion about the future of assessment in the province. In this respect, the Office of the Premier of Ontario's September 2017 statement of the need to "update provincial assessment and reporting practices, including EQAO, to make sure they are culturally relevant, measure a wider range of learning, and better reflect student well-being and equity" is important and timely.[58]

Conclusion

The province of Ontario is committed to achieving excellence, equity and well-being, while maintaining public confidence. This chapter has described various efforts across the 10 Consortium boards to improve excellence and equity in educational achievement. We have concentrated on mathematics achievement – one of the areas that two of the boards in particular focused on in their CODE projects and one of the priorities for the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Mathematics strategies have built on the success of previous literacy strategies by using teams of coaches and consultants to provide support for classroom teachers in adopting a balanced mathematics program, along with data to track and monitor student progress and identify areas of needed intervention, especially for students with learning disabilities. Additional strategies have also taken into account unique features of mathematics learning given the nature of the subject matter and the low levels of confidence of many elementary teachers in their own mathematical competence and learning.

By and large, teachers welcomed effective diagnostic assessment tools and processes if they enabled them to see behind and beyond the tools to understand the fullness of their children's development and put faces on the data.

Teachers also expressed criticisms that extend back over a decade, about the large-scale standardized testing instrument known as EQAO in terms of cultural bias in test items and testing processes; tendencies to focus on test preparation even in

the grades before tests are administered; dilemmas surrounding exclusion of vulnerable groups, especially newcomers; and inclinations to restrict innovation in Grades 3 and 6 since this might inhibit performance on the tests. If better tools with fewer harmful side-effects were available, educators would use them, and many already do so.

As the Ontario Government and the education profession move forward in reviewing current assessment strategies, it is important to emphasize the significant work being dedicated to improving excellence and equity in mathematics achievement that this research has uncovered, especially in the two of the boards that made this their priority for *Leading from the Middle*. Raising achievement in math is not being pursued simply by concentrating attention on making marginal gains for students just below the point of measured proficiency, but by building the foundations of mathematical competence among early learners to support the growth of their number sense; by strengthening the competence and confidence of elementary teachers in mathematics through intensive coaching, consulting and collaborative professionalism; and by developing the uses of diagnostic assessment to guide support and interventions for struggling students that had contributed to the success of the literacy strategy.

Chapter 4:

Well-being

The Origins of and Impetus for Well-being

When adults compare present generations of young people to ones in the past, they are apocryphally ungenerous. Things aren't what they used to be, they complain. For at least a quarter century, teachers in Canada and elsewhere have also been concerned that the job involves more and more social work, and that children are bringing more problems to school with them. Whatever the truth is, there *is* also something different about the children and youth of today. The figures do not lie.

Anxiety, obesity, depression and autism spectrum disorders among young people are on the increase.[59] Within Canada, bouts of unemployment bring poverty and insecurity to many families.[60] The working poor have to piece multiple jobs together to make a living and have less and less time to care for their own children as a result.[61] Digital technology distracts parents from engagements with their children, and excessive screen time diminishes these children's attention spans in turn.[62] The tyranny of traditional schoolyard bullies has been supplemented by the taunts of cyber-bullies.[63] Babies born premature now survive thanks to advances in health care, yet many of them also bring a range of resulting disabilities with them when they start school that require support.[64]

Beyond Canada, religious, political and ethnic conflicts in other parts of the world reappear as violence and prejudice in the country's neighborhoods and schools.[65] Newcomer children may bring post-traumatic stresses from their war-torn countries of origin. Recognition of the historic injustices inflicted on the cultures and identities of Indigenous and LGBTTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer) people places heightened demands on school boards and their teachers to be responsible for everyone they teach.

"Helicopter parents" are perpetually hovering over their offspring in families, schools and even universities.[66] Their constant concern about their children's emotional security has produced a "strawberry generation" of easily bruised youngsters.[67] Then there is the rise of "nature deficit disorder" from growing up indoors glued to glittering screens, or from having recess on padded playgrounds, rather than enjoying the thrill of engaging with nature, come rain or shine.[68]

Concern about the well-being of students is so widespread today that school systems around the world are producing new programs, standards,

and even accountability systems to address it. The idea of and aspiration for well-being first came to the forefront in 1948 when the World Health Organization (WHO), a creation of the United Nations, defined health as "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."[69] The WHO was the first organization to develop global metrics of mental health.[70] Indeed, it was the WHO and affiliated national agencies that advocated for the growth of new professions like psychiatric social work and school guidance counselors.[71] Well-being has come into recent prominence in education following its appearance in international indicators from the OECD, UNESCO and elsewhere that rank different countries in relation to their performance in well-being and happiness.[72]

Well-being Policies

In the past decade, governments and policy groups in Europe, parts of Australia, Canada, and the United States, have all advanced a well-being agenda for their schools. But they do not define well-being identically. The Consortium boards examined several different policies to reflect on the well-being policy directions in Ontario. The first example was from the state of New South Wales in Australia.

One major policy goal for schools in New South Wales is to "enable" well-being by helping students to "connect on many levels" with each other and their communities.[74] Schools should "strive for excellence in teaching and learning," according to the government, "and build trusting and respectful

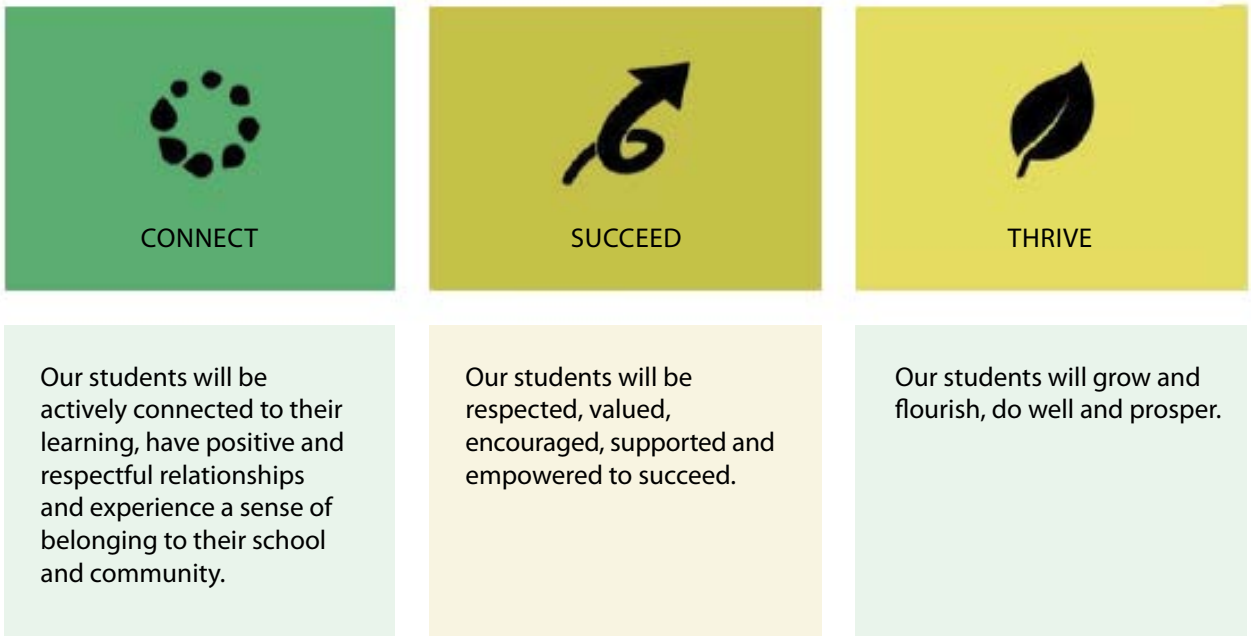

Figure 3: New South Wales Graphic Depicting Well-being[73]

relationships for students to succeed."[75] A good school system attends not only to students' cognitive, emotional, social, and physical well-being, but also promotes their "spiritual well-being," which "relates to our sense of meaning and purpose."[76]

The CODE boards also studied a graphic of from Public Health England "depicting eight principles to promote emotional health and well-being."[77]

The report accompanying this graphic argues that "Support from the senior leadership team is essential to ensure that efforts to promote emotional health and well-being are promoted and accepted." Leadership strategies should be "integrated, monitored and sustained for impact." These should demonstrate clear "links with the Ofsted inspection framework" (Ofsted being England's national body for school inspections), understanding that "one of the four key Ofsted judgments is 'the quality of leadership in, and management of the school.'"[78]

The CODE boards compared and contrasted the well-being strategies from New South Wales and England with that of the Ontario Ministry in 2016.

Figure 4: Public Health England Graphic Depicting Well-being

Figure 5: Ontario Ministry of Education Graphic Depicting Well-being

The Ontario Ministry explain its graphic by observing that "Self/Spirit' is situated at the centre of the four interconnected domains" represented by the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical quadrants.[79] The Ministry notes that "concepts of self and spirit have different meanings for different people," indicating that in some communities "cultural heritage, language and community are central to identity."[80] For instance, the Ministry notes, "according to Indigenous ways of knowing, well-being is based on the balance of the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects of the individual, seen not as separate domains but as elements combined and centred within Spirituality and connected by community."[81] This multifaceted and multicultural understanding of well-being is often missing from universal definitions such as those that are expressed in international rankings.[82]

In small-group discussions, with notes recorded on flip-chart paper, the 10 boards debated the approaches to well-being expressed in the three policy documents. One group identified "commonalities" across the documents, finding that they all "allow for interpretation," "are broad in scope," and "allow multiple entry points." Another asked, "What is missing?" The English report came in for the sharpest criticism. "Why is 'management' in the centre?" the group asked. In contrast to New South Wales and Ontario, there was "no connection to the physical/spiritual."

By studying the three well-being documents, it became clear that well-being is not a clearly defined or agreed-upon construct in education policy. This is also true in research. Wellness, for some, means mindfulness, understood as calming the body and mind in order to think more clearly and with greater compassion for all living beings.[83] For others, like former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, it was about rugged outdoor adventure – just as it is for some students' engagement with wildness and nature.[84] In South-East Asian cultures, wellness may be defined by duty and filial piety or by making sacrifices in the present for well-being in the future – what western psychologists have called delayed or deferred gratification.[85] These issues of cultural variation pose questions for how educators in Ontario understand well-being and its relationship to achievement.

Figure 6: CODE Consortium Notes on Definitions of Well-being Across Three Jurisdictions

Well-being in Ontario Policy

In 2008, the Ontario Ministry of Education produced a report entitled *Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education* that established three core priorities: "high levels of student achievement," "reduced gaps in student achievement," and "increased public confidence in publicly funded education."[86] Well-being was only referenced insofar as schools should be "safe and healthy."

Just one year later, amendments to the Education Act made well-being a responsibility of all school boards. But it was not until 2014, with the release of *Achieving Excellence*, that well-being was placed on a par with academic achievement, equity, and public confidence in the school system. The "renewed vision" of *Achieving Excellence* communicated that "Students cannot achieve academically if they feel unsafe at school or are bullied online. They cannot be expected to reach their full potential if they have mental health issues and if we do not provide them with the support they need."[88] Well-being was presented as a precondition for achievement.

In part, *Achieving Excellence* was based on a growing recognition that the world was changing rapidly. Why were youth depression and anxiety soaring? Why did one in eight students in Ontario have serious thoughts about suicide? More than one in five students reported being cyber-bullied. One in eight worried about being threatened or harmed at school.[89] These percentages are even greater for vulnerable populations such as LGBTTIQ students.[90] Acknowledging the challenges students face, along with the fact that the problems are unevenly distributed in schools and society, explained "why the well-being of children and students needs to move to the centre of the education system's priorities."[91]

As a result, the Ministry encouraged educators to "increase interest among children and youth in being physically active, and to increase their motivation to live healthy, active lives." *Achieving Excellence* called on a broad range of partners to "build safe and accepting schools" and to help students develop as full human beings and contributors to society.

Well-being in Practice

How has student well-being been developed since 2014 by the 10 boards? Four broad trends are identifiable:

1. ***Improved well-being increases achievement.*** Many children cannot achieve if they are mentally or emotionally unwell, bullied, anxious, sleep-deprived, enraged, hungry, or depressed.

2. ***Academic achievement is crucial for well-being.*** Failure destroys dignity. Focus and accomplishment provide the purpose and direction that allay anxiety in children and adults alike.

3. ***Well-being is a complement to academic achievement.*** It helps develop well-rounded, academically successful people who are also happy and fulfilled.

4. ***Well-being constitutes a major achievement.*** This happens when young people experience learning in their schools that enables them to lead lives with meaning and purpose.

All four understandings of the relationship between academic achievement and well-being are evident within and across the 10 boards. In some cases, simply meeting basic needs for food and clothing was a priority. In other instances, well-being is related to one particular program or target group of students, such as those with learning disabilities or English language learners. Technology contributes to students' ill-being in some cases, while in others it is a way to promote well-being. Finally, several boards developed interdisciplinary teams to improve services for particular groups of students, including those requiring mental health services.

So, a range of new strategies demonstrating local initiative has been put in place to address the new policy emphasis on student well-being. These reflect four different perspectives on the relationship between well-being and achievement.

1. Improved Well-being Increases Achievement

According to the *2016 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario* more than one in six children grows up in poverty, and the number is increasing.[93] Student ill-being emanates from "unfavorable socio-economic and family circumstances" that lead to "a low sense of personal competence, a feeling that one cannot control and plan one's life."[94]

Teachers usually observe the consequences of children's ill-being for their learning. In one board, they remarked how

> It's the teachers who serve the students because we know right from the beginning that the students were ready to learn if they were well fed. A lot of them weren't coming to school well fed, so we had the breakfast program and we had fresh fruit available in the class all day long for the kids to snack on. It really is a need in our school.

A principal in the same board described how her staff goes out of their way to ensure students' needs are being met. "They bring in clothes and make sure they're fed and they do all those extra little things so that they're ready to learn. These teachers make breakfast for the kids. They're putting butter on the toast. If we want them to be able to learn to read and to write they have to do these things." A colleague explained how "one child in Grade 2 or 3, his glasses kept breaking. The teacher called an optometrist and explained the situation. The optometrist donated glasses. The optometrist even came to school for the fitting for the child."

Many boards have to deal with multiple sources of ill-being in their communities. An assistant principal of a school where 85% of students self-identify as Indigenous and that is "the hub for 23 First Nation tribes" stated "We have a lot of kids that are high-anxiety, with a lot of developmental trauma. A lot of kids are in [foster] care. We have a lot of students that transition in and out of the North on a regular basis." A principal in the same board explained, "We refer to our kids as 'trauma kids'" due to "poverty, neglect, and violence" so "we look at our role as addressing the whole student. Sometimes we clothe them, feed and shower them, and love them, really. It takes a lot of work and a lot of empathy and understanding."

One of the teachers in this board asked, "You really start off the day, you are looking at Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*. How did they sleep? Are they hungry? Are they feeling OK? Are they happy? You are starting bare bones and you work your way up until [they] are ready to learn." When students joined a cookout for teachers after school hours, one of them asked "Do you mind if I get a plate for my mom? She's really hungry and she's too embarrassed to ask."

The principal in this school attributed the vulnerability of her students to parents who are "unemployed, uneducated, living in extreme poverty," and struggling with parenting due to negative experiences they encountered in residential school systems as students. The legacy of the residential school system looms large. "We have one of the highest suicide rate areas in all of Canada," one service provider noted, that results from "a lot of despair, hopelessness, depression." Many students have witnessed suicide in their families or have seen family members self-harming. Some students had resorted to suicide themselves, due to high rates of suicide in their immediate environment, being in families with substance abuse issues, having an absence of positive role models, suffering instability from being raised in foster care, and being in a system where there was relative unavailability or complete absence of mental health services.

The director of the school board was disconsolate that the board had lost five students in five months, one of whom, a ten-year-old, "was deemed high suicide risk" and had sat on a waiting list for mental health services for eight months without being seen. A teacher lamented losing two students to suicide over the course of the school year because of very long waiting lists for mental health services. Some students wait up to three years to be seen.

Schools in this board take a role in "parenting parents," in having to serve as "pseudo-parents" for students, in "writing letters on behalf of the parents for the mental health facility or family physicians because the parents don't feel articulate enough to be able to convey their concerns" and in teaching students to be resilient and self-sufficient.

Given the needs of Indigenous parents, a new position was created in one school: the Aboriginal Family Support Worker.

> It's a new position that we designed to support our families. Really, it's a pseudo-parent for our kids. She's parenting the parents, helping them get organized so that their children are up and coming to school and giving them supports if they need supports in seeking services from Aboriginal housing, or getting kids to the clinic for appointments or getting them to Firefly Mental Health Services for counseling, or working with the agencies to support their families and get them the services that they require. She takes families to the food bank. She really just is there for whatever we need her to do. She does lice checks with the kids – all of those kinds of things that are really helpful.

Wherever possible, schools in this board try to draw on the assets that parents offer in their communities. One principal explained how "the parents that come to our school are advocates for all of our kids and do a lot of activities. They are quite great at being advocates for *all* kids." The parents do fund-raising to provide "free lunches for kids" and they work with foundations and government agencies to "help support the large amount of food that we have available to the kids."

In other boards, the challenges facing children in poverty or from troubled backgrounds stem from other sources. One concerns the disturbances associated with a "high immigrant population and Syrian refugees." One teacher noted how "numbers are going up, up, up with English Language Learners. Some of them are coming from pretty horrible situations." "I think about some of these students. There are going to be lifelong mental health issues." One board's response was to appoint a new superintendent with responsibility for mental health and fund new support specialists such as community youth workers, speech pathologists and English Language Learner staff.

Another board was located in and around a working-class city where local employment opportunities and associated incidences of poverty rise and fall with the fortunes of the core industry. In 2011, the region featured a 24.2% youth poverty rate compared to a provincial rate of 17.3%. One in four young people live in low-income families, many of whom are working poor.[95] Educators expressed gratitude for the commitment of trades unions and philanthropy to this community. "It's a part of the culture here," one said. "There's huge care in this district," a colleague observed. "There's huge care around mental health, huge care around the partnerships, huge care around poverty. I think that's a huge strength because there's this belief in helping others. When I came here, philanthropy is a cultural value in this community, and so people help."

The sense of civic responsibility for this community is evident among charities, community groups such as City Pride, unionized labour, and partnerships with United Way, with the local community college, and with industries and apprenticeship placements. These fund things like mental health seminars on topics such as student anxiety, and organize a "Run for Well-being" fundraiser to educate teachers around student mental health.

Ill-being does not only manifest itself at the lowest levels of Maslow's needs hierarchy. It can be psychological as well as physical, and affect the affluent as well as the poor, through environmental pressures that create anxiety and stress, for example. "Some of their anxiety is related to parental pressure," one teacher observed. "Some of the anxiety is perfectionism." As we will see later, one way that schools supported students was by providing a calming space that helped them to gather themselves and settle down when they were stressed or upset. "Kids had the option of going there when it was needed," one teacher stated. It provided a valuable respite from academic press, "where you could just go and relax."

Notwithstanding all these developments, the research on well-being indicates that caring for students who are especially at risk of experiencing ill-being is often insufficient to ensure well-being.[96] Promoting well-being involves more than avoiding ill-being. How, for example, do we prepare students to thrive in classrooms with challenging academic material, complex social environments, and digital technologies? Learning requires discipline and zest, the ability to focus and the capacity to explore topics from different points of view, the social skills to interact with others, and the stamina or grit to persevere through difficulties and bounce back from disappointment. Enhance positive well-being, this argument goes, and you also will improve achievement.

According to a system leader, "doing what we need to do to leverage that wellness that we are trying to engender across the entire system, into increased student achievement, that's one of the goals now." In general, then, Consortium educators were endeavouring to develop not just school-based, but system-wide approaches to well-being, and they wanted to do this not just for students but also for staff. We will see further examples of how the Consortium's boards are working on this in Chapter 6 on *Collaborative Professionalism*.

2. Academic Achievement is Crucial for Well-being

The relationship between well-being and academic success runs in both directions. Well-being can support academic success and academic success can also be a catalyst for well-being. For example, one principal wanted to raise mathematics results on the EQAO, even though "the children do well" already and they "mark high." "Pushing that thinking and pushing the question" of how to raise mathematics results was a central component of the LfM project in another board. Increased expectations were meant to enable students "to boost their confidence" and to "make them feel good about being learners." Clarity of purpose and direction was also important. The director of this board stated, "I think it's stressful to waste time and not know where you're going." "In the absence of direction, people do what they want. It isn't always the most purposeful thing."

In between and cutting across achievement and well-being is Carol Dweck's concept of growth mindsets. These promote the simple but compelling idea that "your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your own efforts."[97] The growth mindset "makes you concerned with improving;" with not being able to do or know something *yet*.[98] Growth mindsets are related to "the love of challenge, the belief in effort, resilience in the face of setbacks, and greater success."[99] They are the bridge from the *Age of Achievement and Effort* to the *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity*, and back again. Almost half the boards' projects put a priority on developing "growth mindsets" among students and their teachers. "A lot of the dialogue now is about the growth mindset and how important that is," one teacher said. A growth mindset was linked to mathematics achievement, students' self-regulation, and resiliency. A special education consultant spoke about "building in mindset activities in every single session" of her coaching with teachers. A teacher in another board gave students the URLs of video clips on growth mindsets to encourage them to work harder to develop a greater sense of accomplishment. "The kids are going home and there's some YouTube videos [on the topic] that they're actually playing for the parents at home," one said.

3. *Well-being is a Complement to Academic Achievement*

Achievement and well-being can be the cause of each other. They also both have value in their own right. Several boards in the Consortium adopted socio-emotional learning programs for students in the belief that they complement academic achievement.[100] The work of Stuart Shanker on *Calm, Alert and Learning* has been influential in many of them.[101] Shanker's research emphasizes the role that excessive stress plays in prompting behaviors that educators experience as disruptive. Educators who have taken workshops on Shanker's work have been encouraged to make inventive use of classroom materials, manipulatives, and furniture, as ways to calm students and help them regulate their behavior so they are able to be functioning members of the classroom.

On the advice of an occupational therapist, one classroom in a board with a high number of Indigenous students, for example, has mounted a climbing wall for students with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder to use when they are restless. Previously, students had been climbing up the kitchen wall cabinets during class time. Other classrooms have provided spinning devices in the form of cones and egg capsule chairs where students can sit, spin, and close themselves in for security. Another school in the same board has self-regulating spaces for meditation and classrooms with calming devices, where students are able to decompress until they are calm enough to pay attention to instruction. All of these are ways that educators are adapting their environments to promote student well-being.

Educators described significant improvements in students' ability to self-regulate since these materials had been provided. It took far less time to calm students down before they could rejoin a class. Half the students were being sent away half as often to calm down for less than half the time compared to the past, teachers said. It was better to give students the time and space they needed to

get in the right frame of mind to focus on learning, teachers believed, than to punish them when their minds were racing, other students were distracting them, or their bodies were restless.

In another board, "there was hitting" and "there wasn't a lot of communication" between children in one class. The teacher worked with them to develop their oral language and self-regulatory skills so that they could share their feelings verbally without resorting to hitting. The teacher gave students a "calming space" to visit in the corner of the classroom. In another class involving a "really withdrawn" child, a teacher decided to use her kindergarten's "drama and play center more to build in opportunities for imaginative play" to develop the child's skills in interacting with others.

Another widely used program in many boards was *Zones of Regulation*. This provides students with "a framework to foster self-regulation and emotional control."[102] The zones were created when researchers found that students were being punished for misbehavior, rather than teachers pro-actively understanding what the precipitating events were that had led students to experience difficulties in the classroom. One board described this as an "early emotional literacy project teaching kids to identify their emotions and getting more vocabulary than happy, mad, sad." In this program, students are taught to identify their emotions with reference to four categories or colours.[103]

1. The *Red Zone* describes extremely heightened states of alertness and intense emotions. A person may be elated or experiencing anger, rage, explosive behavior, devastation, or terror when in the Red Zone. Students in this zone do not find it possible to advance their academic learning.

2. The *Yellow Zone* is also used to describe a heightened state of alertness and elevated emotions. However, people in the Yellow Zone have some control over their actions. A person may be experiencing stress, frustration, anxiety, excitement, silliness, the wiggles, or nervousness when in the Yellow Zone.

3. The *Green Zone* is used to describe a calm state of alertness. A person may be described as happy, focused, content, or ready to learn when in the Green Zone. This is the zone where optimal learning occurs.

4. The *Blue Zone* is used to describe low states of alertness, such as feeling sad, tired, sick, or bored. Students in the Blue Zone need teachers to rouse their minds to life with exciting curricula that can take students' minds off of their troubles and re-engage them with the potential of schools to broaden their horizons and expand their imaginations.

Teachers and administrators were enthusiastic about *Zones of Regulation*. According to one elementary teacher, all her students

> have a little strip on their desk with the four colors and they can check in. I will just say to everyone, "What zone are you in?" If they're not in the green zone, which is ready to learn, ready to go, we've got to figure out what we can do. I do have a couple of kids that would say, "I'm in the yellow, can we have a body break?" That goes to one of the strategies to get you out of the yellow and into the greens, just to move, to exercise.

A teacher in a different board explained how *Zones of Regulation* was "teaching little children at the age of 3 'Are you in the red zone? If you're in the red zone, this is what you can do'." "Teachers are actually loving it as well," she continued. "It's something across the board." Another teacher described how "we're also working on labeling feelings, because if they don't know what it is that they're feeling, they don't know how they can help themselves."

The four zones provided an appropriate way to discuss emotional topics that came up as a matter of course in the early childhood classroom. "I think giving everybody a consistent language is helping because working with students, they're able to identify the zones a lot easier than they're able to identify what emotion it is," one teacher said.

The program also gave teachers a framework to reflect on their teaching.

> Right after Christmas, I'd done a lesson and I just felt it didn't go well, and after I came back I realized the reason it didn't go well was because most of the kids were in the yellow zone. When I went back the next day and said, "Who can tell me what we did yesterday?" None of them could remember. I think for me when I'm teaching I'm more aware of what's going on with the students and if I'm seeing that the students are not in the green zone, maybe the whole class needs a body break.

According to one principal, educators were "seeing some gains" because of this approach. Suspension numbers had dropped. "Kids are able to take responsibility for behavior a little more easily than they used to," the principal said. "They're able to articulate what went wrong." More is happening in all of this than mere self-regulation. Students are acquiring what educators in the francophone board described as *autonomie* – the ability to learn independently while in the company of others. This capacity for self-regulation or *autonomie* is consistent with the argument that well-being can enhance achievement, of course. But emotional awareness and self-regulation as well as *autonomie* are also valued in their own right.

Another strategy to complement academic achievement with well-being was the idea of resiliency or what educators called "bounce back" – reflecting the Latin origin of resilience in *resilere* – to react back. The resiliency framework in the schools in one board stemmed from the research of Wayne Hammond, who had done workshops with the board. As with growth mindsets, the board

wanted its students to know that resiliency is something that is developed, rather than a fixed ability. "You build resiliency. You're not born with it," one principal said.

One elementary school took the idea of "building" resiliency literally. They decided,

> "You know what? We need to do a boost." We dressed up as construction workers. We developed "toolkits" for students. They had their own toolkit of different supports. We built a resiliency wall. Every student had a brick and they could [write] on, "Who supports me when I'm feeling down?"

These resiliency walls and toolkits were mounted throughout the school. Students wrote about various sources of support they could draw on from their resiliency toolkits that helped them feel relaxed, calm, or strong enough to move forward. Teachers reported that students sometimes literally searched through these toolkits when they felt they needed help in dealing with a frustrating issue.

Another elementary school also organized a "bounce- back" day around a superhero theme when a student in their school was diagnosed with a serious illness. According to one teacher, this "tied together zones of regulation, mental health, and super heroes all in one. It was fabulous." When the boy passed away later that year, the students "dealt with it very well," according to a superintendent. "We had built that resiliency." "Basically, we do better at bouncing back," a teacher at the school added. "When things get tough, we need to find our superhuman powers within ourselves."

In *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*, Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healey define resilience as "the capacity of a system, enterprise, or person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances." Resilience requires a creative use of all kinds of resources, including not just courage and perseverance, but also humor and imagination.

Two teachers in one board commented on the work they were doing with their students on mindfulness. "There's breathing, body scanning, and learning techniques, and recognizing arousal," said one. A colleague described how a team of three teachers undertook "a collaborative inquiry on mindfulness in the classroom." They taught

> the students about full body listening with your mind. What did that look like? What did that sound like? Your ears, your eyes, just your whole body. We have many new teachers who are very interested. They introduced it in their classroom with some high needs kids. It's very interesting to see the kids that are "up here" one minute, and put that mindfulness practice into place, and they can come right back down. We can get back into teaching then.

Schools across the boards were experimenting with "calming spaces," where students could retreat for a little restorative time before returning to a class. Educators have begun teaching students the basics of meditation so they can learn to settle their bodies and quiet their minds to prepare for learning. Yoga classes have become popular with students. Some teachers have introduced simple yoga exercises into their instruction, so that

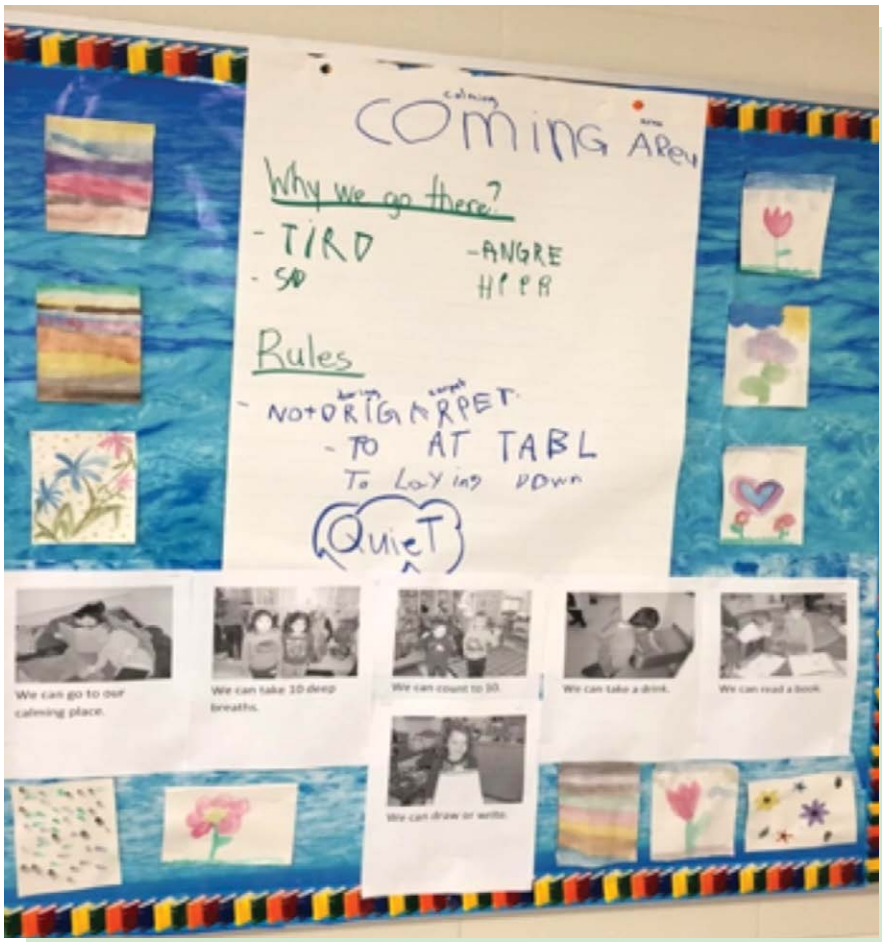

Figure 7: Calming Area in a Kindergarten Classroom

students have the benefits of increased blood flow to enhance optimal levels of cognition.

Mindfulness interventions were especially popular in JK/SK classrooms. Some teachers invited students to try out simple activities such as following their breath when they were stressed or anxious. Others used imaginative play to demonstrate different ways students could manage conflict. As Figure 7 indicates, one kindergarten classroom's calming area not only encourages children to "take 10 deep breaths," but also to "read a book" or to "draw and write."

4. Well-being Constitutes a Major Achievement

Accomplishment can come before well-being, after it, or sit alongside it. It can also be a form of well-being in itself. A sense of accomplishment is central to some definitions of well-being.[104] For Martin Seligman, a leader in the field of positive psychology, "accomplishment pursued for the sake of accomplishment" is one component of a flourishing life.[105] Numerous educators in this study work with a similar theory of action. The well-being of their students is also an

accomplishment and their sense of accomplishment, beyond grades and test scores, is integral to their well-being.

One development in student well-being in the Consortium boards is the increasing engagement of students in this agenda themselves. One board created student-led well-being groups called *Sources of Strength*. The group consisted of student "leaders from every part of the school. You get kids that aren't the jocks, and they are not the artsy kids. You want it to be representative of everybody." Students volunteered to be part of the group because they felt that by being open about their own struggles with anxiety, depression or just feeling different by having a speech impediment, for instance, they would be able to help others who were undergoing similar experiences. Their own weaknesses and vulnerabilities became sources of other students' strength.

The students received training from mentors at the school. They organized events such as a *Walk for Depression Awareness Day*, so that students and community members wouldn't ignore any student who was struggling. A mental health resources board displayed at the school encouraged students to "sit in nature," "read a book," or "pet a furry creature" as ways of reversing emotional states that could lead them into a tailspin of depression and anxiety. In this way, the board

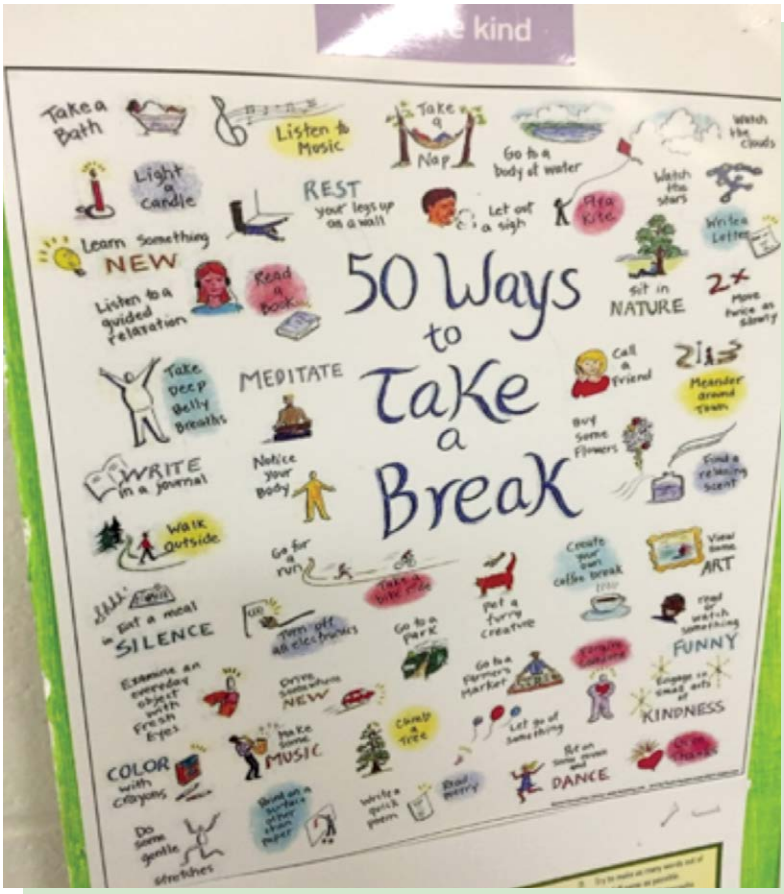

Figure 8: Students lead toward well-being: Poster on student-made resiliency board

wasn't just providing students with services. It was encouraging students to pay attention to one another, to reach out to others with kindness, and to make sure that no one was left alone to suffer in silence (See Figure 8). Well-being here was more than a topic for educators to address. It was an issue for students to take charge of for the well-being of all. It was itself an accomplishment.

Summary

The four perspectives on the relationship between achievement and well-being are only analytically distinct. In practice, they often overlap. Mindfulness programs were developed alongside programs of self-regulation, for example, in schools that also saw achievement as a way to help children *feel* successful. The board with the resiliency program also supported *Sources of Strength*. Even in research, the boundaries between emotions and cognition are not always clearly defined. But the analytic distinctions do help us understand that emotional regulation and mindfulness are intrinsically valuable as well as important means to learning-related ends.

Decompressing with meditation, moving with yoga, stepping outside for some fresh air, or immersing themselves in a novel or a sketch that might give them a break from academic pressures, are all ways that children develop their well-being as well as their academic learning. Educators are endeavouring to improve their students' well-being with climbing walls, calming areas, Zones of Regulation, resiliency programs, meditation, movement, and a host of other innovations.

Whatever the theory in action of the relationship between well-being and achievement, the enthusiasm about and engagement in well-being initiatives is widespread across all 10 boards. Teachers, leaders, schools and systems are compassionate about the struggles their students face and committed to helping all their students succeed and be well. They respond to the most basic needs of students and their families, initiate programs that help calm their agitated minds, establish a range of wraparound supports including ones that are led by students, and engage each other and a range of partners to build the capacity for success. This is a lot for teachers to do and sometimes to bear. So how are teachers and others paying attention to educators' well-being?

Educator Well-being

People in organizations are unlikely to be well or stay well for long if their leaders are unwell or ill. Leaders can hardly pull people together if they themselves are falling apart.[106] For these reasons, no credible strategy on student well-being can ignore teacher or principal well-being.

The escalating nature of professional demands on teachers and principals poses threats to their well-being. Principals acknowledged that something has gone awry. "We recognize that our staff are stressed," one principal in a board with large numbers of students in poverty said. "We've learned that the more we've gotten to know our students as people, the more our stress increases, because every story is heartbreaking."

The greater the levels of concentrated poverty and social disadvantage, the more educators need help in finding ways to attain a work-life balance. An assistant principal observed how "teaching isn't a pretty profession anymore. It's a messy profession. Our school has two teachers that are on stress leave, and there are other teachers that are on the verge of leaving. This is no longer a school where someone might start and end their career, because we don't know if they're going to last five years." A director of one of the boards commented that "I have staff that are burning out, and I have admin that are burning out, and I have senior admin that are burning out."

Schools and boards are seeking ways to respond. One principal pointed out:

> We are trying to be as responsive as we can to the well-being of staff as we are for the well-being of students, and we know that they are interconnected. If the teacher is not well then you know what the result is going to be and the impact on the kids. We are now at that crossroads where all of the decisions that we make around supports for students, we need to be equally as cognizant of the supports and the well-being of teachers.

Some schools adopted specific strategies to improve educators' well-being. "We've been talking more and more about mental health with our staff and they're starting to take care of themselves now," one principal remarked. "They've got the yoga going. They've got after-school class where they're doing a lot of fitness." However, a teacher from the same school said, "There's this belief that, now that you've yoga-ed and meditated, you should be good to go. 'Get to work! Let's go!'" One of the boards provided financial support for its teachers to do an online course in mindfulness that yielded hundreds of subscribers. Yet this was also a board where the director said the thing they found most supportive for their own well-being was positive and supportive relationships with colleagues.

One of the strongest supports for teacher well-being that is confirmed by the research on teacher satisfaction and retention is indeed a positive collegial atmosphere in a "learning enriched" environment, with time for staff to work together on common problems and interests.[107] We explore this topic further in Chapter 6 on *Collaborative Professionalism*.

Educator well-being is inherently imperiled by the "heart-breaking" nature of some of the work and the morally compelling nature of all of it, always, for educators whose profession is a true calling. It is also exacerbated by insufficient support from outside services, such as social housing and mental health support.

Some of the responses to these challenges are to be found in individual programs of exercise and mindfulness. Some are to be found in the strong, inclusive and empowered communities that comprise the collaborative professionalism we will describe in Chapter 6. And some depend on effective leadership from the middle that unites and creates clarity and coherence of direction among diverse programs and initiatives.

Questioning Well-being

We have seen four ways in which CODE Consortium boards are realizing Ontario's new well-being agenda in relationship to academic achievement by addressing four propositions:

1. Well-being increases achievement; ill-being undermines it.
2. Academic achievement is crucial for well-being.
3. Well-being is a complement to academic achievement.
4. Well-being constitutes a major achievement.

Two additional ways of viewing well-being in relationship to achievement are problematic and deserve further discussion. In raising these questions, we are challenging neither the basic ideas of achievement or well-being, nor the considerable progress that the 10 boards have made in realizing both of these purposes. But we have to open to critique if we want our ideas and strategies to be robust. As in resistance training in physical health, we must generate a little of our own resistance if our basic ideas are to become even stronger. The two additional arguments we will consider are:

1. Excessive attention to well-being can undermine achievement.
2. Excessive emphasis on tested achievement can create ill-being.

1. Well-being Can Undermine Achievement

It's hard to imagine that anyone could be against well-being or happiness. Educators in the 10 boards did not seem concerned that excessive emphases on well-being could undermine achievement or detract from it. However, there are imminent threats to the well-being agenda that we can predict by examining analogous movements in the past.

The ill-fated self-esteem movement of the 1990s, for example, cast suspicion on programs designed to provide emotional support for students because bolstering students' self-esteem did not only have no effect on their learning outcomes, but it also exacerbated anti-social attitudes among "conceited", "self-important" and "narcissistic" students.[108] If we equate well-being with happiness, we run the risk of communicating that a life of meaning and purpose should not also involve struggle, selflessness, and even suffering sometimes. Any teacher who has done post-graduate study, for example, or who recalls their beginning years of learning to teach will remember times when they were stuck, moments when they failed, and critical feedback that was hard to take, but who went on to feel exhilarated when the suffering was over, the obstacle had been overcome and the hard work had been endured to yield a better result. Becoming fulfilled and successful as a teacher does not involve boundless happiness and unending praise. Why should it be any different for other learners?

Daniel Goleman's popular advocacy for emotional intelligence has also been criticized for concentrating on emotions that are easily regulated and trainable through commercially-run programs rather than on ones that are not so easily "fixed" such as disgust (the basic emotion of racism) or boredom and disengagement (a common problem caused by many workplaces themselves).[109] The programs of emotional self-regulation we have discussed are vulnerable to the same criticisms.

As the educator cited earlier in this report noted, it is easy to oversimplify an emotional world in which only four colours apply. Is calmness, for example, the best way to be always, everywhere, or does it appeal because it makes teachers' classrooms more manageable? There are important cultural differences in emotionality, including joyous and raucous emotions that may not always make young people so amenable in a traditional classroom.[110]

Third, Alfie Kohn takes issue with ways in which people have sometimes used Carol Dweck's growth mindsets – a project priority in many of the boards – to turn teachers and schools away from the overwhelming external impact of poverty, lack of public funding for other services, and poor curriculum or pedagogy.[111] We have to believe we can help children, whatever their circumstances, but also not give up on attacking the existence and persistence of poverty itself.

Some critics worry that other movements like mindfulness and resilience are also turning us inward so much that we stop looking outward at the things that are causing our problems in the first place. It's important and indeed heroic to keep pulling drowning people from a river. It's also important to go upstream to see and stop those who are pushing them in. If a few teachers are doing courses on mindfulness, for example, it is likely a positive thing for them. But if hundreds of teachers in a system are taking these courses, there may be something not quite right with that system.[112]

The majority of this chapter has highlighted the many positive ways in which the well-being agenda has been advanced across the Consortium's 10 boards. But the risks are real and the time for reflection is right and ripe if the well-being agenda is to be integrated into the rest of the provincial educational agenda.

One of the four priorities of *Achieving Excellence* is maintaining public confidence. If well-being is perceived as not connected to learning or achievement, if it seen as self-indulgence, or if the ways of being it promotes do not fit with some of the cultures to which children belong, this will attract criticism and undermine public confidence. For this reason, braiding together the well-being agenda with the learning and achievement agenda for all students is a high priority – practically, strategically and publicly.

2. *Excess Emphasis on Tested Achievement Can Create Ill-Being*

School systems in Denmark, Norway and Sweden have the very highest scores on international well-being rankings, but are only rated average on their students' test score results. These societies suggest that regardless of what students are able to do on international large-scale assessments, they are still successful at achieving high levels of student well-being.[113] Conversely, students in some of the world's most high-performing jurisdictions on international large-scale assessments such as Shanghai, South Korea, and Hong Kong have reported "relatively low satisfaction with life."[114] Internationally, there is growing concern that excessive pressure for high test scores (and to avoid low test scores) can cause ill-being.[115]

In the previous chapter, we learned how some educators were critical of how the EQAO assessment affected student learning. One other

objection is the perception that the EQAO can harm some students' well-being. A number of educators commented on the emotional impact of large-scale assessment on student anxiety. "I have kids that suffer from anxiety, so putting them into a testing situation like this seems totally wrong," one teacher said. Another teacher recalled, "I spent so much time all year long trying to build the confidence of these children, that they were learners, that they were good at what they were able to do, and then this test would roll around and I would have to then give these kids things that they weren't able to do. I couldn't support them." A principal concurred: "Kids feel a lot of stress about it. Even though they're not going to be punished for it, they feel a lot of stress and anxiety about writing it." One educator had experienced test anxiety even in her own family:

> My son is in Grade 3 this year. Two nights ago (when he went to bed) it was, "What if I put a comma in the wrong place?" I was like, "It doesn't matter." I've never said anything one way or the other, or anti-whatever. I'm like, "So you put a comma in the wrong place." He's like, "But the teacher is saying ..." And I get it, because the teachers feel badly when it's ranked in the paper and it's in *Maclean's* magazine and the school is going to be reflected poorly.

"There's a lot of pressure," one principal remarked. "I can picture one of my Grade 3 teachers. She's carrying the weight of things she can't control." This teacher had a student with ADHD who spent hours each day "spinning in his chair." She needed the time and space to support the student, but she also "knows this [the EQAO] is coming." She found herself focusing on the test, rather than on creating a positive learning environment that would promote learning and well-being at the same time.

One principal had connected with schools in Norway in a broader partnership involving other Canadian educators. He had learned through the partnership that the Norwegians "don't obsess," he said. Given the fact that "their scores are pretty good," he ended up "wondering exactly what are we doing structurally to affect [children's] mental health, their well-being" through the EQAO.

It is important to reiterate that our evidence on educators' responses to the large-scale assessment of EQAO, including its emotional impact on student anxiety, comes from about half the boards. These were the ones where EQAO was more relevant to the grades and topics involved in their LfM project focus. We did not pose this question directly and systematically unless it arose in the course of looking at the boards' projects, how they related to the priorities of *Achieving Excellence*, and how they compared to the boards' previous work as reported in 2011.

In this respect, because we did not pose questions on this subject to all the boards, our data on the impact of large-scale assessment on student learning and well-being are partial and probably an underestimate of how the issue applies more widely across Ontario's 72 school boards. Since other research on the subject in Ontario is not yet available, only further research will adjudicate on this issue decisively. However, "do no harm" is a central principle in many professions and evidence that EQAO assessments

may be contributing to ill-being among some students, even if this is partial and temporary, should be taken seriously.

Minimizing Risks

We have indicated that well-being and achievement can each be pursued excessively or exclusively at a cost to the other. The risks are real and not trivial. How can we minimize them? In practical terms, we can:

- improve support for vulnerable populations outside schools as well as within them;
- be responsive to cultural differences in emotionality;
- ensure that programs of emotional self-regulation address a wide span of emotions;
- make sure that young people do not only turn inwards to focus on themselves and their relationships with each other, but also look outward to their world in learning that has meaning and purpose;
- do not lose sight of the value of genuine and hard-earned accomplishment as part of and sometimes as a precursor to well-being;
- avoid unnecessary anxieties caused by large-scale standardized testing;
- attend to the quality and collegiality of everyday work-life for teachers and leaders;
- create a clear public, policy and professional narrative that integrates achievement and well-being; and
- establish firm structures in schools, school boards and the Ministry that unite those who have portfolios and responsibilities in curriculum and learning, with those who have expertise and responsibilities in well-being and mental health.

Conclusion

The province of Ontario should be proud that since the launch of its commitment to well-being in 2014, there has, on the evidence of these 10 boards, been extensive activity by educators on many fronts – closer relationships between curriculum and mental health staff; programs of emotional self-regulation, resilience and mindfulness; interest in and commitment to growth mindsets; student mental health committees; and increased attention to and opportunities for student self-advocacy; to name just a few. Teachers and principals really care about student well-being, and they see efforts expended in this area as supporting learning and achievement too.

For the time being, educators have the freedom to experiment with their own approaches to improving student well-being without mandates from above. This freedom is reflected in the diverse approaches to well-being seen across the 10 Consortium boards. The Ministry's inclusion of well-being as a provincial priority is meeting with broad endorsement and engagement among its educators. Now would be a good time to start to create greater coherence among these many initiatives and activities – to audit what is being learned, and to determine with precision which practices are proving more successful than others. Well-being strategies now need an evidence base not just in the literature, but in the practices of the province itself.

One way to create or even recreate greater coherence is to develop networks for lateral learning – *Leading from the Middle* – across the boards. These can ensure that positive innovations

in promoting well-being and achievement together are disseminated among educators. Some of the more promising approaches to well-being, such as *Sources of Strength* student groups that assist peers who are struggling with anxiety and depression, that existed in one or two boards, should be disseminated more broadly.

This chapter has also raised questions about the risks of emphasizing well-being at the expense of achievement or vice versa and of creating new silos between them. There are also some things that are missing on the well-being agenda and that may require further deliberate exploration. How many ways are there to be well? How do these mesh with the different cultural heritages and ways of being among Ontario's families? What are the risks of applying universal definitions or singular measures of well-being in highly diverse cultures like that of Ontario? Are some emotions and forms of well-being being explored and promoted more than others? How can educators be as inclusive about differentiated emotions as they have become about differentiated instruction?

Well-being is populated with important ideas, philosophies and practices like growth mindsets, mindfulness, and emotional self-regulation. An educational system that practices collaborative professionalism must be able to see the risks as well as the strengths in each and all of these ideas if they are to become more robust and sufficiently evidence-based. Otherwise, it will become vulnerable to attack and to resulting moves to return to a more straightforward *Age of Achievement and Effort* alone that is specific about accounting for achievement, but no longer bold with regard to what it is achieving and how.

Last, this chapter has pointed to the importance of teacher and principal well-being in addition to student well-being. One of the educators in this study memorably said "Well-being is first. Take care of people. Take care of everything." To this we would add, "Take care of teachers' and principals' well-being. Take care of everyone's well-being."

Chapter 5:

Identity

As long as there has been adolescence, young people have been preoccupied with who they are and who they will become. Insecurities about how they look or feel, whether others like and accept them, how they will separate their own individual sense of who they are from their parents, and if there is a group to which they truly belong – these have been the abiding issues of adolescence for decades.[116] In middle school and high school, teachers and counselors have supported adolescents as they have pursued this quest for identity alongside the push for independence, accomplishment, and success.

If this were not complicated enough, identity issues have become more insistent in recent times. Immigration and a global refugee crisis have heightened our alertness to multicultural and multiracial identities. Canada is one of several countries paying overdue attention to the identities and rights of the founding Indigenous peoples. Ontario's embracing of *Universal Design for Learning* has pushed an inclusive approach to young people with disabilities. Concerns about bullying have moved issues of gender identity and of otherwise being "different" to the forefront of educational policy. Meanwhile, Brexit and the 2016 elections in the United States remind us not to overlook identities such as those of the White working class, lest the new "politics of resentment" foment anger and alienation.[117] In addition to all this, rates of adolescent anxiety have skyrocketed as the identities of young people are increasingly shaped by social media.[118]

The quest for identity commences very early. In Ireland, for example, developing identity is one of the four foundations of the early childhood curriculum.[119] But the onset of major physical and psychological changes signals that the transition to adulthood has begun—the age of an "identity crisis."[120] This is a time when educators can offer enormous assistance to the young by helping them to find a sense of meaning and purpose. This can mitigate the ups and downs of this life stage, and prepare young people to contribute to making a more peaceful and prosperous future.[121]

We know that identity is integral to well-being. We will accomplish little of value unless we know who we are, individually and collectively. How do we acknowledge young people's diverse and intersecting identities, and help them form over time? How do different identities interact in communities, so they are mutually acknowledged and accepted? When and how should we question identities even as we celebrate them, during public holidays, for example, or among some faith-based communities that do not seem to value all kinds of inclusion or equity? Do people of different identities see themselves represented in the curriculum and the design of the school? And how do we integrate identities so that, separately and together, young people can feel they are part of something

greater than themselves, without losing sight of uniquely who they are as individuals?

The complexity of identity building is exacerbated by the impact of social media. Teenagers in many countries are actually at less risk of physical harm these days in the form of violence, drugs, early sex and pregnancy, excess drinking and so on. This is because they are simply going out less, and having fewer experiences of building relationships and identities with others, face to face. In 1929, Charles Cooley gave us the concept of the "looking glass self" that is developed through how others we value, like our family, friends and teachers, see and respond to us.[122] But the looking glass self is now a digital hall of mirrors. Supine adolescents, alone on their beds, populate a distorting world of Instagram identities, iPhone interactions and Facebook "friends," viewed and posted with endless emojis, long into the night.[123]

At different times or in different places, parts of our identity become more salient compared to the other aspects. This might relate to our race or nationality, our gender identity, our movement into being parents or grandparents, or to the kind of job we have. But sometimes, we do not select the salient parts of our identity. They are imputed to or even foisted upon us, against our will. At the very least, this imputation can be irritating – as when someone (like one of us) with a British accent is assumed to be unusually "posh" or privileged, even though they may have grown up in poverty and have a disvalued regional accent in their original country.

More seriously, *imputations* of one aspect of identity so it overrides all others can also lead to *amputations* of other significant parts of people's identities in ways that are not merely irritating but inequitable, insulting, oppressive and unjust. In *Stigma: The Management of Spoiled Identity*, Erving Goffman describes what happens when people are treated and responded to in relation to a singular and stigmatized part of their identity.[124] Despite all the assets an individual might have, others may react to them negatively and even abusively in terms of a single "master characteristic," as Goffman calls it, that overrides all other aspects of identity – as someone who is disabled, elderly, homeless, "Native," an ex-prisoner, Asian, fat, black, deaf, white trash, mentally ill or gay, for example.

This process of stigmatization makes identity a critical issue for well-being and equity. Goffman described how those who suffer from stigma develop "spoiled" identities that they then have to manage. Goffman defines "stigma" as "the phenomenon whereby an individual with an attribute which is deeply discredited by his/her society is rejected as a result of the attribute. Stigma is a process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity" and leads to people being victimized, bullied, excluded, ignored, teased, pitied, patronized and generally stereotyped in negative, punitive and derogatory ways.[125]

How do the stigmatized respond to the marks that are made upon them? Some, of course, go under, as they internalize the sense of shame and isolation that online bullies, colonial powers or racist vigilantes foist upon them. They become depressed, turn to drink, flee, or end up in prison or among the homeless. Others divide themselves by creating and then living a "false" self to increase the chances of acceptance among others but often at great cost to their inner "true" selves that they are hiding.[126] This can be expressed in a range of

strategies such as acting white, passing as straight, creating alternative stories to account for time spent in prison, or talking in long monologues at parties to disguise their own deafness and inability to listen.[127]

Goffman describes additional ways in which stigmatized groups set about managing their spoiled identities. They may band together in their own sub-groups for self-help. They may organize and protest against out-groups. They can turn the characteristics that are stigmatized by others into points of pride among themselves – as we have seen with Black Power, Gay Pride, Nasty Women, and now White Trash.[128] These things can take the form of organizing and advocacy that build coalitions with others who have been marginalized and mistreated. The formation of subgroups can also lead to fragmentation of different identity groups, with each one pursuing its cause separately from the others.

In some cases, people with spoiled identities can turn to violence against those they regard as their aggressors. They can persecute other stigmatized groups, such as immigrants and refugees, or people of different faiths and beliefs. The consequences of managing spoiled identity are sometimes ironic and they can be self-defeating for the stigmatized groups themselves.

Identity is intertwined with power. Who has the power to identify, elevate, include, exclude, or bully us? Who determines when a difference is treated as a deficit? What will become of us? Who will decide? Do any of us remember the "cool" people who condemned others to sit by themselves in the school cafeteria? Do the words of Janis Ian's classic song, "17," ring true for "those of us with ravaged faces, lacking in the social graces" who "desperately remained at home, inventing lovers on the phone?" Who is it that assigns problematic attributes to blackness, being unemployed, certain kinds of sexuality, or being a "nerdy" boy who likes to dance, or an adolescent girl who prefers poetry or rock tumblers to makeup and fashion?

It's important to help vulnerable groups deal with and more effectively manage potentially "spoiled" identity by making them feel safe, secure, welcomed and protected in school environments. The even more challenging quest concerns how a community and those who lead it should assume responsibility for changing themselves to create inclusive and engaging environments for young people of many different identities. This is the principle of Universal Design for Learning that has transformed many Ontario schools for students with disabilities so that the curriculum, architecture, organization and pedagogy are inclusive of them in ways that are also good for everyone else.[129] This principle should also apply to those with many other kinds of identities, so that different groups and their identities can see and express themselves in what they are learning and how they are developing as people.

How does educational design include Indigenous art and encompass outdoor spaces as well as indoor ones when learning environments are created? Where do students see themselves represented in the curriculum and its learning materials and test items when they are gay, shy, talkative, fidgety, raised by a single parent, Catholic, Islamic, Old Order Mennonite, or poor, for example? How can students come to understand others and their identities through the curriculum and pedagogy of the classroom?

Schools educate not only young minds but also develop whole persons, including their identities. This means that educators have a powerful and privileged platform to create the generations of the future. They teach their students what to know and what to do. Deliberately or inadvertently, they also teach young people how to be, and how to live together.[130]

One of the prime responsibilities of all teachers and other educators today, then, is to support young people in developing and building their identities individually and together. This was difficult to do in an *Age of Achievement and Effort*, which tended to view identity as tangential to improving literacy and numeracy. Equity was about narrowing achievement gaps rather than also including and developing diverse identities so learning and achievement would become more available to all.

But the world is changing and with it the responsibilities of educators. Today, educators have a responsibility to acknowledge the diverse identities that students bring with them to school, and to offer curricula that will enable them to develop with their identities fully intact. If schools can do this, all of our young people will learn not only how to be the best version of themselves as individuals, but also to come together in the quest to build a strong and inclusive community, with a collective identity.[131]

How can educators take on this important responsibility? A first step can be taken by disentangling the many different aspects of identity from one another. Based upon our interviews, and a review of associated literature on the nature of identity in the form we have just summarized, we have found 15 different ways in which identity presents itself in the boards and schools of the CODE Consortium.

Identity....

Is an integral part of adolescence and growing up.
Is part of human & educational development.
Is a quest and a struggle.
Is something to be acknowledged, represented, celebrated.
Must sometimes be critiqued and challenged.
Is multiple, complicated, intersecting.
Is presented differently to different groups and audiences.
Is increasingly online, virtual, variable & vulnerable.
Is inseparable from who has the power to define it.
Can be ignored, attacked, stigmatized.
Can become hidden, disguised and divided.
Can be inverted, made proud, protective and emboldened.
Can become angry, frustrated and vengeful.
Is something that should interact as well as intersect with other identities.
Should be a process of creating individual uniqueness & collective belonging.

Figure 9: 15 Dimensions of Identity

In the Consortium's schools, these different aspects of identity were sometimes shaped intentionally by adapting pedagogies to different kinds of groups and by designing curriculum and ceremonies to honor particular cultural heritages. While some groups have well-established claims on these kinds of public recognition, others have new and emerging identities, and still more have yet to surface in the official sphere of policy debate.

Identity and Policy: Now and Then

For years, Ontario system leaders have described the diversity of identities among students and their communities as one of the province's assets.[132] The 2011 *Leading for All* report praised how the *Essential for Some, Good for All* change architecture capitalized on "local authority and flexibility" to uphold cultural diversity. For example, the francophone board in that study "actively protected multi-literate areas upholding its own imperiled culture" because "protecting this identity was regarded as being at least as important as narrowing measurable achievement gaps."[133] Likewise, educators serving an Old-Order Mennonite community knew that they couldn't force parents to send their children to school beyond a certain age (as the parents would simply migrate to another part of their community in North or Central America), but instead would have to find creative ways to promote "a generational change in attitudes to education by building trust and relationships with families."[134] Culturally responsive approaches to Indigenous students with regard to their language development and spirituality, along with curricular revisions to include First Nations, Inuit and Métis history and contributions, were efforts at accommodating Indigenous content in order to support identity development among students. Efforts at including immigrant youth and English language learning were also used to respect and engage the identities of students and their families.

Since then, the Ministry of Education has continued to embrace equity among and inclusion of identities for all students in all of Ontario's schools. The graphic organizer for the province's well-being strategy, that we showed earlier, first appeared in 2012 in *Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development published by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services*.[135] This was the result of a "youth engagement process" that entailed "extensive youth dialogue" in "face-to-face" and "interactive workshops" throughout Ontario, along with an online survey.[136] A Youth Development Committee of 25 young Ontarians was created from a pool of over 400 applicants to inform the Ministry's findings.

In its report, the Ministry explained the location of "Self/Spirit" in the centre of the organizer by affirming that the "sense of self" is a "core concept" and a "force of gravity" that "connects aspects of development and experience together."[137] It noted that "for some individuals of Aboriginal descent, the sense of self has a spiritual significance."[138] Others, such as francophone youth, "may perceive their French heritage and language as a central component of their core self."[139]

Stepping Stones started a conversation about positive youth development but did not explicitly address the role of schools. However, as Franco-Ontarian educators have long argued, schools provide a valuable place for building culture among the young.[140] They do this through

the norms that they promote, through their languages of teaching and learning, and through what they choose to teach (the curriculum). For these reasons, *Achieving Excellence* rightly recognized that schools could play major roles in identity building and the development of well-being.

Based on our interviews with Consortium members, our visits to their schools, and our analysis of materials describing LfM projects, we found extensive work in the boards on identity-building for Indigenous youth. While not a new theme for Ontario, this is now being addressed with much greater focus and intensity. Alongside the province's prominent attention to franco-phone identity, we were able to observe how the francophone board in our study dealt with a shift from a traditionally homogenous Franco-Ontarian culture to a more international one that included growing numbers of immigrant families. Less prominent in current policy, but deeply embedded in the province's educational history is the existence of publicly funded Catholic school boards.[141] Catholic school boards, of which there are four in this study, make up almost half of Ontario's boards and attend explicitly to Catholic identity-building.

At the same time, a number of new groups, such as ones concerned with LGBTTIQ issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and susceptibility to bullying have begun to express their identities in provincial policy discussions and decisions, though with more uneven expression within the boards and the schools themselves.[142] Last, other important identities among young people and their families that are demonstrably associated with educational inequity have received less attention in policy or practice compared to the other groups. Examples include historically Black Canadians whose heritage stretches back several generations; a range of groups, including recent immigrants, with different ethno-cultural and religious identities; and White working class families who live in conditions of poverty and low income.[143] Identity-building issues for Indigenous youth, in Franco-Ontarian schools, in Catholic schools, and among these other emerging or overlooked groups make up the remainder of this chapter.

Indigenous Identities

In its 2007 policy document, *Ontario First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, the Ontario Ministry of Education announced its aspiration to close achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in literacy and numeracy. This was an ambitious goal given the magnitude of the inequities experienced by Indigenous youth. Consistent with the *Age of Achievement and Effort*, it wanted to improve high school graduation rates and increase the number of Indigenous students in postsecondary education.[144]

In a 2009 progress report on the implementation of the Ontario FNMI Education Policy Framework, the Ministry stated that it was making progress in establishing greater collaboration among the school boards and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) organizations throughout the province. An FNMI advisory council had been formed, as had the Directors' Council on Aboriginal Education. There was an increase in funding for FNMI education, including for Native languages and Natives Studies programs.

In a further report, the Ministry documented progress between 2009 and 2012, including a growing number of partnerships among school boards, schools, families, educators, and FNMI communities.[145] Professional development opportunities and the provision of classroom resources gave educators in the province a greater knowledge and awareness of FNMI histories and cultures. It provided them with the tools to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into classroom learning with Treaty curriculum and Residential School curriculum. In terms of achievement, since the launch of the Ontario FNMI Education Policy Framework, the province has seen an increase in the number of FNMI students meeting provincial standards in mathematics, reading, and writing, and a significant increase in the graduation rates of Indigenous students.[146]

The heightened concern with the progress of FNMI students was reflected in the 10 boards, including those with low populations of Indigenous students. Several boards have undertaken efforts to teach FNMI languages and to transform their curricula so that Indigenous students now see themselves and their cultures reflected in their schools. For example, some board offices and schools we visited were adorned with student-designed murals infused with aboriginal art, cultural expressions and banners supporting Indigenous students and their communities.

Recognition of and attention to Indigenous identities was most salient in one northern board with a high proportion of Indigenous students. The board has 17 elementary schools and 6 secondary schools that are spread out over 75,000 square kilometers in an area the size of France, and a student population of 5,180.[147] Over the past decade, its Indigenous student population has grown from 40% to over 50%.[148]

This board has a history of low achievement and low graduation rates among its FNMI students. Because those students represent an unusually high percentage of their student body, and as a result of the high needs that are frequently associated with this population, the board has made concerted efforts to cultivate Indigenous identities in the school and community. For example, Indigenous art and architecture are infused into the design of school buildings. In one of the elementary schools in which more than 50% of its students are Indigenous, the main hallway near the front entrance has the seven grandfather teaching symbols carved into the floor and a traditional seating area that serves as a spiritual/cultural space or an alternative learning space. This school also has Indigenous art work, including various traditional animals, painted on the walls and floor of the gym, as well as students' art work hanging throughout the building.

Another elementary school in the same board, with an Indigenous student population that exceeds 80%, built a culture room as a gathering place for families and as a space to host traditional feasts and pow-wows. The culture room has a kitchen and a traditional drum. "It's fascinating to watch who gravitates to the drum," the vice principal said. "Our community drummers – it's interesting to watch the kids that will take part in the dance and everyone sort of does their own, they have their own connection to it."

This vice principal also described how one Elder is in the Indigenous classroom three times a week

Figure 10: School floor with engraving of Seven Teachings of Indigenous Culture

and how another Elder helps out with traditional feasts and pow-wows – a common practice in the board's schools, in which all members of their communities are welcome. Likewise, Elders frequently serve as guest speakers in the schools. They work cooperatively with leaders and teachers to inform them about new ways they can engage Indigenous youth in their schools.

Teachers in the board integrate students' cultural knowledge and practices in their teaching. They use examples from traditional Indigenous activities, such as fishing and hunting, in their lessons. One teacher described how she incorporated netting Walleye fish – a traditional Indigenous activity – into her teaching to enable students to share their perspectives by drawing on prior knowledge and experiences.

Students do not only learn about their own heritages, but they also bridge their experiences with other cultures. In a lesson about the book, *Flat Stanley*, students mailed their own *Flat Stanley* photographs and figures to Maori students in New Zealand.[149] This allowed them to connect with other students, with different Indigenous heritages, and with a similar history of colonialism, on the other side of the globe.

Students also learn about the impact of residential schools on their families. On the one hand, the legacy of residential schools has bequeathed monumental problems for FNMI communities to confront. "We're now in that generation where their parents were in residential school systems," one principal said. "We're parenting parents. They didn't have role models to know how to parent. It's a mess. It really is."

At the same time, the influence of residential schools can be addressed in the curriculum. An elementary principal described an example from one lesson,

> The one thing that's really standing out in my mind is our grades 7 and 8's are learning about residential school systems. Their job is to interview their families and talk about how it affected them. She [a teacher] does it every year. Last year it was pretty powerful. There were two very strong stories in one classroom, where the mother felt that the residential school system was very destructive. She had a very negative experience, and yet the grandmother said how influential and positive it was for her. It rescued her out of a situation that was very toxic. Then they link it to current events, so right now they're looking at what's going on at different reservations. They look at current and historical trends and try to blend the two to talk about how we can make things better in the future.

Using culturally responsive pedagogy, students learn how to conduct interviews, study local history, and engage with diverse perspectives on the residential school system. They link what they have learned about their community's history with colonization and the youth suicide crisis that has occurred on their own and other First Nations reserves. The same school offers a Native as a Second Language (NSL) class, although that's "not an easy task sometimes" because there are not enough teachers and leaders of Aboriginal descent in the school system, due to a very limited number of Indigenous students graduating from university teacher education programs.

The board also has an outdoor education component in its curriculum.[150] It is funded by the province's and board's Teacher Leadership and Learning Program that provides grants for teacher innovation. Most classes are held outdoors. The program is based on the premise that Aboriginal students learn differently from those in the dominant culture and require different pedagogical approaches. One principal described how his fellow principals said

> We need to engage these kids. They put in an Aboriginal case manager to work with them. They brought in an outdoor education program where they take them out for canoes, dog sledding, all these life skills, so the kids said, "We'll come." Their attendance has improved. We actually have more kids in that program than we do in the music and the drama [programs].

Outdoor education infuses traditional Indigenous life skills such as building fires and shelters in wilderness settings into the curriculum of the school to make connections to students' lives and builds on their prior knowledge and strengths. A popular hockey

coach and teacher in the board noted: "There's kids in there and you can't get them to do stuff like writing and reading. Then you take them outside and they are the first ones to know how to build a fire and shelter."

Education in and with Indigenous communities is not only about appreciating assets rather than concentrating on problems, or vice versa. It is about both of these things. On the one hand, the challenge is to recognize and respond to the prevalence of joblessness and extreme poverty in the homes of many Indigenous students, and to deal with the impact of residential schools and other historic forms of colonial oppression on subsequent substance abuse, mental health problems and shortfalls of adequate parenting in many families.

On the other hand, serious efforts are now being made to build on the traditional assets of these communities in the arts and outdoor life skills, that residential schools and to some extent conventional public schooling even today have adversely disrupted. Indigenous spirituality and communal values have now become anchored in the schools' curriculum. Students learn to name and confront the colonial history that took away Indigenous peoples' livelihoods, families and dignity.

These questions of Indigenous identity are relevant not only to Indigenous communities themselves. What is essential knowledge for Indigenous communities is good for all Canadian communities. One of the Consortium's Catholic boards, for example, made a concerted effort to cultivate and celebrate the identities of the FNMI peoples of Canada—not least because of the church's own historic role in the forced assimilation of Indigenous people in residential schools. One leader in the board spoke frankly about the negative, discriminatory, and incomplete stereotypes that too easily define Indigenous identities, and preclude students from developing a sense of pride and confidence. "I don't want people to know because if I tell you that I'm indigenous, you're going to think my mom's an alcoholic, my dad's a drug dealer, I live on a reservation and I sell cigarettes," she said. "There's generational memory and I don't want people to know. If I can pass for white or if I can pass for Spanish or Italian, I'm going to pass."

> Provincially, there's a process where students who are FNMI are encouraged to come forward to the board and identify themselves. In our board, we believe we created this condition where students do feel comfortable. We have had a lot of students who didn't identify and then, I find out they're Indigenous and I'll say, "Why didn't you identify?" Their response is, "Miss, why would I?"

Such has been the sense of shame attached to Indigenous identity that the director of the northern board with a large population of Indigenous students has only recently started to acknowledge in public that his own mother is Indigenous.

Leaders in another board are working hard to instill a sense of pride in all of their students about their identities. "We've created the conditions where students are feeling more comfortable identifying as a member of the First Nations," one said. One way the board set about this task was through a curriculum innovation called the *Red Feather Project*. This project sought to raise awareness about 1,180 missing or murdered

Indigenous women in Canada. Students researched the identity of one of the missing or murdered women, wrote down their given woman's name on a red feather, and participated in a commemorative ceremony to honour and recognize the lives of all the women. They learned about the Native Women's Association of Canada and their efforts to draw national attention to the plight of missing women through their Sisters in Spirit initiative.[151]

The students' ceremonies featured music, poetry, texts, and art. Performances by the students highlighted the injustices experienced by these women and the need for greater support and intervention programs on their behalf. The *Red Feather Project* created a twitter hashtag (#redfeatherproject) that has made photographs and text for their ceremonies available for other boards to learn from and to expand upon.

The origins and impact of the Red Feather project were described by one of the board's leaders:

> They [the teachers] applied for an innovation grant [with the Teacher Leadership and Learning Project] and they worked with the [TLLP] network and with the community members and they came up with this idea. They would take a red feather and on each red feather, they would write the name of one of the murdered or missing Indigenous women. That student would write the name and know who that woman was, and put that feather on the tree.
>
> The beautiful thing is that everybody was involved in this. Everybody! In the English classes, they were writing essays about it. In drama, they were doing plays. To be there that day was beautiful, because there were so many members of the community there. There were members from the First Nations community and the pastor of the parish really took an interest in the project and what the kids were doing. It was a real coming together of the community!

Figure 11: The Red Feather Project

This case shows how Ontario's inclusion of identities can become a source of curriculum innovation in an interdisciplinary project that addresses a major social justice issue and uplifts everyone.

Another board was focusing its supports for Indigenous students on the local, Lenape language. One of its superintendents stated, "Leveled literature has been with us for a number of years now, so we have, locally, developed literature in the Lenape language that is now being used in primary classrooms. I can tell you that there's been a huge shift [in engagement] in those classrooms and in that school." Projects like this, he said, could only have emerged from the flexibility they give to their schools' steering committees to come up with their own self-initiated projects. According to him, a project like the Lenape literacy curriculum "never would have come out of a PLC," as the PLCs he had experienced tended to be data-driven, top-down endeavours in which educators were required to focus on "what we would consider to be traditional instructional strategies."

For this superintendent, initiatives like the Lenape literacy project were made possible by his board's commitment to community engagement in a process of continual deliberation with Indigenous students and elders from the local Delaware community:

> The collaborative inquiry that resulted in the development of resources in the Lenape language—that doesn't happen if we don't have involvement from the Delaware community. It's not going to happen. You saw, first hand, the impact of student voice.

This vision emanated from collaborative inquiry with students, teachers, and community Elders. Genuine identity building requires respectful and in-depth community consultation that develops trust over time and thereby helps to maintain endangered linguistic and cultural heritages.

Indigenous students experience the greatest educational inequities of all cultural groups in Ontario and Canada. In the *Age of Achievement and Effort*, these inequities were addressed by identifying local achievement gaps, raising teachers' expectations through traditional professional learning communities, examining and comparing examples of students' work, and improving literacy provision. With the shift to an *Age of Learning, Identity, and Well-being*, there has been a growing movement to address, embrace and engage with the whole of Indigenous students' lives in addition to, not instead of, their academic achievement. Some parts of this movement have been to recognize, restore and renew Indigenous education in the activities and emphases of the school curriculum – within Indigenous communities themselves, and throughout Ontario school boards more widely.

In an *Age of Learning, Identity and Well-being*, it is time to recognize identities, to rebuild them where they have been suppressed, to engage with them and to have them interact with each other. It is also time to strive for a collective community of Ontarians and Canadians in which many identities can prosper and be proud. Together, a future can be forged where what is essential for some Ontarians' identities – their recognition, representation, dignity, and respect – is good for all of them.

Francophone Identity

In the 2011 CODE Consortium study, in an *Age of Achievement and Effort*, apart from students with exceptionalities, ensuring a welcoming environment for students and their identities was not a focus for most of the 10 boards. Indeed, the word "identity" was scarcely used in nine out 10 of the individual case studies of the boards that provided the foundation for the final ESGA report. Building identities was left to the family, religious institutions, or other intermediary associations. The emphasis was on student achievement as represented in large-scale assessment results.

One exception, though, was the Consortium's Franco-Ontarian board. The board was created by the Government in 1998, along with 11 other francophone boards. Four were public and eight were Catholic. The policy was a response to concerns about the imperiled status of Franco-Ontarian identity. In 2005, *Ontario's Aménagement Linguistique Policy for French-Language Education* noted that the francophone population in Ontario had declined to a point where it was less than 5% of the population.[152]

To respond to these challenges, the Ministry advocated for "identity-building" as a "key intervention area" for francophone boards.[153] Identity-building was to occur through a process of *animation culturelle*, which "promotes the students' academic achievement and cultural development by placing learning in a meaningful context where the French language and culture become relevant in the student's eyes."[154] *Animation culturelle* also proposes "planned and organized integration of culture into students' experiences and learning to actively contribute to their identity building."[155]

In many ways, Franco-Ontarian education was ahead of the rest of the province in asserting that identity was not a side issue, but central to any education for the whole child. If you're in the majority group, you don't need to worry about identity so much. It is affirmed through a million small interactions on a daily basis. It's different if you're a member of a linguistic and cultural minority. Yet beyond this shared identity based on the use of the French language, there have been several points of tension. On the one hand, traditional Franco-Ontarian culture was "declining, older, more rural but undergoing increasing urbanization."[156] "Subtractive bilingualism," where "learning a second language occurs at the expense of the mother tongue" was decried as posing a "threat of linguistic assimilation" into the dominant English-language majority.[157]

On the other hand, the French language was situated in a dynamic global community of "at least 30 countries" and approximately 355 million speakers that could contribute to a cosmopolitan future.[158] The international francophone community, it was recognized, could uplift the purpose and renew the relevance of a French-language education in an age of globalization.

Francophone schools were experiencing students bringing "greater cultural diversity" with them but many students were not necessarily strengthening Franco-Ontarian culture because "many of them speak a form of French that is different from the French spoken in Ontario."[159] Yet, "their entry and inclusion, as well as that of their parents, become a source

of dialogue and learning for everyone in daily contact with the school."[160]

With a declining population of long-settled Franco-Ontarians, and with a rising population of immigrants from around the world – many of them from conflict zones and with little French proficiency – Ontario's francophone schools needed to develop strategies to preserve their traditional Franco-Ontarian heritage, while at the same time integrating a growing number of immigrants and refugees into their systems.

In 2011, a principal had worried about "white bread parents" who would say that they wanted "a multicultural education and this is exciting, until somebody by the name of Ali or Hassan makes trouble with your kid." Another principal reported a child saying that she didn't like a supply teacher "because she's brown and I don't like brown people." Educators acknowledged that their schools were changing and that "we didn't have these kinds of students before." They also seemed eager to talk with students and parents about the value of growing cultural diversity for their schools.

By 2016, the schools' populations had continued along their path towards greater cultural diversity. One board superintendent said that "In some of the schools, 90% of the school are immigrant students. One school has 78 nationalities." The 10 largest sending countries of francophone immigrants to Ontario in recent years have been Lebanon, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, Morocco, Mauritius, Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, and Rwanda, in that order.[161] This is an extraordinarily diverse array of nations with very different histories, cultures, and kinds of spoken French.

To respond to this diversity, educators are aware that it is not enough simply to assert a traditional Franco-Ontarian identity.

> Right now, for our end of the year concert, we're going to be using the theme of "around the world," and we're trying to pick songs or dances from countries from where the kids are from. We're going to have their families on posters around the stage, so we're planning to incorporate all the different ethnicities in the school and to showcase it. We've also had activities where the parents of these students would come in, talk with the class about the differences about where they're from. We would show videos of their different countries or different songs, different cultures.

One of the board's consultants discussed her role in building understanding of diverse identities among the students.

> There was a lot of talk around Christmas and so on with the little kids. We said, "It might be useful to look at other festivals of light or other festivals to make sure that there's a whole sort of array of different traditions that are talked about." It was taking what they were already doing, and looking at ways that we could supplement that to make sure that the school climate was also one in which all of the kids feel comfortable learning.

An elementary school principal believed that these efforts were appreciated among students: "The children accept differences well at the schools. They're integrated very, very well. The teachers

made a conscious effort to make sure our children are integrated and feel good. Not just the new arrivals but all students."

Educators supported their school's endorsement of a global francophone identity that includes French speakers from all over the world, including Lebanon, Haiti, Algeria, and France. One teacher explained:

> We have *Francophonie*, which is a francophone activity celebration—so we had our own version of the *Francophonie* and we celebrate that with the kids, too. That's part of the francophone culture and our mandate in our school board is to celebrate the francophone culture and language and make it living and authentic for them, so we're always looking for various ways to help the kids identify with this as being part of their culture. It's not something that belongs to the school. It belongs to them.

However, the identity issues of Franco-Ontarians are not resolved with a few festivals. In 2014, public hearings revealed a concern that "integrating newcomers without many roots in the community (more specifically without any roots in the local Franco-Ontarian community) may dilute feelings of belonging to the community."[162]

In Ontario, identities regarding language heritage, cultural heritage, race, and immigrant status intersect and interact with one another on a daily basis. This issue is not exclusive to francophone boards. It affects English-speaking boards too. The advantage that the francophone boards have is that they have been thinking about how to engage students with issues around their identity since their inception. Indeed, in 2011, one educator in the Consortium's francophone board stated that the purpose of education wasn't "about doing well on any one test; it is about preparing students for the francophone community. It is about knowing each of our students."[163] Another said their school needed to be a place where children could "have room to run and slide and skip and jump." A certain dignity and pride was attained precisely by standing apart from the majority culture as expressed in the *Age of Achievement and Effort*. For Franco-Ontarians, identity was even more important than achievement.

In the 2011 report, the francophone board felt that the Ministry did not appreciate the challenges of educating a francophone population and required the same 100-minute blocks of literacy units for their schools—with the identical structures of scaffolding of guided reading, reading aloud, and shared reading—that were used in the anglophone schools. "It is really difficult for us," one educator complained. "We have to fight against a big machine."[164]

By 2016, though, one system administrator expressed how "we absolutely feel that the Ministry supports what we're doing and in fact has given us the legal background to do what we do." Instead of being defensive about students' well-being, as they were in 2011, now educators affirmed that it has "always been a part of our thinking and our strategy." The approaches of the board and the Ministry supported one another. Sometimes "we're getting the message from the board, so we see it as a message from the board and then, later on, we'll find out it's actually a message from the Ministry," one elementary school teacher observed.

This board is shifting from a traditional Franco-Ontarian identity to a globalized francophone one. In many ways, amid a cultural transformation wrought by immigration, it is a pioneer in establishing the new *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity.*

Catholic Identity

Thirty-seven of the 78 school boards in Ontario are Catholic. The existence of Catholic schools and school boards as publicly funded institutions goes back to the provisions of the British North America Act in 1867 (section 93) in which education rights held by religious minorities at the time of Confederation were legally secured.[165] Because of sensitivities about reconciling this Constitutional legacy with the contemporary educational rights and requirements of other faiths and minorities, Catholic education and identity receives little or no discussion in provincial policy. However, among Catholic boards themselves, faith and spiritual identity are accorded considerable and continuing importance.

One of the distinguishing features of the Catholic school boards is the presence, in official terms, of a distinct religious faith. Catholic faith identity permeates the vision, policies, leadership, and sometimes even the pedagogy and curricula of these boards. In these boards, Catholicism serves as a means of fostering students' faith formation through religious disciplines such as daily "walking with Jesus" and beginning and ending each day by attending Mass and celebrating communion.

One Catholic board uses a social justice lens through which educators envision their work.

In this board, several upper level administrators, superintendents, and directors used their faith as a principled foundation to rectify the inequities present within their diverse communities in all that they did. Leaders from this board based their stance on identity on the belief that they must fight for parity as a publicly funded Catholic school board, and consequently, they see their presence as a gift.

> As a Catholic community, identity is where we start. That's how we develop a sense of who we are, created in the image and likeness of God. That is our identity, but each identity is different. The idea of Catholic identity is very strong and we know in Ontario in particular we are constantly fighting to exist as a school board, as a separate school board. We are always having those conversations about identity so just the idea of identity, it's who we are and it's how we think.

According to the board's leaders, this provincial history of public funding produces an appreciation for their own identity as a Catholic school board, and, by extension, for all the identities in their diverse board.

> Catholic identity is really a part of who we are, so we're really closely linked to that identity piece. When we do work in identity, we're already grounded in it. We don't need to go into classrooms and say, "Hey teacher, make sure that you consider the identity of these students!" The teacher already comes in with the experience of identity being so crucial to who that person is.

> Catholic education being publicly funded in this province is different. It doesn't look like that everywhere else and we know that and we have to think about humility with that. What gift have we been given with publicly funded Catholic education?

For Catholic system leaders, their belief system provided a moral foundation for education today.

> There is a concept of contemplative practice and a concept of human dignity at the core and being where the focus needs to be. Human dignity is the core social teaching. That allows us to enter into relationship from the basis of identity and culture.

A fellow superintendent concurred: "In our board, I know that that's what we go by. Everybody is created in the image and likeness of God and will be treated with dignity and respect." "What is our pedagogical signature?" another one asked. The response centered on Catholic identity. "The connection to that is our identity and how that signature could be the signature that lives in a child's heart, in a parent's heart, in a family's heart, lifelong."

Catholic faith was realized in different ways in the boards. One board's senior leadership team practices "Christian meditation at the start of our meetings" "That's very purposeful and deliberate because it's this idea of just turning off, unplugging, and placing ourselves in the presence of God and in the presence of the creator, and of one another," the Director explained. "We're purposeful in ensuring that we make time for that," another member of the team commented.

This board's principals also framed their work in light of Catholic values. A core value emanating from the Catholic intellectual tradition that has become integral to thinking in political science is the principle of "subsidiarity." Subsidiarity means moving as many decisions as possible to the lowest level of competent authority that is closest to practice.[166] Principals in one board felt that digital technology could help them realize "the notion of subsidiarity, that the work and the change and the impact of that change will happen at the ground root." Technology helped the school to connect to the community. "I think technology has broadened the definition of community partners," one principal commented, "which has allowed us to lead from the middle. Ten years ago, we wouldn't have access to those community connections so quickly or rapidly."

Who were these community partners? In one school, students learned about "what agencies help people who are homeless, who are hungry. I think there's a lot of good, real life learning there, and the chance to share authentically with the kids." In another school, a science teacher asked the students to write on "What connects us to the community?" In his class one "quiet, reserved student," responded with a project on graffiti, and how "it can be leveraged to be a positive thing, as opposed to the negative" because it provides a form of artistic expression for the young. This student was so motivated by this project that he "presented it to the town council outside of credit, outside of school. He has now taken it to the community."

Teachers in this board fulfilled their faith in many different ways. One Indigenous studies teacher and social studies department chair did this by making sure that his students would learn about "all kinds of world issues" that were impacting their local communities. Students learned that because of acid mine drainage, "there's not clean drinking water in Clear Lake, which is 30 minutes away. Gold mining is destroying people's homes."

In an elementary school, a grade three teacher invited in speakers from homeless shelters and asked students to reflect afterwards upon the Gospel preaching that "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me." This education for meaning and purpose requires students to understand the nature of the human condition and what they can do to improve it. They do far more than "regurgitate what they found on Google," but are challenged to think for themselves and model their lives on religious leaders who address the needs of others.

In one school in this board, students were greatly disturbed by a curriculum unit that exposed them to the enormity of the Syrian refugee crisis. They initiated an effort, together with their teachers, to develop a fundraising drive to bring a refugee family to their region. "This very much came from the students," according to the board's director. The students learned how to work with local faith-based charities and government agencies to make their aspirations a reality. The family of seven, from Aleppo, Syria, arrived in Toronto in October 2016 and has since settled successfully into their new home in Canada.[167]

This board takes student leadership seriously. It has an elected student trustee and has convened "Voices that Challenge" forums to encourage all students, not just the high achievers, to pitch in to improve their schools and community. This grass-roots engagement is anchored in the Catholic belief that every life is sacred and every voice needs to be heard.

Identities, it will be recalled, are not only things to be elevated and celebrated. All identities, including faith identities, must also be inspected and interrogated, in instances where they are flawed, where they have become oppressive or exclusionary, and when they have failed the very people they were supposed to serve. During a discussion about the history of the Catholic church and its role in the colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples, one board superintendent said that,

> Part of it is, you have the discussion about that history. That's where we're going with the residential schools, and that's new for Canadians. We're getting there, we're having those conversations, but we're just getting comfortable with our voice in those areas.

Another system leader pointed to her board's work on the history of residential schooling:

> Having those conversations with the kids is really important. I was in a session the other day where somebody was talking about residential schools. They were talking about it in religion class and then, they were talking about it in language, in their English class. They were talking about it in social studies. You have those conversations about colonialism.

"The curriculum needs to catch up with the idea of historical narratives and whose voices are missing as part of the curriculum," another superintendent added.

Catholic school boards in Ontario have distinctive roles to play in the emerging *Age of Learning, Identity, and Well-being*. They can be among the most explicit in anchoring issues of well-being and identity in spiritual values. They are also beginning to model the importance of being inclusive and self-critical in relation to their role in developing and not suppressing other kinds of identity too.

Emerging and Overlooked Identities

Embracing, including, and engaging identities is increasingly central to Indigenous and francophone communities and the communities that are served by Catholic school boards. These issues also apply to identities that have received less policy priority or recognition. In a world of rapid change, Ontario schools must address other emergent or overlooked communities and identities too – ones which are less prevalent in our data, and not so prominent on the policy radar, but that have increasing importance in society and in the schools themselves.

The research question on the interview protocol most pertinent to this chapter was "How does your project promote identity and well-being?" The way that the question is phrased means that individual classes, schools, and boards could have had an abundance of work going on in regard to identity-building that research subjects did not discuss because they were not connected to LfM projects. For example, one teacher stated that "We have 'Roads to Freedom' which documents the perspectives and contributions of the African-Canadian community," but this curriculum did not seem to be related to LfM. Others commented that they "have Black History Month," when they plan special curriculum units that deal with Black identity for their students, but this was a part of their schools that had been in place for many years and was not part of new LfM projects. They were understood within a framework of multicultural education as "foundational principles of how we operate our districts," according to one superintendent.

While acknowledging that multicultural education has been firmly established in Ontario for many years, new and emerging identities are struggling to establish their presence in some of the province's schools to the same degree. LGBTTIQ identities are a key example.

LGBTTIQ people have long been stigmatized in Canadian society.[168] In one survey, 70% of Canadian students reported hearing "That's so gay" in school every day and 64% of LGBTTIQ students indicated that they "felt unsafe in school."[169] Bullying has impacted heterosexual students also, with 58% reporting "that they find homophobic comments upsetting."[170]

The same survey found that schools could take positive steps to address the bullying of LGBTTIQ students. Those students who attended schools with Gay-Straight Alliances were "much more likely to agree that their school communities are supportive of LGBTQ individuals."[171] On a separate survey, 88% of Ontario's students affirmed that students "wanting to form a Gay-Straight Alliance Club in their school should be able to do so."[172]

The *Accepting Schools Act* of 2012 decried all "gender-based violence and incidents based on homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia" in schools. Educators were called upon to sponsor "activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name gay-straight alliance or another name."[173]

Beyond protecting students from the ill-being caused by bullying, the Ministry of Education sought to create a positive climate for all LGBTTIQ students. One policy maker from the Ministry of Education said that "when two dads come in with the kid" that it's important "that they're welcomed in the school." It isn't enough just to "make it really overt that it's okay" but it should be genuinely affirmative in the sense that "we're going to celebrate every child that comes into this school." Interviewees occasionally mentioned how they had addressed LGBTTIQ issues when they surfaced in their schools and classrooms. One board interviewee described how they had responded to issues concerning a transgendered student in one of their schools. "It ended up being a terrific experience, with our anxiety about what was going to happen," they reflected. "The outcome wasn't anything that we would have expected, really." "There was a lot of communication that was done with that intermediate student. The issue was resolved very well with the input from all the people that needed to provide their input."

One board's coordinator for Safe and Inclusive Schools highlighted how the *Accepting Schools Act* was the foundation for all of her work:

> It basically says it is the school's responsibility to provide a safe and accepting climate for learning. It's not anybody else's responsibility. It's really the school's responsibility. It actually lists also some of the elements of that safe climate, for example, things to do with gender or diversity of orientations… Because it's listed clearly in the legal framework, we feel that the Ministry absolutely supports what we're doing.

Following the mandate of the *Accepting Schools Act*, all the other boards had Gay-Straight Alliances, although they had different names. This variation in names or presence of euphemisms may reflect a lingering unease among some boards about how to address the identities of sexual minorities. Discussions about whether other terms than "Gay-Straight Alliances," such as "Diversity Clubs," should be used in schools, project hesitancy about acknowledging the existence and needs of sexual minorities in schools.[174] This awkwardness can contribute to the continued stigmatization of LGBTTIQ youth.[175] This can be overcome by Ontario's move towards a positive, identity-building curriculum for all students, including those from groups that were previously stigmatized.

Other new and emerging groups in terms of identity in Ontario are immigrants and refugees. One principal told the story of a 7-year-old boy, who had come to the board only five months before as a Syrian refugee. His suggestion had been for his teacher to take the time to teach a "word of the day" in Arabic. The principal thought this would communicate, from the perspective of the child that "you know and the class knows

I matter—that means something to me." The teacher tried the practice the very next day in his grade two class. The surprising result was that the rest of the class asked if they could do five words the next day.

It turned out that students wanted to get to know their classmates better and were naturally curious about the languages and cultures of their friends. According to the teacher, the student who taught the Arabic words was so "excited that someone cared" about an aspect of his identity that previously he had not been able to share. The "word of the day" practice has spread since, with powerful results for all of the students. "It levels the playing field, even if just for one minute," she stated. "For just a minute of the day, that kid is the leader, instead of the one who can't do it."

Curricular adaptations of this kind affirm the identities of refugee and immigrant youth and assure them that whatever their heritage language and culture, they too have a place in Ontario's multicultural mosaic. When these measures are supplemented by multicultural or international events, as we referred to earlier in the case of the francophone board, then students' cultural and linguistic identities are affirmed. They are able to participate in contemporary Ontarian culture from a position of strength.

There are other groups who are vulnerable to underachievement and exclusion that have received less explicit attention in official policy or discourse at the provincial or the board level. Historically Black Canadians, for example, whose families are not refugees or highly skilled immigrants and who have lived in the country for generations, are highly prone to underachievement, inequity, placement in lower streams in high school, and overall racist mistreatment. Yet they have, until now, been accorded less attention in official policy than students with other identities.[176]

In common with other countries such as the US and UK at this time, there has also been a tendency to overlook, ignore and have no vocabulary for the White working class as a specific population group with its own particular culture, history and struggles with disadvantage and poverty in Ontario. The closest that school boards come to recognizing White working class identity is in discussions that refer to child poverty – ones that were especially common in two metropolitan boards with long histories of manufacturing. Trend lines caused by globalization that lead to a separation of not only the richest one percent, but also the upper middle class from the working class, are emerging in Canada as well as in other nations.[177] This is leading growing numbers of the White working class to abandon traditional party affiliations for exclusionary movements they believe will better represent their own interests against cosmopolitan elites and influxes of immigrants. The process of stigmatization works in the same way for all overlooked or ostracized identities that will quickly turn inner shame into assertive response if their rights and claims are ignored.[178]

Identity is a critical and also a complex feature of modern societies. Schools must continue to perform their historic role in socializing the young and helping them develop a sense of who they are. In a province that is less homogenous than it once was, and more heterogenous than

it historically assumed and insisted, coming to terms with identity-building as a continuing process in the education of young people is now more complicated and demanding. Teachers and other educators have been working hard on many fronts to get better at this work of developing their children as whole people through their schools. They are doing this in a world of greater migration, virtual interaction, gender fluidity, and multiplicities of faith.[179]

Ontario schools, we have seen, are concentrating on how to strengthen Indigenous, francophone and Catholic identities. They are also trying to protect young people against the bullying and stigmatization that accompany negative imputed identities, as commonly occurs with racism or in response to LGBTTIQ youth, for example. The challenge beyond this is to ensure that identities don't become just an additive agenda; a set of categories to concentrate on or boxes to be ticked. In the end, this will only tick people off! Identity is a two-edged sword. It can open up possibilities but also restrict them if each group attends only to itself, and some groups get overlooked altogether.

The Consortium Boards have made immense progress in recognizing and including a number of key identities, are progressing more unevenly in attending to others such as LGBTTIQ students, and must make a start in finding the vision and vocabulary to acknowledge and include the identities of other underserved groups like historically Black Canadians and the White working class. Beyond this, the continuing challenge is to ensure that identities come together not only in festivals and celebrations but also in the pursuit of a parallel collective identity that is dedicated to a common good of all Ontarians as global citizens.

"Who are we?" is the leading question of a new *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity*. It requires even more demanding reflection and attention than was characteristic of the *Age of Achievement and Effort*. The Consortium Boards are an example to the world of how to incorporate identity explicitly into the agenda for educating our children in today's world. *Achieving Excellence* returns us to the core moral purposes that brought most educators into the profession in the first place in which achievement and accomplishment are integrally connected to identity and well-being. In a modern age of increased aspirations, global migration and monumental change, these purposes can be achieved only by the highest caliber educators who can cultivate and capitalize on their collective professionalism in helping every child to flourish and succeed.

Chapter 6:

Collaborative Professionalism

Complex educational change in a diverse and rapidly changing society requires high level expertise from all professionals in relationships of effective collaboration. For over a quarter century, Ontario has been a global leader in *professional collaboration* among educators. Its development of the idea and strategy of *collaborative professionalism* is the most recent example of a powerful idea that can further transform teaching and learning that benefits all students. This chapter documents the origins of collaborative professionalism in the province and describes how it has evolved. Based on international research, including Ontario, the chapter sets out a refined definition of collaborative professionalism. It illustrates its presence and impact in the ten boards that participated in this study.

As an idea and a strategy, collaborative professionalism came out of a difficult period of austerity and was the result of a concerted effort to rebuild positive relationships among teachers, administrators, government and other partners. The time for the idea had clearly come, as explicitly collaborative ways of working were needed in order to realize the government's reform agenda in *Achieving Excellence*. Improving excellence and equity in mathematics would require elementary teachers to work with coaches and colleagues who had specialized expertise. Promoting all students' well-being meant that teachers would collaborate closely with mental health professionals. The pursuit of broader learning outcomes of global and transferable skills augmented by technology pointed to the emergence of interdisciplinary approaches to problem-based learning. Last, in the context of a complex reform agenda pursuing higher order goals of learning and well-being, collaborative professionalism would be a way to develop common understandings and overall coherence regarding how all of the parts of the agenda made sense and fit together.

In 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Education produced a memorandum stating its intention to establish, with its partners, "a vision for collaborative professionalism that improves student achievement and well-being."[180] The resulting deliberations led to the following definition of *collaborative professionalism*.

> Collaborative Professionalism in Ontario is defined as professionals – at all levels of the education system – working together, sharing knowledge, skills and experience to improve student achievement, and the well-being of

both students and staff. Collaborative Professionalism values the voices of all and reflects an approach in support of our shared responsibility to provide equitable access to learning for all. All staff are valued and have a shared responsibility as they contribute to collaborative learning cultures.[181]

Ontario thought leaders echoed and expanded upon this original definition. Lyn Sharratt and Beate Planche argued that teachers and leaders had to achieve a shared vision by engaging in ongoing professional learning together through co-planning and co-teaching.[182] Carol Campbell conceptualized collaborative professionalism as "an ecosystem of formal and informal leaders and learners...being enabled and equipped to learn together, to share their knowledge, to de-privatize practices, to innovate and to co-create improvements in professional knowledge, skills and practices with benefits for students' well-being, equity and learning."[183]

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves pushed the definition of collaborative professionalism further by describing six components whereby:

1. It involves everyone.
2. It incorporates professional learning and development through "regular quality feedback related to improvement."
3. "It addresses the learning needs of each individual, strengthens the professional community and explicitly contributes to the improvement of the wider society."
4. It thrives on diversity and disagreement.
5. It cultivates individual and collective talents and professional judgment.
6. It promotes collective responsibility for all students.[184]

Professional Collaboration and Collaborative Professionalism

Collaborative professionalism in Ontario classrooms is running ahead of official definitions in policy. Indeed, *how* teachers collaborate and *how well* they collaborate has progressed significantly since our previous work with these boards. The difference can be explained by drawing a distinction between professional collaboration and collaborative professionalism.

Professional collaboration is a descriptive term that points to all the different ways that educators can, do and might collaborate – long term and short term, formally in meetings and informally in social gatherings, and through many deliberately designed structures and practices such as professional learning communities or collaborative inquiry.

Collaborative professionalism, by contrast, is a prescriptive term. It advocates for forms of *collaboration* among educators that are professional in the sense of being open, rigorous, challenging and evidence-informed. It advocates for a kind of *professionalism* where teachers' judgments are not all individually autonomous but are rooted in collaborative inquiry, joint work and collective responsibility.

The progression from professional collaboration to collaborative professionalism is summed up in Figure 12.[185]

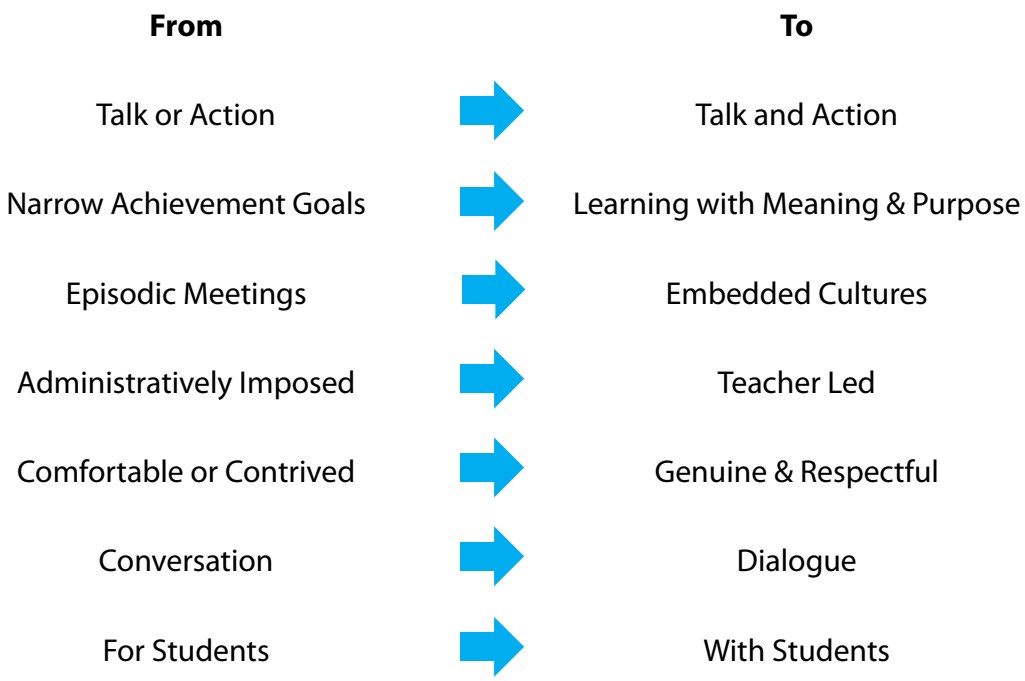

Figure 12: From Professional Collaboration to Collaborative Professionalism

Professional collaboration may and, in Ontario, sometimes previously did confine itself to improving specific achievement outcomes in literacy and mathematics. *Collaborative professionalism* also addresses greater purposes and outcomes in innovative and interdisciplinary projects that enable and encourage young people to experience learning that has meaning and purpose for themselves and for society. Collaborating together to develop projects investigating water quality in different communities or to understand and engage with the lives of Syrian refugees are compelling examples of these deeper senses of collaborative professionalism.

Professional collaboration can sometimes restrict itself to teams working together on specific time-bound tasks. Data teams that examine students' progress on data walls in the school and that identify particular students needing support and intervention are an example of this. *Collaborative professionalism*, on the other hand, may and does incorporate these uses of data, but also goes beyond them. It extends into cultures of collaborative inquiry that are embedded continuously in the everyday nature of the job. In the past few years, Ontario has promoted such forms of collaborative inquiry as a way to identify students' assets, recognize their challenges, support the improvement of instruction, and also to explore new directions and priorities.[186]

In *professional collaboration*, much of the collaborative activity may be ordered and orchestrated by administrators in the board or the school. PLCs, for example, may be instigated and administered by school principals around priorities that they have designated. In *collaborative professionalism*,

the initiative for collaborative work also comes from teachers, as in the province-wide Teacher Learning and Leadership Project (TLLP), for example.[187]

Like the wrong kind of jeans, *professional collaboration* can sometimes feel too tight or too loose. Conversation may be too comfortable, polite and eager to avoid offence. Or it may feel contrived if teachers are being made to collaborate on things they do not regard as being essential to their work and its impact. In *collaborative professionalism*, there is acceptance and encouragement of the need to provide honest feedback, and have challenging conversations and robust dialogue about students, curriculum or pedagogy, but always in a respectful way. Structures and protocols that necessitate listening before judging, for example, are commonly used to ensure these processes proceed professionally.

Professional collaboration involves considerable conversation about ideas, initiatives, and proposals. It certainly entails sharing and learning as in the Ontario definition. In *collaborative professionalism*, though, there is also expression of different views, and of challenging opinions.

In *professional collaboration*, popular innovations like growth mindsets or self-regulated learning will be learned and shared. In *collaborative professionalism*, they will also be questioned and critiqued. This is done not to dismiss them, but to submit them to the same process of critical scrutiny and review that is warranted by any new body of research. Only then can educators exercise their best decisional capital to determine their appropriateness for students in a given classroom or school.

Last, in *professional collaboration*, teachers work together for the students. They do this in data teams, in curriculum planning, or in looking at examples of students' work, for instance. In the deepest forms of *collaborative professionalism*, teachers engage students *with* them in bringing about change together. Students are brought into the process of inquiry and reflection with their teachers. They become active participants in a collaborative process that drives their learning forward.

Then and Now

Comparing the data from 10 boards now compared to our previous report published in 2011, we mainly see progress from *professional collaboration* to *collaborative professionalism*. For example, the previous report acknowledged how professional learning communities (PLCs) had been defined in the philosophy of *Education for All* in 2005. The term *professional learning community*, the report argued, refers to:

> a way of operating that emphasizes the importance of nurturing and celebrating the work of each individual staff person and of supporting the collective engagement of staff in such activities as the development of a shared vision of schooling and learning, capacity building, problem identification, learning and problem solving … [It is] about students, teaching, and learning identifying related issues and problems and debating strategies that could bring about real change in the organization.[188]

Apart from the inclusion of debating, the definition of professional learning communities was one that involved nurturing, celebrating, supporting, sharing and learning. This kind of *professional collaboration* provides comfort and reassurance while avoiding unpleasant or difficult subjects. It places a premium on the idea that all teachers are equal, which makes it hard for colleagues to acknowledge that expertise is hard won, unevenly distributed, and warrants the respect that should be accorded to anyone with an impressive professional knowledge base.

More in tune with the principles of *collaborative professionalism*, and providing an important foundation for continued progress in the field, was the commitment to collective responsibility for all students' success. This was most evident in the sustained interaction between special education resource and classroom teachers and between special education and curriculum staff in the school board offices. Teachers used tools and protocols like anchor-charts of key curriculum ideas in a classroom, menus of strategies of differentiated instruction, and data walls that enabled better monitoring of student progress. "Coaching at the elbow" enabled teachers to have the assistance of instructional coaches as they practiced new strategies in literacy, though on one or two occasions there were concerns that the coaches were there more to ensure compliance with prescribed methods than to improve learning. Overall, professional collaboration tended to concentrate on discussing and reviewing new strategies, especially in relation to the foregrounded priority of literacy, and reviewing student progress on assessments posted on data walls.

By the time of our current study, professional collaboration was transforming into collaborative professionalism. Educators remarked that their conversations were more focused and action oriented. Collaborative inquiry is widespread in practice, strongly supported by Ministry policy and documents that provide guidance for educators, and continuously advocated by the thought leaders who are the province's ambassadors. There is less use of data teams to manipulate test score results. Some collaborative professionalism is focused on traditional areas like mathematics achievement but even these are driven more by collaborative inquiry than coaching and intervention with specific methods.

Other areas of collaborative professionalism concentrate on areas like developing the curriculum to respond to cultural diversity, or focusing on a particular student of "mystery" or "wonder." Teachers are often the drivers of their own professional collaboration now. The only area in which collaborative efforts seem to have receded is in collaboration across schools and boards – something we will discuss in the next chapter.

Collaborative Professionalism Designs

We will now look at half the boards and examine what has been happening in relation to their practices of collaborative professionalism. The examples are all specific designs of collaborative professionalism:

» **PLCs** that are teacher-led, not principal-driven, and that focus on broad issues of student learning and development rather than literacy and mathematics alone.

- **Collaborative inquiry** to support improvements in mathematics teaching and learning within the context of the whole board operating as a learning organization.
- **Interdisciplinary teams** of teachers, administrators and other professionals to support the overall development and well-being of the whole child.
- **Collaboration around individual students of mystery or wonder** to rehearse, review and refine collective understandings of and responsibilities for students who struggle with their learning in one area or another.

1. Professional Learning Communities

Ontario educators have been engaged with the idea and strategy of PLCs for over 15 years. Originally, in the field as a whole, PLCs were intended to be communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. They expressed and embodied shared power and authority among all educators in a school in pursuit of a shared vision of student learning and development through processes that included collective learning among the staff, as well as peer review and feedback.[189]

From around the late 1990s, however, PLCs were often adopted in environments of high stakes testing in the US, and these models then spread elsewhere to other jurisdictions, whether or not they had such testing. PLCs now typically had a more precise focus that concentrated on specific dimensions of student learning, usually in tested foundational subjects, in relation to measurable improvements through formative and summative assessments. Teachers participated in the PLCs but principals were often the drivers and quantitative data assumed increasing importance. Inquiry continued, but it was directed to subjects not determined by the teachers themselves, especially when student learning results in areas like literacy and numeracy were in need of improvement. This provided focus but often at the cost of an education for the whole child and attention to child well-being.

In our 2011 study, one of the participating school boards with high proportions of Indigenous students, was initially drawn to this particular approach to PLCs. Some of the schools in the board have over 80-85 percent Indigenous students. According to provincial records, only 53 percent of Aboriginal students graduated in four years, compared to 88 percent of non-Aboriginal students.[190] On the EQAO, only 24 percent of the board's students in Grade 6 met the math standard in 2016, compared to the provincial average of 50 percent. Similarly, its students scored 56 percent and 54 percent in writing and reading, respectively, compared to the Ontario averages of 80 percent and 81 percent.[191]

According to the board's current director, PLCs in the board had been around "as a vehicle for professional collaboration for teachers and school leaders for probably 15 years." Initially, the PLCs were meant to raise expectations about what students could achieve. Teachers' beliefs about their students' capacities were disturbed once the PLCs required them to interact with peers, especially with special education resource teachers who had begun to work alongside them.

Board leaders then sought to improve the language skills of students (an area in which they were struggling the most) by building the capacity of their teachers through professional development

in differentiated instruction and universal design for learning strategies. They established new structures to allow teachers to meet regularly to plan together. They encouraged their staffs to dig down deep into problems of practice by taking the time to discuss struggling students, study various forms of data, and pilot new instructional strategies.

The PLCs began with clear administrative direction for teachers to post data walls in their schools, produce results and abandon previous excuses. "You can't say it's the increased number of aboriginal students coming into the classrooms," one administrator said. Teachers were asked to reflect on and discuss EQAO scores in their PLCs. The pressure was intense. Over time, though, expectations increased. Teachers began to see ways that they could make a difference to their students' learning, whatever their circumstances were outside of school.

By 2016, PLCs had evolved significantly. Test scores had diminished in importance. Teachers themselves insisted on leading their PLCs. The goals of learning, well-being, and understandings of the community were broader and deeper, and teachers felt closer to them. PLCs are now more bottom-up.

First, there now is a board-led PLC to support educators who are part of a special board program called "Transitions North" that serves mainly students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). One of the "Transitions North" teachers described the purpose of the program as that of helping teachers by "Recognizing stressors within the classroom, recognizing known stressors outside the classroom, teaching them [teachers] those things, how to deal with it, how to recognize it."

The "Transitions North" board-led PLC comprises a multidisciplinary team of teachers, educational assistants, school and board administrators, resource teachers, and community service providers across three schools. This PLC meets about every six weeks. It is facilitated by one of the school administrators and its leadership is rotated based on the topic under review. It accords importance to the voices of teachers in discussions.

At the time of our visit, the group was discussing a book on emotional self-regulation, and their experiences of implementing the strategies offered in it.[192] Members of the board PLC also discussed tools and strategies for helping students to manage their emotions, such as emotion boards with faces showing different emotions (focusing on teaching one emotion per month), emotion books (creating a class book of emotions using pictures of students), and modeling emotions (providing students with practical examples of what to do when they were feeling a particular emotion).

Second, PLCs are much more evident within schools themselves. According to one teacher, PLCs had previously been a "very top down kind of thing as opposed to collaborative, and did not support best practices." Recognizing that "a true PLC is supposed to be driven by the teachers," a teacher "advocacy group" took initiative and, leading from the middle, advocated for teacher autonomy in selecting the topics of discussion for PLC sessions.

One of the most innovative examples of this in one school is a teacher-led PLC comprised of hockey coaches. These coaches had noticed that some of their Indigenous students who struggled in their academic learning, performed exceptionally well on a hockey rink. They showed skill on the ice and demonstrated leadership in the locker room. The coaches wondered how these skills might transfer to the regular classroom setting. So, they told their principal they would like to take over the running of the PLC. They went on to develop rubrics of interdisciplinary skills based on the student's success on the hockey rink – including emotional self-regulation.

"We're linking hockey to other areas of the curriculum," one of the teachers explained. "So, in science and math, we're able to study how the skate and stick are made, how the puck comes off the stick with such velocity."[193] "We're taking hockey, we're connecting it to the curriculum, which is engaging the students, as well."

Teacher-driven PLCs in the board also address bread and butter issues like writing and math. In another of the board's schools, we joined a principal and two teachers on a return visit in January as they reviewed student work and literacy assessments in their PLC. "We get substitute teachers in so that our teachers can work collaboratively," the principal explained. "Teachers get to pick their topics based on student data and then their interests." The data include EQAO scores, report cards, anecdotal observations, and other assessments.

This particular PLC has a protocol for examining student work. The team looks at assessments, thinks about the curriculum and instruction, and then reflects on if and how instruction should be changed to meet student needs and inform future lesson planning. All of these conversations are grounded in the assessment data. "I personally love the synergy of that team," the principal explained. "They're very comfortable to press one another's thinking. They're very comfortable saying 'I agree or I don't agree.' You saw it a couple of times, a teacher saying, "You know, I'm not going to do it that way. I'm going to try this instead.'" The principal probes and encourages, asking questions like, "What happens next?" to keep the discussion moving.

Then, the teachers suddenly stop the PLC in mid-stream to move the discussion right to the students themselves. A kindergarten teacher is curious why a student gave a particular answer for their reading comprehension assessment. She decides to go down the hall to ask the student about how she approached, thought about, and responded to the question. The teacher learns that there's probably been some over-thinking on the student's part, but that the wording of the question may also have been confusing. Back in the PLC, the teacher incorporates the student's perceptions in discussions about the team's plans for future support in reading comprehension. Teachers, the principal, and students too have now become part of the PLC.

This northern remote board is not the only one that has transformed how PLCs operate. A board in the South has infused collaborative professionalism into its PLCS too. One of its teams focused on improving the learning opportunities for science and literacy. Participants worked together to engage with multi-media and technology to supplement

science instruction, spur student interest and situate learning in the real world. A board leader noted, "We continue to move away from things like a textbook or the answer at the end of a question. It's more about the process and about the learning and connections." She explained,

> We're always pulling from the news whether it's news, television reports, social media, tweets around something—the newspaper is filled with science related articles and we're applying things like the claims-evidence-reasoning framework to help better read and understand those news reports on science to decide is this worth our time, what probing questions should we be asking about what they're reporting, and whether the sources are valid and reliable.

A teacher put it like this:

> What I loved is it was different from all the other PDs that we've done. It was science specific. It allowed us to meet with other science teachers from other schools and see what worked for them that may not have worked for us. We shared stories. We shared what worked, and what didn't work. We brought together ideas. We've made friends, we're closer, and that, to me, is what's really important. Then we take it back to the class and the kids are just eating it up.

This board also uses social media to provide entry points to open up dialogue and discussion amongst all of its educators. What started as a finite series of in-person meetings has evolved into a digital PLC. One board superintendent described how:

> We're trying to capture that collaborative learning, and sharing our anthologies through Twitter so that the voices of educators are coming constantly to the surface. Our PD days are complemented by hashtags so that schools can engage in cross conversation. It's just starting to take off and now almost every school in our board has a Twitter account. The interesting thing about Twitter is that we have an Equity twitter account and now I'm getting new information because we're pushing out information and we're also having people connect us. "Oh, I read this article." The system is now informing us as system leaders. It's just a great reciprocity of information and connection.

In the *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity*, the goals are bolder and the desired outcomes for learning and children's overall development are more complex than they were in the *Age of Achievement and Effort*. The PLCs reflect this in their broader purpose, in the extent to which they incorporate teacher involvement and leadership, in how they start to draw young people in, and in how they permeate the whole life of the school. Conversations are more open and direct. PLCs are down-to-earth and matter-of-fact. Teachers have a collective belief, a shared sense of efficacy, that even though their students live in very challenging circumstances, they can learn and develop with the right supports and with attention to their overall well-being in addition to their measured achievements.

2. *Collaborative Inquiry*

There is a fine line between where a PLC stops being a formal implementation of policy and becomes a genuine a culture of collaborative inquiry. One marker of this transition is that PLCs tend to be easier to convene as groups of people who want to meet together to inquire into and improve practice together. Collaborative inquiry describes this process or culture where the activities undertaken by PLCs become pervasive and embedded – where inquiring into practice, trialing improvements, and evaluating the results are part of the everyday life of being a teacher.

Collaborative inquiry has a distinguished pedigree.[194] Beginning with the emergence of action research in the 1940s, collaborative inquiry has been expressed as action research, collaborative action research, critical inquiry, and spirals of inquiry, to name just a few examples. Essentially, collaborative inquiry involves teachers and others engaging in continuous and repeated cycles or spirals of problem identification, inquiry, gathering of evidence, group deliberation, action and then evaluation, followed by a repeat of the cycle or spiral. In schools, collaborative inquiry almost always begins with a problem of practice related to student learning and then evolves in an iterative process that draws in multiple perspectives and consults external evidence such as that provided through assessments and scholarly research.

Collaborative inquiry became a major policy approach in Ontario in 2010. By engaging educators as researchers, it was argued, collaborative inquiry could enhance both professional learning and student learning.[195] The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat of Ontario noted that inquiry

> engages teachers as learners in critical and creative thinking…. Inquiry positions the teacher as an informed practitioner refining planning, instruction and assessment approaches in the continual pursuit of greater precision, personalization and innovation. A focus on student learning drives inquiry.[196]

Expanding on this earlier definition, an ensuing Ministry document in 2014 argued that, "through collaborative inquiry, educators work together to improve their understanding of what learning is (or could be), generate evidence of what's working (and what's not), make decisions about next steps and take action to introduce improvements and innovations."[197] In Ontario, collaborative inquiry is an integral part of collaborative professionalism. It is evident in PLCs, school networks, and action research partnerships.[198]

Two boards that have focused on improving mathematics learning illustrate the ways in which collaborative inquiry has advanced collaborative professionalism. In the first board, back in 2011, the emphases of leadership development in relation to the CODE project were on breaking down the silos between special education and curriculum staff. These two areas of professional specialization were compared to "two ocean liners that just never crossed paths." This meant that when special education and curriculum consultants advised schools, their strategies were completely disconnected from one another.

The ESGA project encouraged special educators and curriculum consultants to work together on a regular basis to develop shared strategies to assist the province's students with learning

disabilities. This was done to create collective responsibility for all students in the classroom in a culture where "we're all teachers of special ed students." Inside schools, professional collaboration concentrated on modeling demonstration lessons of effective differentiated instruction, and on sharing ideas in book clubs and similar discussion groups.

Since 2011, the commitment to collaborative professional learning has delved deeper into principles, protocols and processes. The new director and his team try to run the board like a learning organization where feedback is constant and everyone is learning from each other – a vision that was also conceived by the current director's predecessor. In this spirit, the director himself works with an external executive coach.

At the heart of the board's work in a number of areas was a team of consultants who each worked with a family of schools (five families with about 19 schools in each family) and instructional coaches who were assigned to three schools each. Together, the consultants and coaches collaborated on a range of tasks that involved working with individual teachers to reflect on and share their practice with larger school groups on professional development days. At the school and board levels, the coaches and consultants worked in interdisciplinary and inclusive teams representing different roles and identities to implement projects, initiatives and school-driven inquiries in the context of being an effective learning organization.

Schools in this board are expected to undertake their own inquiries into number sense in mathematics, inquiry-based learning and so on. Board leaders mirror this expectation by undertaking their own inquiries. The director was candid about inspecting his own leadership in this sense.

> As a leader, I thought I've participated with many schools in coaching and training. I said, "Are we actually applying some of those skills in our Exec Council team meeting?" "No, we're not." "We're not even modeling and using the tools that we've been trained in our team." I said, "Am I using the right protocols to help facilitate?" I had to look at it in terms of my role in terms of facilitating my team, so being very intentional around my leadership behaviours with my class.

Being consistent at the top with what is expected of the people one leads is neither easy nor commonplace. A superintendent described an example of what this shift had meant.

> I would want to avoid bringing things to the table, because I was worried that my colleagues were judging me, or being critical of my ideas. I would say now that we have these more open conversations and are challenged to express our concern and work through a situation because it comes back to the damage that's caused by not having a conversation versus the damage that's caused by having it. Now, I feel comfortable bringing stuff to the table. We can't move a system forward if we feel that we can't trust people to value the lens that we bring.

Being "deliberate" and "intentional" about how to build a more effective team was crucial to strengthening trust, the director felt. So too was

developing "a proper protocol to facilitate [conversations] because we know ahead of time what the purpose of the conversation is and whether the person has had a chance to gain advice, and then trust their work when they come back with a recommendation."

Part of the approach to establishing greater trust was in these practices and protocols. It was also in leading by example. The director put it this way:

> Some of us have moved forward and become very visible about what our inquiry is currently. Some superintendents actually share it with their learning team structures as you're developing your own inquiry. This is the inquiry I'm working on. The visibility of that shows the vulnerability that I'm a learner, too. Because of my position, I'm not the expert, but I should be the lead learner in the organization.

Just as the senior team wanted to model how it was to ask questions and be vulnerable, it was also the case that in working with schools, coaches and consultants did not tell teachers what to do instructionally. Instead, as mainly non-specialists in mathematics, and given the particular coaching and consulting approach and protocols preferred, coaches believed that "asking effective questions to push your thinking is going to help you go back to that reflective piece."

For coaches and consultants, collaborative inquiry meant that "nobody's an expert at anything and we're just here to learn and grow and be the best that we can be, being respectful of everyone's level and entry point, (and) building strong relationships." Collaborative inquiry through good coaching and consulting combined asking questions, pushing thinking, focusing on students' work and building relationships rather than enforcing particular ways of teaching.

One member of the coaches and consultants team commented,

> I have no problem when someone says to me, "Can you explain what this means?" And I'm like, "You know what? I got no clue. Let me find out and let me get back to you," because I think there was a point in time when someone like me needed to know everything. "Well guess what? Hello I don't, so, we'll figure it out together."

This is consistent with the view of the director cited earlier that "I'm not the expert, but I should be the lead learner in the organization."

Within the context of being a learning organization, it was important to see colleagues with dissident perspectives not just as an expression of a flaw or weakness in individuals, but also as professionals holding views that should not only be tolerated but actively solicited. "We tend to hear the voices that resonate with us – the early adopters that are moving forward", the director reflected, "but not the 20% or so who are less enthusiastic." The director described an upcoming meeting on the day of our interviews with educational assistants and their union that was designed to address this issue as a point of inquiry and learning that he wanted to exemplify and embed in the system's culture.

> Ironically, we're going out to listen today to those who've given us some feedback, that are not engaged, that are not feeling that their well-being is being considered. We're going to take a risk to listen to them with their union leader. We know it'll be difficult (but, we're asking) "What's the structure we're going to create to try to give you a voice as an educational assistant in our system?" "We're in the trenches, and does anyone care about what we're doing? We're professionals, too." We're going to hear about 100 of them – 20% of our EA population. We're going to present to them and listen to them. We think it's important enough to hear their voice and to figure out how they can be part of the solution.

To sum up, in place of the specific professional development interventions and fledgling professional learning communities of 2011, there were, in 2016, multiple systems of cross-disciplinary instructional coaches and consultants working with clusters or families of schools each. The coaches were not subject-specific but concentrated on co-learning with teachers, helping them to the next level, brainstorming, sometimes co-teaching, and being non-directive but highly encouraging in a context of relationship-building. Some professional communities consisted of math teachers and non-math teachers interacting together.

The board was clearly trying to model at the very top what a culture of collaborative inquiry looked like, and to embed this in the structures and processes for improving mathematics achievement in the early years. What we see at the very highest levels of the board, though, are ways in which collaborative inquiry is not merely a process to look at data to lift scores in literacy and mathematics, but also a way of learning that is intended to permeate the whole organization. It is not a process that is administered to teachers by administrators but it is also enacted by and valued by administrators themselves. It involves open and challenging dialogue that admits vulnerability and gaps in expertise, that in turn call forth the knowledge and expertise of colleagues. It requires deeper informal trust on the one hand, and more precise formal protocols and procedures on the other. And it is directed to fundamental issues of teaching and learning such as developing the foundations of number sense that underpin mathematics achievement later on, rather than only trying to raise achievement in grades that are being tested. These are all striking developments in collaborative professionalism in Ontario.

In a second board, one of the main strategies for improving mathematics teaching and learning has also been collaborative inquiry. Our 2011 report on the board, in the *Age of Achievement and Effort*, pointed to intensive support of one-to-one coaching in new literacy practices and school-based teamwork devoted to data-driven improvement. Educators used both province-wide and in-school diagnostic assessments to see where interventions would be required.

By the time of this current study, collaborative inquiry included a local university and focused upon mathematics learning. One board leader explained:

> We also have a collaborative inquiry team, in which we partner with the university. Teachers volunteer for that. There are some teacher teams and there are some teacher

and administrator teams. They are provided with four half days of release time to investigate whatever they are curious about professionally. Many of those teams, and there are around 20 of them, are focused on maths. They are able to, in their own buildings, work with each other with their own students, and they are supported by researchers from the university – anything they need in terms of literature or in terms of how to gather data, how to analyze data, exactly where we're really working in our own schools with our own kids.

"We meet to plan maths lessons together and learn about maths content," one teacher said. "Together we implement those lessons and observe students to see what they know about maths content. We're also learning about maths content and maths pedagogy."

Over time, it was felt that although PLCs had existed over many years, they were now becoming "more mature," with teachers who "come out of their classrooms and have those discussions in the hallway after school." Some of this maturation was informal. One principal stated that it entailed "talking with a group of people you can trust, that you can confide in and vent in a positive way." In this way, good collaborative inquiry contributes to well-being, as when a colleague can be counted upon to be there when needed to "calm me down."

At the same time, PLCs were also becoming more formalized and focused. They concentrated more directly on matters of learning and teaching and less on the metrics of external assessments. Timeslots of 50 or 60 minutes were blocked off weekly "to get together, and talk about ways we can teach math, and get students to understand different math concepts, math language, and things like that."

The board's director valued collaborative inquiry, but also stressed that it was not an end in and of itself. "It's great to have administrator learning teams and that people get release time, but if it doesn't have an impact, then I'm not really sure it matters", she said. This principle also applied to all aspects of collaborative professionalism. "This is an organization of thinking and learning, and we should reflect that in the way that we act and in schools," she argued. Collaborative inquiry worked best when "it makes them think and it pushes them." This was her job: "pushing that thinking and pushing the question."

Sometimes we talk about people in groups and collaborative inquiry and all of this, but you have to have a really good question. If you don't have a really good question, you can spend a lot of time, a waste of time, doing the wrong thing.

Collaborative inquiry has now become foundational for collaborative professionalism. It entails addressing authentic learning issues, using precise protocols, and continuous tinkering by teams of teachers with pedagogy, curricula, and assessments. All this occurs within a deepening culture of professional trust, built around "good questions" that are aimed at improving student learning.

3. *Interdisciplinary Teams*

One legacy of professional collaboration from the *Age of Achievement and Effort* has been the use of interdisciplinary teams in literacy. These bring together literacy coaches, instructional coaches and special education support staff to support student achievement. Educators in the schools can call upon colleagues in the central board offices to provide additional supports and ideas, especially with regard to special education students and others with learning challenges.

The existence of interdisciplinary teams does not always amount to collaborative professionalism, though. Are they top-down in nature or driven by the team members themselves? Do they focus on making rapid gains and interventions in order to improve measured achievement in literacy and math, or are they also focusing on deeper and longer-term learning goals that are connected to young people's sense of meaning and purpose? Do they focus on data that have been given to teachers and other members of the team, or do they also draw on data that teachers and others have collected for themselves in relation to the children and the curriculum that they know best? The answers to these questions position interdisciplinary teams differently as being representative of collaborative professionalism or merely as one more method of professional collaboration. This section explores ways in which interdisciplinary teams have expanded and deepened to encompass the more challenging features of collaborative professionalism.

In 2011, a major goal of the 72 boards in working together to implement special education reform, we found, had been to create interdisciplinary teams of special education and curriculum staff at every level – from the board office into the school. Our report noted that

> The project was designed to break down "silos" within school boards between the curriculum and special education departments and their superintendents. This was meant to lead, in turn, to making "better use of the roles and responsibilities of the special education resource teachers in relation to classroom teachers as they shared collective responsibility for all students. *Restructuring* was being employed in order to achieve *reculturing* of board relationships.

Interdisciplinary teams continued as a common strategy for pursuing academic achievement after publication of *Achieving Excellence* in 2014. In one board, for example, the idea of interdisciplinary teams was self-consciously inherited and adapted from the earlier era of literacy reform. This board's senior leadership infuses the work of the interdisciplinary teams with curiosity, creativity, and possibility as part of its aspirational mission entitled "Transforming Learning Everywhere."[199] These were combined with the board's core values of integrity, accountability, listening to diverse voices, trustworthiness and camaraderie. One board leader commented,

> One of the things that we've really been working on is that interdisciplinary approach, recognizing that educators bring one perspective, or teachers bring one perspective; but what voice do DECEs bring, speech and language pathologists, social workers, psychoeducational consultants?

These teams, it was felt, had to include all the relevant identities and voices pertinent to any issue at hand. "When the tables come together," a superintendent asked rhetorically,

> Who's represented there? Who is the voice? Who is bringing up perspective of equity in a lot of areas? Who's representing and reminding people that, in the team, we need to be thinking about, right up in front in our planning, around our students with special needs; around our First Nations, Metis, Inuit; around our LGBTQ community?

This inclusive approach to interdisciplinary teams eventually stimulated teacher leadership and the director was enthused when a board conference was driven by many kinds of teachers, and not just those who were already well disposed towards innovation and change. He said that the conference

> was all driven by our educators, leading the workshop and breakouts and even students coming with their teachers to lead the breakout sessions. It's creating the structure and culture where everyone can share their successes, no matter how big or small; because we tend to put the spotlight on, sometimes, the early adopters. Then others who are can't see themselves in these people, like, "I just can't see myself."

Writing on slices of birch branches, during our interview session, the senior administrative team expressed how Leading from the Middle was about moving out from the centre, just like the concentric circles of tree growth. It was about developing a language, sharing a vision, building coherence and working in interdisciplinary teams that developed relationships as well as undertaking tasks.

In a second board, that historically had experienced difficulty creating coherence and cohesion within the board among its different specialists, an experimental study was started to test the power and impact of interdisciplinary teams. Previously, curriculum specialists and SERTs (special education resource teachers) worked in silos and were rarely present at the same meetings or available to teachers at the same time. The board therefore designated four elementary schools as experimental sites for building interdisciplinary team structures and four control schools to be "doing business as usual." In the four experimental schools, the planning and schedules of SERTs and curriculum consultants had been aligned so that they were in the same schools on the same days. "They're co-engaging in school improvement planning. They're co-engaging in data analysis. They're co-engaging in special education meetings. All of the work, there is a collaborative team that everyone's there together for those four schools."

The goal of the project was to see if teachers' perceptions of students change as a result of the collaborative work between special education and curriculum specialists over a two-year period. Although the project was only approaching its one-year mark at the time of our research team

visit in May 2016, the initial signs were positive. A principal from one of the four experimental schools noted,

> Having the alignment of Spec ed and curriculum working together to support teachers to target student needs has been amazing this year. We're very, very blessed with the knowledge that at that table, when we're problem solving over a certain situation, we have everyone sitting there and respecting one another's opinions. Teachers feel safe.

Similarly, a SERT teacher commented that the partnership has been beneficial for the SERTs, curriculum consultants and teachers alike. Special education resource teachers were concerned about the child, while curriculum consultants were concerned about supporting the teacher. Curriculum consultants gave teachers actual strategies they could use to improve instruction and work with difficult kids. For this SERT, having curriculum consultants present at the table in meetings was "a huge weight off" the shoulders of SERTs.

In the Franco-Ontarian board, similar examples of collaborative professionalism were evident. The project in this board focused on six elementary schools out of 37 that are supported through a multidisciplinary team model. The six schools were identified by board leaders because of the difficulties they were having improving their literacy results not only on the EQAO assessments, but also on school and board-based measures. To this degree, this project is data-driven in selecting schools most in need of services for additional supports.

In many ways, the board has worked with a model that still appears to reflect the legacy of the *Age of Achievement and Effort*. Schools gather data in mathematics and French and post it on "data walls" to track the progress of their students. They follow the "Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways" model of Michael Fullan, Peter Hill, and Carmel Crévola with three stages of evidence-gathering; modified instruction and periodic "check-ins" with colleagues; and critical reflection on student work.[200] Teachers also use the tiered strategies of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model and its timetables to ensure that all of their students are able to master academic content.[201]

Where things look quite different, however, is in the organization and leadership of the multidisciplinary team. Not only does it have the more traditional staff of a Special Education and Curriculum Consultant, but it also has a Consultant for Safe and Inclusive Schools, a Cultural Facilitator, and an Effectiveness Framework Lead. This is done because "we can't separate well-being and the curriculum." "That's why we want data not only about math and literacy, but also about how students feel in class." The multidisciplinary team model strives for a "harmonized practice" integrating academic achievement and well-being in the board's schools. This shows that the right kind of collaborative professionalism can help different provincial pillars to support one another as part of a coherent and well-integrated strategy.

The multidisciplinary team began supporting the six schools by studying the interpersonal dynamics of student and staff behavior. As Hargreaves and O'Connor point out, this kind of investigation requires anthropological skills more than

quantitative data analytics.[202] A board consultant explained,

> I think when we went in, we observed a lot of things that they maybe hadn't had a chance to observe. We looked at the kids at recess, we went into the classroom, but we also looked at what was happening in the hallway, what was happening between classes and so on. We were looking at things like: How do they play? How do they appropriate the space during recess? Who does what? How do they appropriate the different things that they might be able to play with?

This observation raised a number of questions for the team that further stimulated its process of collaborative inquiry:

> We were looking at a few different things. We were looking at what are some of the initiatives that they already have in place for school climate? For example, one class in one school was doing Roots of Empathy, which is a pretty elaborate program that not every class can do. Another school had a committee with the community health nurse who comes in and they form a committee to look at some projects they can do. The students actually decide on a project. That's the kind of thing, again, that can have an impact on school climate. What kind of stuff are they going to do? How will the student leadership manifest itself?

To help answer these questions, in addition to qualitative observations of the multidisciplinary team, the board also gathers quantitative school climate survey data to assist in improving academic achievement and student well-being. The multidisciplinary team and the participating practitioners address "the safe school environment. They do the survey and they look at what's happening to school, activities, and if the kids feel safe. It's well-being. They work on the well-being of the staff and student."

A principal of a school in which the team works said that after the team of specialists is assigned to the school, "they create that relationship with the teacher, with the students. They're not evaluated by the consultants, it is more a collaboration. It's teamwork. It's extra support to make sure that things are put in place to help guarantee the success of all students." One board administrator said that "each part of the team observes a different thing. This is the strength of the team; we are the co-learners and we learn when we are sharing the data and the information and observation. This is the heart of the project."

A teacher validated the local and collaborative nature of the interdisciplinary teamwork. "They look at our data, and we also look at the data, and are able to decide what exactly we want to work on. We are much more involved and engaged in the project because it does come from us and from our needs and our students' needs." A teacher involved with the team echoed these sentiments: "I know, personally, I've appreciated the fact that I've been able to base my project expectations on the needs of my class," she said. "I appreciated the freedom to work on what the needs truly were in my classroom."

This work was made possible by offering supply teachers to free up the participating teachers so

they could work with the team to solve their problems of practice. As one principal put it, "you would never have this engagement or this cooperation from the staff if they had to have all these meetings with the consultants and us after school. It's done during classroom time. Their planning and all that is done on their time or during their prep time, of which they have 200 minutes a week."

A participating classroom teacher spoke about the collaborative nature of the process used by the multidisciplinary team:

> We've been meeting about once or twice a month to discuss how things are going in the class and to see where we are and where we want to go from there, so that's really helpful. We go over our data together. We get to make observations and share things that we've done that work or that doesn't work, so we really get to meet with other teachers at a specific time and go over all our data and observations.

An important part of this group reflection is that the bulk of the data studied by the teachers is locally sourced. "All of the analysis is based on data that is gathered in the classroom, so it's not data from the school board or anything like that. It's real numbers from the teachers themselves."

One teacher described how the support of the interdisciplinary team helped one of her students:

> I have someone who came from overseas in November and his language is very poor. He was extremely shy, and I was at a loss on how to help him specifically, and I had the consultant come into my classroom, sit down with him, and she immediately gave me a list of different things that I can do with him. Within the matter of 6 weeks of implementing some of those things, she had seen a difference just in his vocabulary, his motivation.

Because teachers are receiving supports now that they truly believe are helping their students, they are ready to turn to the team for support. A principal put it like this.

> For example, let's say a teacher discusses a specific student she has problems with, "He's having a hard time reading, I've tried this, and this, and this, and it's not working." All the other teachers are saying, "Well, have you tried this, and this, and this?" "Oh, I never thought of that, okay." They're not insulted, or, "Are you questioning my professionalism?" or anything.

Participating principals who work in conjunction with the multidisciplinary team also offer reciprocal feedback to the specialists themselves. One teacher said that "we're comfortable giving the feedback. Our facilitators, our consultants specifically are very open, and I think that's key."

To sum up: multidisciplinary teams are as common if not more common in Ontario school boards in 2016-2017 as they were before 2011. The existence or not of multidisciplinary teams is not, however, what defines the presence of collaborative professionalism in Ontario schools. The progression over time that points to collaborative professionalism consists in the more rigorous ways in which

multidisciplinary teams conduct their work together. It is evident in the ways that they demonstrate and encourage purposeful talk and analysis that is locally sourced and useful to their students. Collaborative professionalism is conveyed by the importance they attach to openness and humility in a climate of trusting yet candid professional relationships. Finally, it also finds expression in the educators' readiness to pose fundamental questions that can help their students to thrive in a rapidly emerging new *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity.*

4. Collaborating with Meaning and Purpose

Collaborative professionalism involves, among other things, collaborating with and for meaning and purpose – for the whole child and the whole society, not just or mainly in relation to achievement scores in one subject or another. We have seen how this collaboration brought teachers together to develop interdisciplinary projects that were about social as well as educational transformation. This occurred in one board's Red Feather project, in another's initiative to study inequities in water quality, and in a third board's inquiry-based learning projects on healthy eating, child labour and writing letters to government officials.

Another way in which this kind of collaborative professionalism occurred was in collaborations that brought together the multiple perspectives and contributions of educators to understand children fully. The province of Ontario has, over recent years, developed an interest and an initiative in what it calls "marker students" or "students of mystery." This idea concerns students who are not being successful with their learning for some reason that isn't immediately obvious to their teachers – "to pinpoint their strengths and their areas of growth, and then put together instructional strategies based on what they need."[203]

A group of teachers in one of the boards undertook this kind of inquiry together into particular students of mystery. In another board, the idea was labeled even more carefully with the double meaning of "students of wonder."

The 2011 CODE report on this board observed a pervasive "case management system" of individual students that made "more systematic use of diagnostic assessments and a strategy of tiered interventions." One early years/special services consultant recalled that in this system, students with perceived needs were described as "marker students." In the 2011 CODE report, there is no mention of the strengths of such "marker students." Rather, they are identified throughout based upon their language deficits.

By contrast, today, the board in question is moving towards a child-centered, caring approach to kindergarten education. The students who are chosen as a focus for collaborative inquiry are identified as "students of wonder." In the words of the early childhood/student services consultant quoted above, "Last year we called it a 'marker student.' We changed it very consciously to a 'student of wonder' this year." This is a student that "doesn't likely have a diagnosis of anything but that they [the educators] have questions and wonderings about." "We went through a process of looking at strengths" in addition to "areas of need.'"

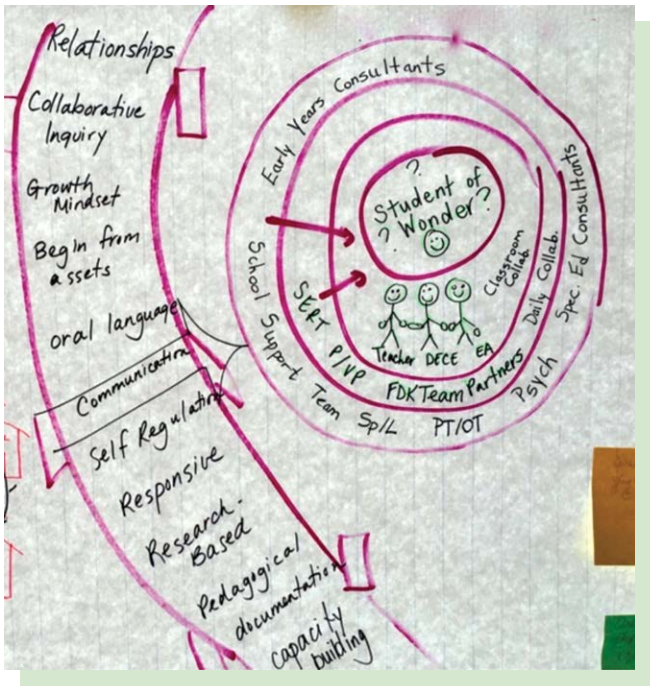

Figure 13: Student of Wonder Graphic

This form of collaborative professionalism must be carefully planned over time. One central office staff member said that, in the first year, "we spent a whole lot of time really supporting schools on the whole process of collaborative inquiry." The scope of inquiry began including issues pertinent to students' identities. "What are things like their spoken languages? When are they most joyful? When are they most engaged?" "We really wanted to address the whole child, not just their learning needs." This meant paying attention to "cultural considerations" and the "foundations of belonging and engagement."

In the second year, the staff member worked with teachers "on looking at their class as a whole." The idea was to begin documenting student learning in a sustained way, including the use of photographs or film clips of students that are subsequently shared with their colleagues. These could capture issues such as one child's social isolation or another child's difficulty with managing disappointment in appropriate ways.

It was only in the third year that educators "started to zero in" on one particular student, identified as a "student of wonder," whom they thought would benefit from additional attention and support. The kindergarten classroom teams are in charge of identifying the student of wonder and developing the inquiry questions relevant for the student. Participation on the teams is voluntary and appeals to teachers' desire to help their students to thrive. The process is always designed to have a concrete, practical outcome. According to one staff developer for the board, "One of the things that really worked is to ask them [the teachers] to bring a picture of their student. They actually had the face of their student of wonder right there in front of them. In the middle."

Participation on the board's educator teams is diverse and multidisciplinary in nature, similar to the teams described previously in the francophone board, although with slightly different and varying participation from different professionals. The composition of the school-specific multidisciplinary team is based upon the needs experienced by a "student of wonder" at a given point of time.

One of the Board's administrators explains how this works:

> We have an interdisciplinary team model that we use when schools are stuck with a particular situation, scenario, or student issue. They bring all of the team together, so classroom teachers, psychologist, social worker, family, outside agency and partnerships come to that table and every voice is equally

> valued. There has been some revolutionary work within student services because quite often the psychologist had a certain position and power and a classroom teacher had a different one, and an EA [Educational Assistant] and CYW [Child Youth Worker). It was a significant shift in our department but it's paid off big, hugely. It's really about working to break down those silos so that people can access the supports that they want and need.

Focus group meetings were held with educators from three different multidisciplinary teams. Some of them were speech/language pathologists, special education consultants, and physical/occupational therapists or psychologists, depending on the wonderings about the student. Most were classroom educators. The multidisciplinary participants spoke of devoting meticulous attention to equity in their deliberations, with consistent support provided to those professionals who were in daily contact with the children.

One key component of the board's model of collaborative professionalism is that it places the kindergarten classroom educators' expertise in the foreground. This acknowledges that whatever changes are made in instructional practices, curricular planning, or assessment, it is the individual teacher who will ultimately be tasked with transforming practice in the interest of student development.

These teams are designed so that classroom teachers receive essential practical strategies to help children to engage with one another and to learn. Outcomes from the work of these interdisciplinary groups are shared among kindergarten educators both informally and in some cases, through sharing effective practices at school staff meetings. These produce "a kind of ripple effect" that raises educators' awareness of issues that are not just relevant for the designated students of wonder, but for all students.

For the Vice Principal of one school, the constant exchange of ideas and observations among the adults spread through the educator teams has had immediate benefits for students' learning. Teachers were "sharing some of the observations that they had done and were getting input and taking that back and applying into their classroom settings." A full-day kindergarten teacher commented,

> The most valuable piece has been the face time, the human interaction. Getting everybody together and giving them that time to really speak to each other. That was a very valuable piece in this whole inquiry project. It really helped move people along.

Unlike in the previous *Age of Achievement and Effort* which identified some students for additional attention based upon data-driven decision-making, this board's educators were now trusted with the professional discretion to select students for study based upon their judgments deriving from everyday interactions in the classroom. They could identify strengths as well as challenges for the students. Of great importance for the teachers was that "it was up to us to choose a student of wonder." Another added, "We also had to frame a question based on a student of wonder. Where were we going to progress with them?"

Teachers' free choice of students led to a rich diversity of inquiry projects in the different kindergarten teams in the board's schools. A Vice Principal described the division of labour in four kindergarten classrooms in her school:

> The one team explored feelings and self-regulation. The second team explored being able to engage and develop oral language. The third team used a strategy to engage a student who was very withdrawn, so it was a bit of social skills development but also oral language development. The last class, they were looking at self-regulation, looking at an alternate space and what that space would look like for certain students.

Educators continued to explore topics related to literacy, but these were now including themes of "social skills development" and "self-regulation" that were not part of the previous reform model. Traditional forms of achievement aren't neglected. They are integrated into a more complex understanding of the child as a whole person.

These examples again point to the emergence of a new model of collaborative professionalism in Ontario. Gone is a narrower kind of professional collaboration that focused more on specific aspects of traditional achievement and on using quantitative data to identity "marker students" with weaknesses that could be rectified. The move towards collaborative professionalism now uses a range of data and educator perspectives to illuminate the strengths as well as the weaknesses of students who struggle in some way. These data and educators' professional judgments about them are then connected to the four provincial pillars and the overall achievement, development and well-being of students as whole people.

These processes are driven by teachers who stay close to the practical world of children that they encounter every day. They are enriched by the many other eyes of their colleagues to help them notice what might be there but that can be easily overlooked in the busy social environment of the classroom. This collaborative professionalism is teacher-driven, not data-driven. It concentrates on the whole child and not only their academic scores. It takes time to build and develop over many years, rather than being implementable in an instant. It is engendering a robust set of professional practices that are deep, transformative, and sustainable.

Questioning Collaborative Professionalism

This chapter has examined the shift in Ontario from a prior culture of professional collaboration to a new one of collaborative professionalism. This shift has been a way to secure coherence in the implementation of provincial policy priorities. This is done not through the rolling out of a particular program from the top, or through granular attention to continuously raising achievement scores in tiers and cycles of data-driven intervention below. It is informed by inquiry and propelled by educators' own initiative within the guiding framework and pillars of provincial policy. It enables the circulation of ideas and adoption of effective practices by the teachers who are closest to the students.

In the 2011 report, PLCs, multidisciplinary teams, and IDTs existed primarily in forms of

collaboration that had lapsed into the general sharing of ideas on the one hand, or preoccupation with pursuing narrowly defined achievement goals on the other. Each approach was limited. Now, educators are using locally-sourced data, external assessments and their best professional judgment wherever possible to improve teaching and learning together.

There is a new kind of collaborative inquiry at work across almost all parts of the ten CODE Consortium boards, then, that is widespread, embedded and addressed to developing the whole child and the meaning and purpose of their learning. Professional dialogue is now more disciplined and also more trusting. It is more formally structured in some respects with protocols and procedures, and more informally robust in how it builds strong relationships in other respects. Dialogue is open, direct and humble as educators of all kinds realize how complex the issues facing them are when they teach increasingly diverse populations, and how it is important to have the collective knowledge and curiosity to understand and capitalize on students' strengths and not just try to rectify their deficits.

Our research indicates that Ontario has continued to explore new ways of improving teaching and learning that are reflected in its emergent model of collaborative professionalism. It demonstrates how to "get better at getting better."[204]

Ultimately, there are no strict dividing lines that clearly demarcate the board-led PLC of the "Transitions North" project from a teacher-led IDT or the multidisciplinary team of the francophone board. Forms of collaborative inquiry and protocols for discussing "students of wonder" likewise evolve and intersect over time. Practice is richer than theory. Yet the same evidence of progress runs across and through all these elements.

Even so, collaborative professionalism has not become equally evident across all ten CODE Consortium boards. While there is momentum away from professional collaboration and towards collaborative professionalism, the progress that has been made should not be overstated. Some problems and issues must still be addressed in moving collaborative professionalism further forward.

1. Racing Cycles

The 6-week cycles of data-driven intervention that have been carried over and are still in existence from the *Age of Achievement and Effort* may be too compressed to be sustainable in a context of broader educational outcomes and increasingly diverse populations. In one board, for example, a teacher explained that there were concerns about how to handle the sheer volume of data:

> Everybody's gathering data, which is good, but what do we do with it, and what is the best data to gather? Now you see the teachers are taking pictures, they're observing, they have checklists, they're gathering it too, but what to do with it?"

Especially given the proliferation of new data, much of which was gathered by teachers themselves, teachers in this board felt that six weeks was not a sufficient window of time to collect data, identify issues, set out goals and objectives, and meet periodically to assess progress – while

still attempting to manage an elementary school classroom full of diverse learners and needs. One teacher said that

> within the space of three weeks, we need to determine what our goal is, have built that up with our students and clearly established what the criteria are with our students, collect the data, and be working on it before that mid-point meeting. Then, we have another three weeks to keep going with that, to continue collecting data, to hopefully bring them to a successful conclusion of that project, to then have our data for the final meeting. I think my colleagues and I are all in agreement that six weeks is too short of a time. We'd like to see it doubled.

Another teacher struggled with finding the time "to just actually implement data collection and data analysis. It's difficult. The classroom's a busy place. There are always problems that need to be addressed immediately, so it's just a question of time." A principal added that

> the time between the meetings is sometimes too short because we establish learning outcomes, let's say at the first PLC, then three weeks later we have the mid PLC, and sometimes, with all of the school activities and other workshops, teachers find it very hard to establish the strategies to reach the learning outcomes that we've set. Sometimes maybe six weeks is a little short. For next year I might be discussing if we can add a week between meetings.

Sometimes, what can look like agile leadership in fast-paced and flexible systems to those at the top, can be experienced as resulting in agitated followership among those further down in the administrative hierarchy.[205] This is not collaborative professionalism as we have defined it.

2. *Integration as Overload*

Ever since the days of the *Essential for Some Good for All* project, there has been a concerted effort for classroom teachers and special education resource staff to share responsibilities for the whole students that they have in common.[206] By the time of the current study, that effort at integration was extending into a push to get classroom teachers, rather than special education specialists, to write the individual education plans (IEPs) for their own students.

In one board especially, Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) saw their role as eventually shifting responsibility for developing the IEPs to classroom teachers, so that children who had needed support in Grades 2 or 3 weren't still requiring LST assistance in Grades 7 and 8. This was so these students didn't become "lifers" who had failed to become independent. LSTs, one member of the LST team said, were "no longer able to deliver eight weeks of intensive support to help that child move on with reading. It's not in our role right now with everything else that's happening to do that."

A survey of secondary school principals in this board revealed that two thirds of the principals felt that only a quarter or fewer of teachers were "actually writing their IEPs." One board administrator said that "a big goal" of the Committee of

Professional Services staff was "to get those teachers writing those IEPs for their students in their classrooms, so they have ownership for what those kids are learning." The board and the teacher's federation had reached an agreement that by June 2017 "every teacher will be responsible for their own IEPs." "But it's your responsibility to program for students. IEP is a part of your program. You're reporting on that in report cards."

Asked how this might be perceived in terms of workload addition for the teachers, one member of the school board administration responded

> Really the bottom line is that if you are the teacher who has to report on that student and you're not even involved in the writing (of the IEP) – so the workload piece is there is some question about "Should I be doing this in my prep time?" My response is "It's a child's program in your classroom. So, yes, it's absolutely appropriate in your prep time."

The board would and did provide workshops and summer institutes to support teachers with writing their IEPs. These were designed to build capacity so that teachers would be able to take on these responsibilities effectively. Still, as this board administrator's colleague insisted,

> Students are entitled to accommodations and modifications included in their IEPs. That's something we want to hold teachers accountable for. We're hoping by developing their capacity, we can help them with this. Report cards must reflect the goals of the IEPs. One of the big things our board is creating is a culture of collective responsibility in terms of "These are all our kids." We need to support all our kids! Gone are those days where we would say "Oh, it's your turn to go out to your SERT (special education resource teacher) classroom and they're going to help you and support you." We want these SERT teachers and regular homeroom classroom teachers to be working together. We want a sense of the fact we own all the students.

Collective responsibility for all students' success is a moral responsibility and a central professional obligation. It is integral to the ways in which collaborative professionalism is developing in the CODE Consortium boards. But while the workload of the LST might be eased as a result of moving to teacher-written IEPs, the concomitant workload of the classroom teacher is conversely at risk in the other direction. In a professional environment where resources are finite and sometimes scarce, and where the demands posed by young people in today's society are increasing, there is tension between developing genuine collective responsibility for all students' success, on the one hand, and placing increasing responsibility on the classroom teacher for all students' IEPs on the other.

Part of a strong culture of genuinely collaborative professionalism and reciprocal accountability should also be that school boards and the provincial government enable teachers to take on this greater responsibility for all students, their IEPs and their implementation, with sufficient training, time for additional preparation and collaboration, and collegial support for working more intensively with more students in circumstances of intensifying student demands.

3. *Abrogating Expertise*

One of the province's main strategies for improving learning and achievement in mathematics has been to use processes of collaborative inquiry. Earlier, we discovered how one board's math strategy used instructional coaches who were not math-specific in their expertise. Coaches and consultants, it will be recalled, felt that "nobody's an expert at anything and we're just here to learn and grow and be the best that we can be."

In a complex culture and organization, it is important, as a learning organization, for it to be acknowledged that no one knows everything and a stance of humility about the limitations of one's own expertise is necessary in order to harness the collective wisdom and insight of the wider team. The director understood this when he proclaimed that he himself was "not the expert," but "the lead learner in the organization."

At the same time, mathematics learning would appear to call for contributions from people with accredited math expertise, especially when, compared to countries like Finland and Singapore, few elementary teachers in Ontario have a major or minor university qualification in mathematics or science, and many are not confident in their own understanding of mathematics. Some principals seemed to recognize this when they assigned more importance to specialists in the higher grades of 7 and 8. "You get a motivated teacher who's comfortable and that spills over. There's that intuition, the understanding of the subject," one principal remarked.

A separate, independent evaluation of the same board's largely successful implementation of inquiry-based learning supported by technology indicated that while teachers benefited from instructional coaching in school-based professional learning as well as having opportunity to engage in collaborative discussions and conversations, they would have welcomed more formal professional development provision, especially in the initial stages of implementation.[207] Sometimes teachers want information and expertise. They don't appreciate being left to wallow around together without it.

Processes and protocols of collaborative inquiry have deepened significantly in the last five years, but the role of expertise in collaborative work may need revisiting in the case of mathematics reform especially. More direct and explicit instruction in professional development may be a necessary supplement to an implementation and support strategy that relies on an approach to coaching in which questions, reflection, brainstorming and inquiry are valued, but nobody, including the coach, claims to have subject-based or pedagogical expertise. Authoritative knowledge and expertise still have an indispensable role to play in collaborative professionalism.

In a rapidly changing profession and society, there are limitations to everyone's expertise. At the same time, the teaching profession should be wary of a wider trend towards the "death of expertise" and an associated "surge in narcissistic and misguided intellectual egalitarianism" where either nobody claims expertise or everyone does.[208] This disavowal of expertise undermines teachers' hard-won professional knowledge, and is unlikely to be the best way to improve learning in math or any other subject.

4. Cross-school collaboration

Last, we saw much more evidence of collaborative professionalism within schools and through the hub-and-spoke style of interactions with consultants and coaches across schools than we did directly among schools themselves. This was true within and also across boards. These issues are ones we will take up further in our next chapter on Leading from the Middle.

Conclusion

Over a decade spanned by two reports, Ontario has become a world leader not just in how much its education professionals collaborate, but also in how well and how deeply they work together for all students' success. Drawing on our data from the 10 boards, we have witnessed a shift from professional collaboration in which many ways of collaboration are practiced and valued, to collaborative professionalism which is predicated on deeper and more trusting relationships on the one hand, along with more precision of focus, more deliberate use of protocols and tools, and more robust processes of challenging conversation and feedback on the other. Collaborative professionalism is dedicated to more than raising achievement results in literacy and math. It is also concerned with ensuring equity and excellence in a curriculum that develops whole children through a quest for meaning and purpose in ways that lead to greater well-being and genuine accomplishment.

Ontario's on-the-ground record in collaborative professionalism is not only a faithful realization of the carefully agreed policy framework that advocates and promotes it. Collaborative professionalism on the ground is actually ahead of the policy in how it is often teacher-led and student-involved within compelling projects linked to challenging educational and professional goals. If anyone wants to see how professional collaboration works at its best in the form of collaborative professionalism in a way that is embedded into practice, system-wide, Ontario is the place to come.

Chapter 7:

Leading from the Middle

Introduction

Ontario education is in a new era. Its policy has shifted in intent and direction. In the first decades of the 2000s, provincial policy was driven by an *Age of Achievement and Effort* with its focus on raising performance and narrowing achievement gaps in literacy and numeracy as well as increasing rates of high school graduation. From around 2014, building on the measured successes of this first period in terms of increased graduation rates, as well as improved standards and narrowing of some achievement gaps in literacy, an *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity* began. This now defines new priorities. These encompass a more broadly defined vision of excellence, an approach to equity that includes and develops young people's diverse identities, and a commitment to students' well-being as a necessary condition for learning and a worthwhile accomplishment in its own right.

This shift in policy has been *bold*. It has had come to terms with Ontario's need to educate and develop young people as whole persons who can participate successfully in a rapidly changing economy and who can pursue responsible and fulfilling lives of meaning and purpose in a diverse and democratic society. Ontario's education system is also striving to be *specific* and to retain public confidence in how it charts and demonstrates progress and in how effectively it implements its newly defined purposes. How can Ontario be bold in its ambition and also effective in its implementation? Much of this answer to this question comes down to leadership.

Taking it from the Top

Few governments lack ideas in educational policy. Between 2008 and 2014 alone, 450 reforms were introduced in OECD countries.[209] Yet, many, if not most, policies usually fail to be implemented successfully. Significantly, few governments even evaluate whether their policies have been successful at all.[210]

Good policies that support worthy goals like excellence, equity and well-being in education can fail for a number of reasons. Governments change. Priorities shift. Policies do not only accumulate and overwhelm people – they can also contradict each other. Policies can also fail because they run counter to the wishes of the education profession, leading to resistance and reluctance to implement them.

Some policies are too top-down or are too standardized for diverse systems. They are too remote from front-line professionals and their practice. This means that they are not able to build on the capacity of their most highly qualified professionals.

In the *Age of Achievement and Effort* in Ontario, however, top-down changes in literacy reform were successful compared to other jurisdictions. One reason was that the "top" was not merely a bureaucracy, but a "guiding coalition" that also included professional leaders and other partners. Another was the provision of extensive professional development and financial support for implementation. Third, extensive investment in coaches and consultants provided on-the-ground support that was closely tailored to the needs of particular schools.[211]

In this time period, PLCs flourished, overcoming the bane of teachers' traditional workplace isolation. The goals from the Ministry and from the boards were clear for educators in the schools. Since the focus was specific, control from the top was feasible. No one could object that students should learn to read, write, and solve mathematics problems at their grade levels. So, in some circumstances, when there is clarity from government, and the profession is approached in a supportive way, top down policies can succeed for a while.

However, when educational policies and goals become more complex, it is more difficult to impose them from the top. Complex goals such as supporting students' well-being or enabling students to develop lives that have meaning and purpose are not as easy to direct from the top as making gains in literacy or numeracy.

Eventually something had to give, if only because the narrow agenda of *Achievement and Effort* was increasingly out of touch with far-reaching societal transformations. A digital age of high-level skills, increasing cultural diversity, globalized interdependence, and high-speed change call for more challenging educational goals that speak to an emerging *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity*. These more complex goals require more sophisticated and flexible change strategies that are adapted to the challenges confronting a rising generation of students.[212]

Starting from the Bottom

An obvious alternative to the limitations of top-down reform is bottom-up innovation. It's not only Canadian music icon, Drake, who has extolled the virtue and the value of "starting from the bottom." Many historic struggles against injustice have also started from the bottom. Grassroots movements and community organizing transformed attitudes towards some of the greatest inequities and injustices of the modern age. In the process they have also shifted the behaviors of customers and then companies in relation to the environmental impact of consumer products and packaging. In the corporate world, some of the world's digital and internet breakthroughs began in suburban garages or teenage bedrooms as bold start-ups that were fired by improbable dreams and relentless determination.

Bottom-up change can succeed, then, but only under certain conditions. In politics and social life, social movements mainly work only when policies and governments oppose what those movements stand for. This means that many bottom-up changes rely on opposition to government and

run out of steam when they achieve some of their goals. Their oppositional nature often means that they have a short and limited life span.

In business, meanwhile, the most spectacular start-ups are the ones we remember; but the vast majority of start-ups actually fail. The same is true of bottom-up innovation in education, where reformers sometimes possess little more than blind faith that proven reforms will naturally percolate their way to the top of the system. But changing systems is much harder than that.

More reformers are now advocating for greater autonomy for schools and teachers, increased freedom for curriculum design, and more personalized uses of technology.[213] But the history of bottom-up innovation and school autonomy is not impressive. In the 1960s and 1970s, innovative ideas often didn't spread beyond a few isolated classrooms.[214] When innovations did spread, their implementation was often superficial. Teachers often used new methods that they didn't fully understand, or even when they did understand them, these methods were isolated experiments that withered away without adequate support. Without explicit strategies to scale up local innovations, there is no reason to believe that reforms based on bottom-up change will fare any better today.

One of the consequences of putting too much emphasis on control at the top even when it is combined with freedom or individual school autonomy at the bottom is that it has bypassed the middle. This has led to incoherence across entire systems because engagement of the middle is essential. Without it, the top lacks first-hand knowledge of what is happening in the schools, and the bottom lacks colleagues who can help to communicate what is transpiring in other schools undertaking similar reforms.[215]

Because of the limitations of top-down reform and the persistent failure of bottom-up innovation in education, a few systems have started to create an intermediary layer of policy implementation that will pass along changes from the top and also gather up innovations from the bottom. This new movement has come to be known as "middle level" or "middle tier" leadership. We call it "Leadership in the Middle" (LiM).

Leading in the Middle

Often, "the middle" seems less interesting than the end points of a continuum. Middle child. Middle school. Middle age. Middle-aged spread. Middle Earth. Middle Kingdom. Middle America. Middle England. Piggy in the middle. Monkey in the middle. Stuck in the middle. Middle Class. Middle of the road. Fair to middling. The same phenomenon exists in other languages. Swedes, for instance, refer to middle milk (semi-skimmed), and middle beer (between strong and light).

The middle is also a connector, like a middle school, that exists in between elementary and high, or primary and secondary. It struggles to have an identity of its own. The idea of a middle level or tier has become increasingly attractive amongst advocates for a reduced or more streamlined role for locally elected school districts. This has been the case in England and Sweden, and in association with the charter school movement in the US. Where there is strong direction from government, along with marketplace competition for schools, attention to some kind of middle seeks to plug the policy implementation gap.

Michael Barber and his colleagues have argued for a new middle tier to replace the traditional middle "layer" of democratically elected school districts or local authorities.[216] In a co-authored report for the Massachusetts Business Alliance in Education about the future of education in the state, they referred to earlier work with Barber's colleagues at McKinsey and Company where they identified "a critical role for what they called the 'middle tier'" (in education), as follows:

1. to provide targeted support to schools and monitor compliance;
2. to facilitate communication between schools and the center;
3. to encourage inter-school collaboration; and
4. to moderate community resistance to change by making the case for a different future.

The idea of a "middle tier" here appears to be part of an overall strategy to minimize democratic control of public education and especially the public's potential opposition to some central government policies. Here, the middle serves as a buffer that will ensure policy makers can get on with their agendas without question or challenge.

Other cases for the middle emphasize the idea of coherence in school systems. Michael Fullan has described Leading from the Middle as

> a deliberate strategy that increases the *capacity* and internal *coherence* of the middle as it becomes a more effective *partner upward* to the state and *downward* to its schools and communities, in pursuit of greater *system performance*.... Thus, it is not a standalone, but rather a *connected* strategy. This approach is powerful because it mobilizes the middle (districts and/or networks of schools), thus developing widespread capacity, while at the same time the middle works with its schools more effectively and becomes a better and more influential partner upward to the center. (our emphases in italics)[217]

Like Fullan, Andreas Schleicher of the OECD also argues that school systems need a stronger role for the "meso" or middle level of change. Here again, the middle can play an invaluable role by helping to implement changes from the top, and to move around ideas and strategies that are percolating up from beneath.[218] The middle, here, is a connector. It improves efficiency and performance by breaking down the walls of miscommunication and misunderstanding that can flourish in large organizations like school systems. The middle moves things up, down and around. It does not yet, however, have much driving force, momentum or identity of its own.

Finally, for still others, middle level leadership is about a set of roles that have career pathways, formal responsibilities, and additional remuneration. In his commentary on the emergence of middle level leadership in England, for example, Jonathon Supovitz refers to how system leaders describe middle leaders as those "who worked closely with teachers, who could more closely foster and monitor individual teachers' improvement" in order to enhance performance.[219] These middle leaders give teachers the sense that they are being listened to and they help to explain the reasons for changes in government policies. One potential danger of being in the middle, like this, is that it can lead to what Harris and Jones describe as tensions "between expectations that the middle

leader role had a whole-school focus versus … loyalty to their department, and … between a growing culture of line management within a hierarchical framework versus a professional rhetoric of collegiality."[220]

In all of these cases, middle level or middle tier leadership is a role, position or function that communicates, connects and creates coherence, increased efficiency and enhanced performance in a complex system. This idea applies especially in instances where traditional, local, democratically-controlled districts have been weakened or eliminated altogether in order to remove the restrictions to market competition and centralized control. Leading in the Middle, then, is about creating stronger systems, not building better communities.

But what does and should Leading from the Middle look like in societies that retain an interest in strong localized and democratic control? Some societies retain an attachment to the power of communities, towns and cities, not just as middle levels that connect other people's policies and purposes, but to be creators and drivers of educational purposes for themselves. What can it look like to Lead *from* the Middle in these jurisdictions, where districts are strong and valued, rather than weak and vulnerable?

Leading from the Middle and Local Control

In North America and northern Europe, school districts have historically been regarded as one linchpin of local democracy.[221] Governor Jerry Brown of California has recognized this by returning control of educational spending back to the state's 1,050 districts, so that the maximum amount of control is placed at the local level.[222]

Districts can accomplish many important goals and functions. They can provide a focus for school improvement and be a means for efficient and effective use of research evidence across schools. School districts provide support so schools can respond coherently to multiple external reform demands and they can be champions for families, students, and their communities, making sure everybody gets a fair deal. Research on strong boards in Ontario and elsewhere shows they are powerful forces for positive educational change.[223] Steadily improving districts like Boston in Massachusetts and Long Beach in California have received widespread acclaim for their system-wide gains.[224] Susan Moore Johnson and her colleagues have found that districts that achieve the greatest coherence have stability of leadership, establish a clear vision, and secure collaborative involvement of educators.[225] In England, some urban districts, like the London boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets, went from being the lowest performers in the country, to scoring above the national average on all key indicators.[226]

However, just like central governments and individual schools, not all local school systems or districts are strong. Some districts do well while others fare badly. Districts vary in their resources and capacities for change like networking and seeking out other ideas. Districts can be self-serving, politically toxic, glacially slow at driving improvement, and, as in the famous US Atlanta cheating scandal, just plain corrupt.

In the US and England especially, there are unacceptable variations in quality among school

districts. Due to differences in demographics, poverty levels, funding, and the associated capacity to develop effective leadership, very high performing and very low performing districts sometimes co-exist side-by-side.[227] The upshot is a conundrum: although all high performing nations are characterized by strong local control, not all nations with strong local control are high performing.

One response to this conundrum is to say that school districts are not worth saving, and either to deliver reforms in detail from the top, or to institute market-based, individualistic alternatives like US charter schools, Swedish free schools, and English academies. These are insulated from district control and their teachers often are not unionized, making them especially susceptible to top-down control and compliance

However, in their review of the rationale for the movement from local authorities to individual academies organized as chains of "multi-academy trusts" in England, US economists Ladd and Fiske conclude that "while some local authorities are decidedly weak, it is hard to make the case that the basic system of local authorities is failing. Moreover, some local authorities, including many in London, have done an outstanding job of assuring high-quality schools for most of their primary school students."[228] Likewise, research by the Sutton Trust finds no clear evidence to show that chains of academies outperform traditional locally controlled schools.[229]

One further factor serves as a commentary on the comparative merits of Leading *in* the Middle in a market-driven system versus Leading *from* the Middle in traditional communities of local control. Ladd and Fiske note that multi-academy trusts and similar chain-like structures of cross-school organization in England "seriously undermine the(se) mechanisms for responsiveness to local concerns."[230] The new system "effectively strips local authorities of responsibility for many of the functions related to articulating overall community needs, coordinated planning, assuring high quality schools for all children in the area, and accountability to parents. The new system is ill equipped to replace authorities as providers of these functions."[231]

Denuding and diminishing local authorities or local school districts therefore leads to no proven gains in achievement or equity overall. It only contributes to deterioration in local support, service and accountability to the community.

An alternative way to reduce variation in quality among districts is to promote collaboration among them so that they share resources and exercise collective responsibility for all their students' success. This approach is what school boards in Ontario came to refer to as Leading *from* the Middle, as we found in our 2011 study of the province's approach to reform.

Leading from the Middle Then

Our 2011 *Leading for All* report on the *Essential for Some, Good for All* (ESGA) project stated that ESGA "only began and then built momentum because of pressure from system leadership, *in the middle*, that coincided with the high profile needs of securing measurable improvement in literacy and numeracy at the top."[232] The results of this action were evident in three key elements that initially made up *Leading from the Middle* and

that contributed to the gains in achievement that are associated with ESGA.

First, was the pressure on central government to provide resources and opportunity from the top. After observing that Ontario's teacher unions had received "$20 million for PD" from the provincial government, the board directors and superintendents had felt like "second bananas" to the unions when it came to school improvement.[233] In response, they worked with CODE to advocate for a new infusion of resources from the Ministry to address the challenges confronted by their students with special needs. Because all of the available evidence showed that these students were struggling academically, CODE won a commitment of $25 million from the Ministry to "do the professional development associated with *Education for All*"– the Ministry's new vision for special education inclusion.[234] This "high-level stakeholder representation that also applied to other provincial reforms in education," was the first aspect of what would later come to be called "Leading from the Middle."[235]

Second, was CODE's decision to distribute the $25 million identically across all 72 of Ontario's boards, irrespective of their student enrolments. Most boards in Ontario are small, so identical funding per board meant that "Every superintendent and director became an advocate." This would not have been the case if the lion's share had been given to the larger boards, as had typically been the case in the past. Consequently, "district level leaders became the collective dynamos who gave the whole project its energy and momentum."[236]

A third aspect of Leading from the Middle comprised "a small steering or leadership team of retired directors and superintendents."[237] This team "was appointed by the head of CODE to be responsible for designing and developing the ESGA initiative."[238] It was this "group of respected leaders at the middle of the system who had decisive influence" on the outcomes from ESGA.[239]

According to the 2011 report, then, LfM related to taking the initiative to advocate for vulnerable students using parity of funding for all of Ontario's school boards. CODE coordinated their efforts through the leadership exercised by a steering group of retired directors who still wished to be engaged with school improvement. Outside the specific theme of Leading from the Middle, the *Leading for All* report also described other ways in which the boards worked together to increase the inclusion of *all* students in their schools. This gave the ESGA reform a moral purpose that extended beyond an academically struggling target group of students. Two dimensions of this work came to be viewed as integrally connected to the idea of Leading from the Middle.

First, ESGA's "emphasis on school board authority and flexibility" "enabled boards to employ *responsive diversity practices*" that sought to engage and increase the achievement of all learners.[240] Boards experienced distinct kinds of diversity, such as working with high proportions of indigenous students, or with recent immigrant students who were English language learners. They responded to these by seeking to "understand and engage with the assets of different communities," and to employ strategies such as differentiated instruction and assistive technologies that helped them reach every learner.[241]

Second, boards created cultures where educators exercised *collective responsibility* for all of their students' success. In the words of the *Leading for All* report, collective responsibility "is about having a common professional and emotional investment in, and mutual professional accountability for, the success of all students across all grade levels, subject departments and the special educational divide."[242]

Over time, the concept of *Leading from the Middle* began to enter the vocabulary of Ministry policy makers and of school board administrators more widely.[243] It also awakened the curiosity of 10 of the 72 boards (nine of whom had participated in the *Leading for All* study), who formed themselves into what became known as the "CODE Consortium" to continue learning from one another in conjunction with the Boston College research team. Together, through collaborative planning and reflection, the Consortium and the Boston College team refined the understanding of *Leading from the Middle* to encompass seven principles represented in the graphic below:

Figure 14: Leading from the Middle Graphic Organizer

The principles were described in more detail as follows:

1. ***Responsiveness to diversity.*** Boards and their schools work with others to generate solutions that respond to distinctive local needs and diversities through practices like differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning. LfM projects engage with students' distinctive identities and develop cooperation to better support students between special education support teachers, curriculum consultants, and regular classroom teachers.

2. ***Responsibility.*** Boards take collective responsibility for all of their students' success by working in professional learning communities. They examine student data and bring together teachers with special education consultants, speech pathologists, and mental health specialists, to devise strategies to support all of the students in the boards who have struggled with their learning.

3. ***Initiative.*** Leading from the Middle is about fewer initiatives and more initiative. It is about educators themselves seizing the initiative together to acknowledge and respond to challenges in their schools and communities and to develop strategies to address them.

4. ***Integration.*** Boards seek to integrate their efforts with government priorities wherever possible, by linking to literacy reforms or efforts to close the achievement gap in the past, for example.

5. ***Transparency.*** Boards act together to establish transparency of participation and results regarding their progress in improving learning, establishing well-being, and building identity. They share their strategies and results with each other through the networks of their relationships and at public sessions which display their projects and their impact.

6. ***Humility.*** No board sees itself as superior to all the others. Each board demonstrates curiosity to learn from the rest. All boards commit to learning from other systems elsewhere.

7. ***Design.*** Boards work together to ensure that the six prior principles are put into place through deliberate designs, and then disseminated throughout their schools and systems.

At Consortium meetings, the boards used these seven principles of Leading from the Middle to organize and deepen their reflections on their projects. The example below was used in a Consortium meeting in 2015 in Toronto.

Consortium participants filled in the slides in advance of the meeting so that members from all of the other boards could see what kinds of progress they were making—as well as challenges they were facing—with their LfM projects in regard to identity. The slide on the next page on student and teacher engagement exemplifies how these collaborative activities then connected the boards' transparent processes of inquiry with the LfM framework.

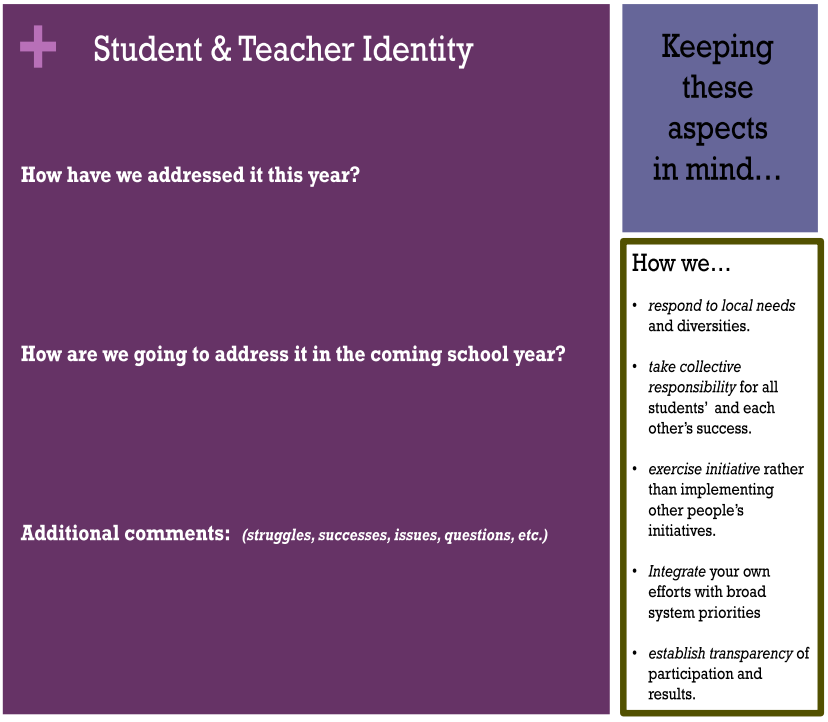

Figure 15: Powerpoint slide enabling transparency of activities on the subject of identity across Consortium boards.

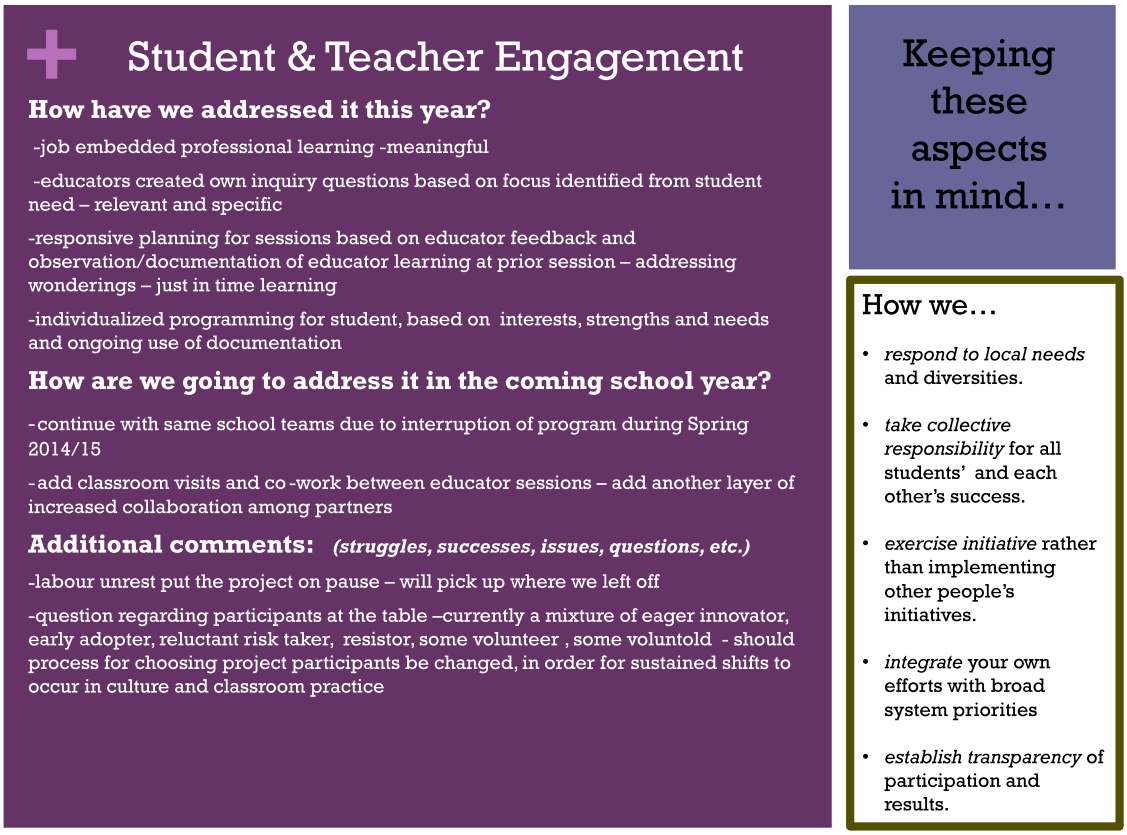

Figure 16: Sample Powerpoint slide exhibiting transparency of one board's activities

At the Consortium meeting, participants discussed the challenges they were facing with their LfM projects. For example, the slide in Figure 16 addresses the role of "labour unrest" in causing disruptions that put the project "on pause." It also presents how teachers responded very differently to diverse initiatives, with some happy to take on the role of an "early adopter" while others complained of being "voluntold" to innovate. This board sought to demonstrate responsiveness to students' "interests, strengths, and needs" and created space for "addressing wonderings" of its educators. This kind of designed openness to obstacles and enablers faced by the boards helped Consortium members to reflect on and refine their LfM strategies.

To sum up: In its first phase, the initiative that came to be known as *Essential for Some, Good for All*, was started, led and driven by the directors and superintendents of Ontario school boards from beginning to end. They united through a strategy of identical funding. This galvanized the majority and eventually all of the 72 board leaders. It was coordinated and connected by a "third party" steering group of retired and respected superintendents. They devised an inclusive strategy that responded to the diversity of each board, connected their efforts with each other, and forged collective responsibility for all students' success among the boards themselves.[244] Efforts and their impact were shared openly across the boards. The *Leading for All* report took the words

of one of these retired superintendents who described their effort as "Leading from the Middle" and described systematically and explicitly the theory of action that had evolved among the boards in a more evolutionary and improvised way.

Through the impact of the report and associated publications such as our own book on *The Global Fourth Way* with its case study of Ontario as an internationally high performing system, the idea of *Leading from the Middle* then became part of the province's explicit approach to leadership and change.[245] It inspired 10 boards – most of whom had participated in the Leading for All project – to articulate seven foundational principles of LfM that were used in collaborative meetings as a framework for reflecting on and guiding change. Through the kinds of topics and questions reflected in Figures 15 and 16, Consortium participants had opportunities to compare and contrast their own work with that of their colleagues.

Leading from the Middle Today

But the impact and development of LfM did not stop there. According to a Superintendent of Curriculum in one of the boards, LfM has "kind of morphed into different things" over time. In the era of ESGA, LfM was relatively straightforward. It referred to a leadership committee of retired superintendents affiliated with CODE who provided oversight to a multi-million dollar provincial grant focused on creating collaboration within and among school boards to improve special education. Today, it has assumed greater depth and complexity in relation to students, teaching and learning. This has three components:

1. A *philosophy* of practice and who and what is the heart of it;
2. A *structure* of interdisciplinary teams and committees; and
3. A *culture* of collaborative professionalism for all students' success.

1. A philosophy of the heart of practice.

Consortium educators viewed LfM as *their* concept, something that they had created and sustained even in the absence of government support. It was *their* initiative—not anything that came out of the Ministry or any other branch of the government—and they had held onto it in spite of a year of labour unrest and other distractions. A director in one board explained,

> I think what we're trying to do, and to me the essence of Leading from the Middle, is making real your vision. It's about moving those ideas into concrete practice and making a positive difference, for all your students and for all your staff so that everybody just loves their learning environment. I don't see it [Leading from the Middle] as connected to personnel. I see that the whole notion of Leading from the Middle is a concept or a philosophy. [It is] this idea of wanting to get as close to the action as you possibly can.

In this view, LfM cannot and should not be reduced to a location such as a middle tier. Instead, it means getting close to the teaching and learning that is at the heart of the profession. In the words of a mental health consultant, "Sometimes the middle is the students, sometimes the middle's the teacher. It depends on where learning is happening, or where the learning is." A Superintendent in a Catholic board explained: "Leading from the Middle really speaks to us through our Catholic social teachings and that notion of subsidiarity, that the work and the change and the impact of that change will happen at the ground root."

LfM is about supporting students with all their diverse identities. "Leading from the Middle really forces us to look beyond those categories, those roles, to see how we can serve others to really uplift them." LfM was apparent in the content and focus of many of the projects that Consortium members shared with each other and the Boston College team. LfM as a vision or philosophy of practice that stayed close to students was evident when Consortium educators identified "students of wonder" and studied their assets as well as their challenges; when students learned about the lives of missing Indigenous women, studied inequities in water quality across communities, or brought a refugee family to their community; when teachers strove to develop students' skills of self-advocacy in writing their own Individual Education Plans; when students were engaged in inquiring into and representing their own mental health issues; when teachers assessed student's work by sitting beside them in processes of pedagogical documentation rather than using standardized tests to make data-driven interventions; when forums were organized for all students to share their ideas about what could be done to improve school climate; and when apps were designed that enabled students to inform educators when students are concerned about other students' lack of well-being.

In all these ways, LfM was about placing students, their learning and their well-being at the heart of and close to teachers' practice. It was about what and who is in the middle of educators' work. Being able to listen to students and their caregivers is central to this understanding of LfM. As one superintendent said, this "is in and of itself a type of Leadership from the Middle because it's inclusive and responsive at the same time."

This student-centered view of LfM provoked deeper reflection among educators about their beliefs, relationships and strategies:

> What are our values? What are our customs? What are our beliefs? We know that it starts with the beliefs and it results in a chain of events, a chain of thoughts, relationships that develop, connections that are made and actions that are planned and actions that are implemented. That becomes the work that we do collectively and that becomes the best that we achieve.

Figure 17: LfM as depicted in birch-bark slices activity of one board

The power of these beliefs and how they engaged educators with their students was expressed in a meeting of the senior administrative team in one board where participants expressed their understanding of LfM by writing on birch-bark slices. For these educators, what mattered most was "getting back to that reflective piece" of always "asking effective questions to push your thinking."

This activity revealed how LfM was experienced by educators not as a mechanistic or bureaucratic phenomenon but rather as an organic activity that "grows and spreads from an idea." It involves "teacher-student voice" and trust to "let it grow, let it flourish."

2. A structure of interdisciplinary teams and committees.

Some educators in the CODE Consortium regarded LfM as a structural phenomenon – a set of roles and responsibilities exercised by consultants, coordinators and mental health specialists who worked together in collaborative teams. This is how a director of an urban board saw it. The essence of LfM, from her point of view, entailed placing people "in learning teams and supporting them through their inquiries." "When I think of Leading from the Middle," the Superintendent of Leadership and Learning in the same board said, "an organization has to put some structures in place and identify what the

function of that structure is." In this particular board, teams of consultants and instructional coaches were assembled to work cheek-by-jowl with teachers to study and uplift mathematics learning. In another board, the leadership team created a new Mathematics Task Force that distributed surveys to ask the students themselves what they liked about mathematics, what they found frustrating and difficult, and what kinds of supports they themselves would most like to receive.

There was much more to all this than simply operating as an intermediary middle-tier that implements government policies from the top down. Recalling one of the seven original principles of LfM in which boards and their personnel take initiative rather than simply implementing other people's initiatives, one superintendent observed: "I don't see Leading from the Middle as the Ministry is at the top and boards are in the middle, and schools are at the bottom. I see that the Ministry lays out the game plan for everybody, but the action orientation rests with the boards."

From this point of view, a diverse array of individuals could Lead from the Middle. One director stated that these included "district staff," "system leaders," "school leaders," and others as well. In a board with a large population of students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, mental health professionals provided by community-based non-profit agencies were considered to be part of their LfM team because their services were viewed as absolutely necessary by the board.

The previous chapter on collaborative professionalism described the presence and pervasiveness of interdisciplinary teams across almost all the boards. LfM is about what these diverse and locally responsive teams do as well as who they are. One elementary school principal stated that LfM could be understood as the "expertise that comes in and helps our team problem solve, and helps to build our knowledge and capacity and mindset." For a board director, LfM "means advocacy, it means people influencing the direction of the organization from the inside, in the grassroots, as opposed to top-down." Here LfM means "flattening the organization, so it's more that we're all Leading from the Middle. We're taking away the hierarchy and protocols and leading all together from the middle. We're all sitting at a table here. You have a voice at the table." In LfM, the structures of interdisciplinary teams are designed to evolve so they become more inclusive and participatory for all.

3. A culture of collaborative professionalism.

Consortium boards experimented with LfM not just as a philosophy or a structure, but also as a method of group work. LfM is about habits and practices of collaboration, empowerment and trust. One superintendent stated: "Our Leading from the Middle methodology is about the circle as a resolution." A colleague agreed: "The circle itself is very much an asset-oriented stance" to promote dialogue. "It's about the fact that everybody came [to one meeting] with a little cheat sheet of a few things they wanted to say, but when it comes together, it actually becomes the conversation." These conversations "speak to how the whole Leading from the Middle is a whole idea of trust. I'm trusting you to know what's really

important for your students, for your staff." One elementary school principal underlined these perspectives when stating that "there is a negative aspect that comes out of Leading from the Middle when people are feeling from above them that they're being held back or there are constraints."

A Superintendent of Special Education echoed this view: "I've always believed that Leadership from the Middle is all inclusive."

> We've got school-based administrators and in my mind, I always thought that those were our leaders from the middle and our only leaders from the middle. But somebody raised a point [at a Consortium meeting] and said we need to start thinking about our teachers and how they are leaders from the middle as well and it just made me really think differently about the whole concept. It shifted my paradigm a little bit. I thought 'She's right!' We have to have that voice. That voice has to be heard! Teachers are an important voice in the Leading from the Middle concept.

Eventually, LfM overlaps with the culture of collaborative professionalism where teachers and other educators work together for all students' success and well-being in ways that are assertive and show initiative – very much like in the province's Teacher Leadership and Learning Project. One board, for example, offers modest amounts of funding up to $1000 for teachers to undertake innovations together.

> It speaks to how Leading from the Middle is a whole idea of trust and I'm trusting you to know what's really important for your students, for your staff—and so that's what the grant does to me. You have a great idea. Let's see what we can do with it. Let's see how we can make it grow. Really, it subsidizes a lot of the stuff that's already happening but it's amazing what can be done with that amount of money.

"They feel connected, they feel comfortable to try something that's specific to their school culture that might be an initiative that might take off and have lift to it," one of the board's superintendents said. "Sometimes," a colleague added, "it starts off locally, and it just spreads from one school to another school, and part of the grant is that idea of sharing. Sharing so that we can all take it and rework it to fit our own communities."

> At the end of the innovation grants, we come in and we share them. We share them with superintendents, we share them with the Director so people have an idea. We share them with other administrators and various contacts throughout the district, so you'll get people saying, 'Oh you did that as innovation grant? That's great. Can we meet? Can I set you up with some teachers?' The teachers who are coming forward are coming forward knowing that they might be asked to be a leader to lead this initiative going forward.

LfM, in this respect, is a culture of collaboration, sharing, initiative and responsiveness to the needs of the board itself. It is founded in a philosophy and made possible by clear structural design decisions. As it evolves, it becomes a culture in itself. This entails new ways of doing things together and acting independently. Ultimately, it expresses a new form of collaborative professionalism that drives learning and teaching forward with an ethic of care for all students.

Summary

The new realization of LfM in the *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity* is expressed in Figure 18 below. This summarizes the different ways in which LfM manifested itself in 2018 compared to 2011, when the prior report was written, in two of the boards.

2011 Report: LfM Then	2018 Report: LfM Today
Literacy development of early learners through » Early detection & greater support for struggling learners » Data driven decision making and progress monitoring » Cross-building collaboration and lateral PLCs	Building self-advocacy skills of students with special needs by » Breaking down the silos between special education and curriculum consultants » Improving maths learning through inquiry » Student focused involvement in their own Individual Education Plans
Literacy & differentiated instruction in kindergarten with » Literacy collaborative involving individuals from across the board focused on data-based instruction » Intervention model for 25 high needs schools » Team to report on literacy in kindergarten	Students at the center of educators' reflections by » New attention to students' well-being » Collaborative inquiry focused on "student of wonder" » Pedagogical documentation using new technologies for sharing, analysis, and planning forward

Figure 18: LfM Then and Now in Two Boards

In the left side of the column, in the *Age of Achievement and Effort*, learning is impelled forward through "data-driven decision making" and "data-based instruction." The focus is on "struggling learners" and "high needs schools." On the right side, documenting LfM as practiced today in an *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity* students are empowered to participate in discussions regarding their IEPs. Their well-being is placed at the center of educators' pedagogical documentation. They are no longer the "marker students" or "bubble kids" of earlier reforms but are now "students of wonder" or "students of mystery." Educators inquire together, drawing on all of the evidence at their disposal, including what they've gathered with their colleagues, rather than simply using provincial testing data to drive everything forward.

LfM today combines a distinctive *philosophy* of practice with supportive *structures* of interdisciplinary teams that are augmented by new cultures of *collaborative professionalism*. Within Ontario, much of this labour-intensive work undertaken by the 10 boards in the Consortium has been transpiring quietly and without much fanfare. Outside of Ontario, on the other hand, LfM is capturing educators' imagination and is spreading rapidly.

Leading from the Middle Beyond Ontario

Starting with the work in Ontario stretching back to our prior report in 2011, the idea of LfM has been gaining interest and currency in other school systems. This has occurred in part through a range of conference presentations by members of the boards and also the Boston College team.

As these ideas and discussions evolved, one of us published an article with UK colleague Mel Ainscow on LfM in the *Phi Delta Kappan*.[246]

Drawing explicitly on the 2011 Ontario report, Michael Fullan has also advanced Leading from the Middle as a desirable change strategy in general and with a number of large-scale systems, including those encompassing entire countries, in particular.[247] He has described it as a way of connecting top-down policies and bottom-up reforms. This contributes to achieving greater coherence to improve the overall performance of systems and to build public confidence in the process.

The work of the Consortium of school boards in this decade, and the associated contribution of our research with the Consortium, along with other thought leaders, has sparked a new international movement of educators and researchers who are producing their own definitions and signature practices affiliated with the idea of Leading from the Middle.

» In *New Zealand*, a report from the Ministry of Education entitled "Leading from the Middle: Educational Leadership for Middle and Senior Leaders" defined LfM in regard to skill sets for leaders operating in decentralized systems without school boards, such as their own.[248] The target audience is school principals and their ability to support or to step aside for middle level leaders in schools to take greater initiative do their work. This sense of Leading *from* the Middle, however, is close to the earlier idea of Leading *in* the Middle in Ontario as a set of roles and responsibilities for "middle leaders."[249]

- In *Scotland and Wales*, following country reviews by the OECD in which one of us participated, Leading from the Middle has been adopted as a national strategy to get school boards to work together. Consortia or collectives are being established now to share resources and ideas and to take collective responsibility for improved equity and for reducing bad variation of quality across boards. In a departure from LfM as it has been piloted in Ontario, the Scots are working to develop systems where each contributing board takes a lead role in particular areas of focus, such as assessment or literacy.[250]

- In California, where funding has been redirected to be under school district control in line with Governor Brown's advocacy for subsidiarity, Michael Fullan's work with key districts, and with other institutions such as community colleges, has promoted LfM as a way to break down cross-district isolation and competition in an inequitable system.[251]

- In Singapore, meanwhile, LfM has been defined "as teachers or teacher leaders (or teacher champions) leading from the middle—in a middle-out fashion."[252] The aspiration here is to promote curriculum innovation so that it leads to "epistemic change in teachers."[253] This highlights Singapore's endeavours to move beyond its historical emphasis on test-taking, so that students learn more complex ways of engaging with subject matter, especially in the sciences. In tune with the earlier definitions of Leading in the Middle, LfM in Singapore also "plays a critical role in alignment and coherence upwards and downwards for ecological consistency."[254]

These are some of the ways in which the work on LfM, that originally initiated in Ontario, is now spreading rapidly internationally. They also reinforce how Leading *from* the Middle (LfM) has become much deeper than Leading *in* the Middle (LiM). The essential differences between the two approaches are summarized in the following table:

LiM	LfM
Level, Layer or Tier	Center, Core and Heart
Improving Performance	Transforming Learning & Well-being
Better Systems	Stronger Communities
Coherence and Connection	Collective Responsibility
Implementing Initiatives	Taking Initiative

Figure 19: A Comparison of Leading in the Middle with Leading from the Middle.

In the *Age of Achievement and Effort*, Leading in the Middle (LiM) was about improving performance and achievement of students and the system. It was about designing roles, responsibilities and functions at the middle levels of a system so that ideas and intentions at the top could be pushed downward. There were also channels of communication that allowed ideas and information to move upwards from the bottom.

This sort of Leading in the Middle (LiM) is ultimately about ensuring compliance with central government priorities. It is also about creating coherence among highly autonomous and sometimes actively competitive individual schools within a wider system. Initially conceived as a method to improve the efficiency of market-driven systems under central government control, where local democracy has been weakened or eliminated, the systemic principles of Leading in the Middle to improve performance and coherence have spread to and influenced many countries. Leading in the Middle in this sense is now common in England, the US, and some Australian states.

Leading *from* the Middle provides a clear point of contrast to Leading *in* the Middle. It is more explicit and direct about the purpose, power and agency of a bold and specific new kind of leadership. LfM is not against stronger performance or improved coherence, although these things may indeed result from its innovations. It differs in that it approaches performance and coherence in a way that is more inclusive and empowering, and ready to engage with people through all parts of the school system. In this way, Leading *from* the Middle, as practiced in Ontario, is about strengthening local communities and local democracy. It is about addressing the particular needs of schools and communities rather than about promoting the capacity of abstract systems to undertake self-improvement.

Leading from the Middle, then, regards those in the middle not just as a mediating layer that connects the bottom to the top, but as expressing and addressing the heart and soul of leadership. Our interviews across the 10 boards revealed persistent concern about Ontario's children, their learning, and their well-being. Leading from the Middle is not, in this sense, just about incremental adjustments among levels to raise performance or about developing more coherent systems. It is about supporting those who are closest to the work of education so they can collaborate together purposefully, responsibly and transparently to develop strategies that will serve the children they know best.

Conclusion

Leading from the Middle is not self-sustaining. It must be nurtured continuously. It requires a structure of support, resources and direction, as well as an ingrained culture of shared habits and beliefs. With more than $25 million of allocated government funding, ESGA galvanized all 72 boards and their leaders to develop an inclusive strategy for students with special educational needs, that supported other students too, that yielded definitive gains in equity and drew attention from around the world.

The work that has been continued at the instigation of most of the 10 school boards that were involved in the initial review of ESGA has retained and renewed Leadership from the Middle for them. This has been done by developing projects related

to government priorities of math achievement, well-being and equity, then sharing and reviewing these with each other. Throughout there has been consistent collaboration with the Boston College team to reflect on this progress and compare it with similar developments in other parts of the world.

The data we have collected from these 10 boards and from policy leaders – the "eleventh board" as understood by the Consortium members – reveal that the original collaboration among the 72 boards has faded away. This situation contrasts with the Teacher Leadership and Learning Project (TLLP), led by the Ministry and the teacher federations, that receives continuous funding to stimulate activity across and beyond the province. The work with the Consortium and the Boston College team also comes to an end with the conclusion of this report.

Leading from the Middle, as a driver of changes that are closely connected to communities yet coherently related to Ministry policy, is not self-sustaining. In Ontario and elsewhere, the idea that cross-board collaborations can be funded as one-time projects and then sustained after the funding has been withdrawn is erroneous. The challenge for Ontario, like the challenges for its schools, is not to leave Ministry funding streams and assigned roles as they are at the top, then seek additional temporary resources to fund certain cross-board initiatives below.

Instead, Ontario now needs to attend to major questions of restructuring that move elements of funding and responsibility from the center to the boards and other organizations. This should be accompanied by requirements for boards to work collaboratively to achieve excellence and equity together. A system cannot Lead from the Middle occasionally. It must be resourced and organized to Lead from the Middle sustainably. One key part of this is that strengthening the heart and soul of the middle always need a little bit of letting go at the top.

In spite of many positive developments observed by the Boston College team in the course of this study, the reality now is that the strategy of Leading from the Middle that has gained global prominence because of how it developed in Ontario, is in danger of disappearing in the place where it began. If Ontario does not institutionalize its vision and support for Leading from the Middle, it will starve the thing that fed the world. Alternatively, if Ontario can design and develop its resources in ways that advance Leading from the Middle continuously, the benefits could be significant and lasting—not just for the province, but also for the world beyond.

Chapter 8:

Conclusions and Recommendations

We have been fortunate in being able to study the progression of a set of large-scale educational reforms over more than a decade in one the most high-performing and multicultural educational systems in the world. We have undertaken this work in collaboration with educational leaders from one seventh of Ontario's school boards in a shared spirit and according to an explicit methodology of appreciative, critical collaborative inquiry. And we have performed this work at a time when Ontario Ministry policy has been seeking to stretch itself in its efforts to develop all its children as learners and whole human beings for a stronger economy and a better, more diverse and inclusive society.

We have met regularly to design and discuss our findings. We have facilitated discussions and dialogue among the boards about the projects they chose to focus on in order to realize some aspect of the province's commitment to *Achieving Excellence*. We have introduced insights from research and policy directions elsewhere to help the boards see where their own work fits on the global landscape of learning, well-being, identity, professionalism, leadership and change.

We have witnessed at first hand, to differing degrees, how the work of the boards and their projects has been unfolding in their schools and classrooms. We have studied what progress they have shown, what breakthroughs they have made, and what dilemmas and difficulties remain. This is the critical aspect of our shared approach to inquiry.

Towards the end of the project, we shared our rough presentations and then written drafts of our findings with the Consortium of 10 school boards. As the Boston College team, we received feedback from our colleagues in the Consortium on this collaborative work. Much of it was appreciative. Some of it was critical. This final report is the outcome of this kind of inquiry and dialogue that is almost unique in reaching back over a long period of change and reform.

Although the boards are rather representative in demographic and achievement terms of boards across the province, this report is not a representative study of all that these boards are doing in education, still less of all the boards in Ontario. We looked at the projects that board leaders chose to share with us in relation to the Consortium's

concern to continue the work of ESGA in the context of new Ministry directions as expressed in *Achieving Excellence*. They all had previously identified aspects of their work as expressions of "Leading from the Middle." This became the focus of our inquiry.

As a result of the emergent nature of "Leading from the Middle," some boards concentrated their attention on areas like math achievement, second language learning, and their progress with students with learning disabilities. Other boards highlighted their work in student self-regulation, identity-building, or other aspects of well-being. Issues of standardized assessment emerged as a concern in some boards. This theme was less prominent when their focus was on topics such as pedagogical documentation of early learners who were not yet directly affected by the tests.

This report is not an experimental control study that measures the impact of one intervention against another. Nor does it incorporate large-scale surveys of teachers' perceptions of collaboration or assessment, for instance – something we had been able to do with our 2011 study. Instead, like all qualitative work, the main value and purpose has been to provide insight into the system; to burrow under the surface; to highlight issues as they emerge before they come up on the policy radar; to pinpoint where practice seems to be making significant progress across many boards – as in the case of well-being programs and the sophisticated nature of collaborative professionalism, for example; and to pose sobering questions about programs and initiatives at the very moment that educators may be most excited about them. Among these challenging questions are issues like

- whether collaborative inquiry groups in math lack participants who have actual math expertise;
- whether there are tendencies towards cultural bias in how emotional regulation programs promote some emotional ways of being over others;
- if we are at risk of elevating some student identities for attention and inclusion over others; or
- whether and why Leading from the Middle – the very reason for this project – might actually be in retreat.

In this final chapter, we briefly review our key findings and then present recommendations arising from them.

Conclusions

This report is written in a time of major transition in and rapid evolution of Ontario's educational system. We are fortunate in having studied and written about the previous ESGA reform and in having been able to analyze the LfM projects in the 10 CODE Consortium boards more recently. The report's 15 findings are presented below.

1. *Ontario is moving from an Age of Achievement and Effort to a new Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity.* The Consortium boards are continuing their focus on academic achievement that is now balanced with a greater recognition of the needs, interests, identities and well-being of students, along with a deeper and broader view of what constitutes worthwhile learning for these students. Ontario is a global leader of this movement.

2. *Math reform is similar to and also dissimilar from literacy reform*. The province's math achievement has declined in recent years. Its strategy for improving math achievement has drawn on previous experiences with literacy – especially in using coaches, consultants, diagnostic assessments, and early screening. But math has key differences from literacy. Compared to literacy, many elementary teachers lack confidence in mathematics. Relying on colleagues to improve math instruction through collaborative inquiry has, for this reason, not always been effective.

3. *Well-being initiatives are ubiquitous*. Well-being was being addressed almost everywhere we studied – in student mental health committees, curriculum projects focused on indigenous identity, initiatives in emotional self-regulation, talking about or even adopting refugee families, and focusing in Interdisciplinary Teams on "students of mystery" or "students of wonder." Without any specific implementation strategy from the top, educators have taken up and circulated strategies for improving student well-being through professional development workshops, conferences, the Teacher Leadership and Learning Project, and the Consortium.

4. *An integrated and coherent achievement and well-being agenda can be undermined by persistence with the current form of large-scale, standardized assessments*. Reinforcing the qualitative and quantitative findings of the 2011 study, the large-scale assessment known as the EQAO is seen by most educators, at levels of responsibility below board and Ministry leaders, as having negative effects on learning, innovation, and well-being. This was especially evident in the interviews with teachers in the grades that are tested or in grades that immediately precede those that are tested. A 21st century movement in learning and well-being that is embracing a range of innovative practices has out-paced a 20-year old system of large-scale assessments.

5. *Educators are eager for and are making significant advances in sophisticated uses of classroom assessments*. These include adopting various diagnostic assessment tools and undertaking digitally-enhanced pedagogical documentation on iPads. These tools allow teachers to record student learning on digital tablets in real time, and to share what they are recording with their colleagues, parents, and the students themselves. As a consequence, reflections on student learning are far more complex and evidence-informed than they were in the previous *Age of Achievement and Effort*.

6. *Identity is integral to achievement, equity and well-being*. Graphics that have been produced after lengthy public deliberations with students at the provincial level highlight identities as central to well-being. Young people with many identities increasingly see themselves in their schools – in their architecture, curriculum, and leadership.

7. *Identity issues are foundational to well-being but they are also complex*. Identity is integral to all human development. Some identities are receiving greater official attention than others, though. Identities are tending to be acknowledged when they have been minoritized, where they are seen as vulnerable, or where they are part of the province's

constitutional history. This can lead to the inadvertent exclusion of other identities in schools and communities, and the associated risks that occur when groups feel unacknowledged.

8. *Emotional regulation programs are highly valued for enabling children to calm themselves in order to learn.* The work of particular authors and trainers in the fields of self-regulation and mindfulness, including their presence conducting workshops in Ontario, has influenced teachers' adoption of an explicit curriculum of the emotions. Teachers stated that they felt supported by many of these new materials and training programs. These enabled them to calm their students, helped students calm themselves, and sometimes even helped teachers in managing their own emotions. In a time of rising rates of anxiety and depression among young people, the attainment of a state of calm attentiveness is a new and popular goal that has been embraced by educators in many schools.

9. *Programs of self-regulation that are now widespread in schools prioritize some emotional states over others.* In our interviews, we have endeavoured to be alert to what is missing as well as what is present. Interviews revealed little or no attention to emotions like surprise (the basic emotion of creativity) or disgust (the central emotion of racism) in the province's emerging well-being practices. This absence indicates that certain emotions—especially those that are conducive to ease of classroom management—are being given greater prominence in the schools. The preference for calmness has value, of course, but its preclusion of other emotional ways of being could have consequences for students from cultural backgrounds that favour the expression of more intense and passionate forms of emotional engagement in learning.

10. *There are four distinct relationships between well-being and achievement according to Ontario educators.* There is no unity or unanimity among these four meanings in policy or practice, between administrators and teachers, or between curriculum specialists and mental health professionals. This poses risks to an integrated narrative and strategy that could clearly connect well-being with learning and achievement. The four meanings are:
    - Well-being is a crucial prerequisite for achievement.
    - Achievement is essential for well-being; failure leads to ill-being.
    - Well-being complements academic achievement; both matter.
    - Well-being is a valued accomplishment in its own right.

11. *Student well-being is not possible or sustainable without educator well-being.* Teacher well-being can be enhanced by specific initiatives such as mindfulness programs and these were strongly valued by those who used them. But well-being for adults in the workplace also depends on the nature of the work environment in terms of having respected leaders, rewarding professional relationships, and a curriculum and assessment system that teachers believe in.

12. *Collaborative professionalism is both **more** collaborative and **more** professional than in our last study of the 10 boards in 2011.* In the seven years since our previous studied was completed, Ontario education has evolved from a culture of professional collaboration to one of collaborative professionalism. Collaborative professionalism is more sophisticated and challenging than professional collaboration. Collaborative professionalism is about professionals being more collaborative not just in how they perform tasks together but in how they build trusting relationships with one another. Collaborative professionalism is also about collaborating more professionally by using more precise strategies and protocols, giving more candid feedback and engaging in rigorous dialogue together. In the many boards that are incorporating student voice with regard to mathematics learning or student well-being, collaborative professionalism also provides students themselves with opportunities to shape their own learning.

13. *There are two kinds of humility that Ontario educators express in relation to their expertise when they engage in collaborative inquiry.* Genuine humility occurred when senior leaders decided to undertake collaborative inquiry on areas of their practice that they wished to improve. False humility arose when consultants set aside their own claims to expertise so as not to offend those they were meant to be helping. Teachers do not always want consultants to say they are not really the expert. Sometimes, they prefer direct instruction and specific advice where it can be useful, rather than being expected to explore innovations and improvements without access to genuine expertise.

14. *Leading from the Middle is a powerful new strategy for change in complex systems that possess strong commitments to local communities.* It promotes deep learning that has meaning and purpose that goes beyond the individual learner and his or her immediate needs. It enables students to become highly knowledgeable and skilled change agents in society. LfM is a not a level or a tier to help the work at the top get done. It is a driving force for educational and societal improvement in its own right.

15. *Leading from the Middle cannot spread or be sustained without continuing vision, support, and funding from the top.* Leading from the Middle cannot prosper and exert its impact in the long term if it is conceived as an initiative or a project with temporary, start-up funding and the hope that what has been started will eventually persist. It won't. The simple fact is that after the end of Ministry funding, Leading from the Middle in the original sense of ESGA across all 72 boards ceased to exist. The same fate will likely befall the work of the Consortium that has been at the heart of this collaborative action research and the resulting report. Leading from the Middle cannot become a self-sustaining culture without rethinking traditional funding structures.

Recommendations

The world can learn a lot from Ontario as it moves from an *Age of Achievement and Effort* into an *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity*. At the same time, Ontario can also learn more about its own approach to change, and how it can improve further.

Recommendations from Ontario

Policy makers from many countries and US states travel to Ontario to learn about its educational accomplishments and to see if there are elements that can be adapted back home. Ontario has been a model of considerable success in education for a long time, yet its strategies continue to evolve. It is essential that other interested systems keep up to date with these developments, so that any policies or strategies that they adopt are accurately aligned with the current reasons for the province's success.

Ontario's educational goals, as set out in *Achieving Excellence* in 2014, and as we have studied their implementation across the Consortium boards, have at least four implications for other systems.

1. Improve achievement through deeper learning.

In the quest to improve mathematics achievement, boards did not try to engineer quick gains with students in the grades that are currently tested. Instead, they built a balanced approach to mathematics teaching and learning, beginning with the foundations of basic number sense in young children. The boards also piloted innovative curricular projects that led their students into real world problems and their potential solutions. Many of these involved the same kinds of problem-solving skills that are required in a complex and rapidly changing global economy.[255]

2. Spread well-being without top-down implementation.

Deliberate attention to student well-being has captured the imagination of educators across the province. It has spread by

- Inspiring educators with a framework that puts spirit at the heart of well-being;
- Injecting professional development approaches and curriculum guides for emotional regulation and mindfulness into the system;
- Stimulating innovation through the province's Teacher Leadership and Learning Project and other means;
- Providing Ministry and school board documents to guide teaching and change;
- Gaining the support and advocacy of Ontario thought leaders; and
- Networking strategies across schools and boards, including through the Consortium.

3. Build collaborative professionalism.

Ontario has shown not just how to help educators to work in teams with meaning and purpose, but also how to keep on improving so that a new culture of collaborative professionalism is becoming widespread and embedded in its schools and boards. The province is recognizing the importance of trusting professional relationships as a foundation for structured collaborative inquiry into the best ways to support teaching and learning. For others who are striving to build strong professional capital amongst their educators, Ontario is a positive and practical point of reference.

4. Use Leadership from the Middle as a Driver of Change.

LfM is not about joining up the dots of other people's improvements. It is about leaders who are close to the work of schools in different communities assuming shared responsibility for initiating and implementing needed changes themselves that will help all students in their systems to thrive.

Recommendations for Ontario

One of the strengths of Ontario is that it rarely rests on its laurels and is constantly searching for ways to improve. Drawing on what we have learned from the 10 boards in the Consortium, we close with seven recommendations for further educational improvement within the province.

1. Make the well-being strategy more coherent and connected.

The province has been successful in stimulating attention to and practical action in the improvement of student well-being across the whole system. We identified at least nine programs of emotional self-regulation across the province, for instance, that have not yet been assessed for their relative impact and effectiveness. What are the relative strengths of each program or approach? What is the evidence-base behind them? Has the time come when the province can make prudent and evidence-informed decisions about which programs are worthy of the strongest investment? These questions can be answered in a number of ways – through commissioned reviews of the international research literature; experimental-control studies that compare the impact of one program against another; or collaborative inquiry about the innovations and interventions that will be most effective for the communities they serve. One more way is to re-invent a system of cross-board collaboration – Leading from the Middle – where boards share their strategies and results, give focused feedback on each others' practice, and where each takes the lead in areas where they are further ahead than their peers.

2. Monitor well-being programs for the existence of unconscious cultural bias.

This process can be built into guidelines for collaborative inquiry teams or in the specifications for program evaluations and program reviews. Is calmness a universal and culture-free emotional virtue, or does it sometimes gain prominence because it enhances teachers' capacity to manage a traditional classroom more effectively? Sadness is sometimes appropriate, when grieving over a loss, for example. Children needn't be hurried into "bouncing back" too quickly. Anger at injustice has been a virtue of some of the world's most inspirational leaders. Raucous expression befits some cultures and circumstances more than others. Do well-being programs embrace, acknowledge and investigate a sufficiently broad span of emotions? Is the learning environment designed to accommodate children's varied emotional ways of being, as when learning outdoors in nature encourages children to be loud and joyous? Or do we too often encourage children to become calm so they can adapt their emotions to the given learning environment? Bias is rarely intentional or deliberately prejudicial, but is ingrained into our assumptions. So, it is important to develop some protocols and criteria to enable educators to inspect their biases about the kinds of well-being that they favour.

3. Be critically inclusive of all students' identities.

With the launch of Achieving Excellence in 2014, Ontario rightly regarded identity as a big part of educational equity and well-being. If children

cannot see themselves reflected in the curriculum and the school, they struggle to succeed in it. If their identities make them targets of exclusion, their academic achievement and overall well-being will suffer. It is right that educators should be especially alert to identities that have been stigmatized and that have made children vulnerable to bullying and exclusion. But it is important not just to expand the list of overlooked identities. It is essential to be courageous and to be critical of some identities when they are exclusionary towards others and work against the kinds of free and open dialogue that are the life blood of democratic societies. It is in the interests of everyone not to ignore the identities of those whose real-life struggles may not be as visible or palpable as others. We must understand and advocate for those who are different from us, as well as those who are the same. And, in our classrooms as well as in our leadership narratives, we must also help people strive for some sense of common identity and shared connection that is greater than each of us, and that transcends us all. Without this, there is no sense of common purpose or dedication to the public good.

4. Strengthen public confidence by making the relationships between learning and well-being publicly and professionally explicit.

People have different theories about the causal connections between well-being and achievement. Some think that achievement is the essential prerequisite for well-being; others believe the opposite. There is research support for each point of view. This report has drawn attention to the existence of at least four different theories of the relationship between well-being on the one hand, and learning or achievement on the other. Leaders of all kinds need to articulate clear narratives with compelling examples of the interrelationships between the two. Professional development and collaborative inquiry exercises can also help educators to identify which implicit theory they most subscribe to and then facilitate engagement of these perspectives in dialogue with each other.

5. Reclaim the collegial value of professional expertise.

Collaborative inquiry should never be a solution that goes in search of problems. Sometimes, in relation to how to use a new digital app, for example, teachers may appreciate direct instruction from people who already know what to do. Collaborative inquiry groups need to include people with the appropriate expertise for the task in hand – ensuring that groups striving to improve mathematics achievement, for example, involve someone who has relevant mathematics expertise. In the interests of collegial equity, coaches and consultants can sometimes be inclined to downplay their own expertise, but this should not be taken too far. Genuine humility is about acknowledging the expertise that defines teachers as professionals, while also admitting areas where that expertise is not sufficient for the issue under review.

6. Review large-scale assessment instruments and practices.

In the twenty years since Ontario's large-scale assessment, EQAO, was first established, there have been profound transformations in many areas of education. Given our advances in research, developments in classroom assessments such as pedagogical documentation, and the evidence of this study and its predecessor, it is time for the province's large-scale assessment system to catch up. Our interviews have revealed that the closer to the classroom the roles of educators get, the more that the holders of those roles see detrimental

effects of large scale testing, not just on well-being, but on learning and innovation too. We welcome the current provincial review of assessment and express the hope that, based on international experience with other systems and recent developments in assessment, positive solutions will be found.

7. Make Leading from the Middle structurally and systemically sustainable.

Leading from the Middle, we have found, is not self-sustaining. It does not continue once project funds have ceased and attention has shifted elsewhere. Here and there, it may survive through personal relationships that were established when there was a deliberate cross-board focus, but otherwise, it is an evanescent innovation. Leading from the Middle can be assured by assigning responsibility to CODE with associated redirected budget support from other priorities, to drive particular areas of focus such as technology, or well-being, or mathematics achievement, for instance. Competitive funding criteria on Requests for Proposals could require plans for cross-board collaboration. Regional collaborations amongst boards can be established, like in Scotland, where boards take collective responsibility for each other's improvement and different boards lead in areas of their own particular strength. Last, accountability and progress measures can be applied to regions where boards take collective responsibility for results. Leading from the Middle needs to be supported by an inspiring vision at the top, and a structure of funding, support and accountability that will ensure its persistence over time. Eventually, Leading from the Middle may become a systemic habit, but in the midterm it will need deliberate structural design to ensure that it has a chance to take root.

The Last Word

The Canadian media guru, Marshall McLuhan, wrote that "our 'Age of Anxiety' is, in great part, the result of trying to do today's job – with yesterday's concepts."[256]

In education, in the *Age of Learning, Identity and Well-being*, today's job is about ensuring that *learning* triumphs over ignorance, that what is true will prevail over what is fake, and that deep understanding will surpass shallow memorization. Today's job in a diverse and rapidly changing society is about building secure senses of dignity and *identity* in young people. Educators should endeavour to ensure that the holders of these identities reach out to and engage with the holders of other identities. All identities also need to be dedicated to common cause in the service of a greater public good. Today's job is also about developing the whole person and their overall *well-being* so they will become physically healthy, emotionally strong, and spiritually fulfilled.

McLuhan was right in recognizing that these bold educational goals cannot be achieved with yesterday's tools. They cannot be achieved with measurement tools that inhibit innovation and exacerbate anxiety. They cannot be achieved with the tools of professional politeness that allow for sharing among colleagues but discourage honest feedback and demanding dialogue. And they cannot be achieved with the administrative tools of top-down reform that are more suited to ensuring compliance with other people's changes rather than commitment to leading change together.

Ontario's educators are eagerly pursuing the *Achieving Excellence* agenda. Not one of the

educators we interviewed spoke against it. Educators are redesigning the mathematics curriculum from the very first years of schooling. They have introduced numerous programs of emotional self-regulation alongside other changes to promote student well-being. They have also started to redress the grievances of students and their families whose identities have been ignored and oppressed by as well as excluded from the educational system. Ontario educators want their students to thrive and flourish with lives of meaning and purpose dedicated to the greater public good.

At the same time, many of the educators we interviewed were critical about what they viewed as an anachronistic accountability system. Throughout the 10 boards that have participated in the Consortium, they wanted to do today's job of educating young people well, but not with the assessment tools of yesterday.

Even in the absence of funding from the top, the 10 boards in the Consortium wanted to continue Leading from the Middle, as they had in the province-wide reform of ESGA. They prepared meetings, studied readings, hosted visitors, traveled over long distances, and engaged in critical dialogue and shared professional learning with each other and also with the Boston College team. They really did continue to Lead from the Middle. In the absence of funding and without an external stimulus, will they continue to do so in the future?

We live in a time in which many of the world's public school systems are being dismantled. National funding is being reduced or withdrawn. Local school districts are being weakened or eliminated altogether as market-driven options of individual school competition take their place. In the face of declining support, many educators have turned to Leading in the Middle as a way to fill in the gaps or join up the dots of top-down implementation and independent, bottom-up initiatives. But what is being lost elsewhere is commitment and connection to the unique diversity of each community as well as overall commitment, across communities, to education for a common good.

The educators we interviewed in Ontario want more than just smarter systems, higher performance, and more coherence. They want strong and inclusive communities. They aspire towards education for meaning and purpose, in a morally just and economically dynamic society.

For these educators, the ideas expressed in Leading from the Middle have started to offer a powerful new change strategy. Leading from the Middle offers them the determination to spread good ideas around rapidly and effectively, the willingness to scrutinize what is going well and what is not in an atmosphere of full transparency, and the overall aspiration for a new and better kind of collaborative professionalism. For these reasons, Leading from the Middle has started to capture the imagination of educators around the world. What began as just one component of the ESGA reform has blossomed into a movement that is being taken up in places as diverse and disparate as New Zealand, Scotland, and Singapore.

Ontario has an opportunity to lead this new movement. It is the birthplace of Leading from the Middle. Leading from the Middle is integral if we want to achieve today's bold goals with the collaborative tools of today's profession. For the sake of the world as well as itself, Ontario must not now abandon the child it has created. With others, it must now Lead from the Middle, both for itself and for the rest of the world.

Appendix A:

The 10 CODE Consortium Boards

Board	Board Name	Sector	No. of Schools	No. Elementary	No. Secondary	Student Population
1	Dufferin-Peel	Catholic	150	124	26	81,000
2	Eastern Ontario	Catholic	42	31	11	12,900
3	Greater Essex	Public	71	56	15	35,000
4	Halton	Catholic	54	45	9	30,000
5	Hamilton-Wentworth	Public	104	89	15	49,500
6	Keewatin Patricia	Public	23	17	6	5,200
7	Lambton-Kent	Public	64	52	12	21,000
8	Peterborough	Catholic	36	30	6	15,000
9	Viamonde	Francophone	39	35	14	11,400
10	York	Public	110	77	33	124,000

Figure 20: Details of Participating School Boards

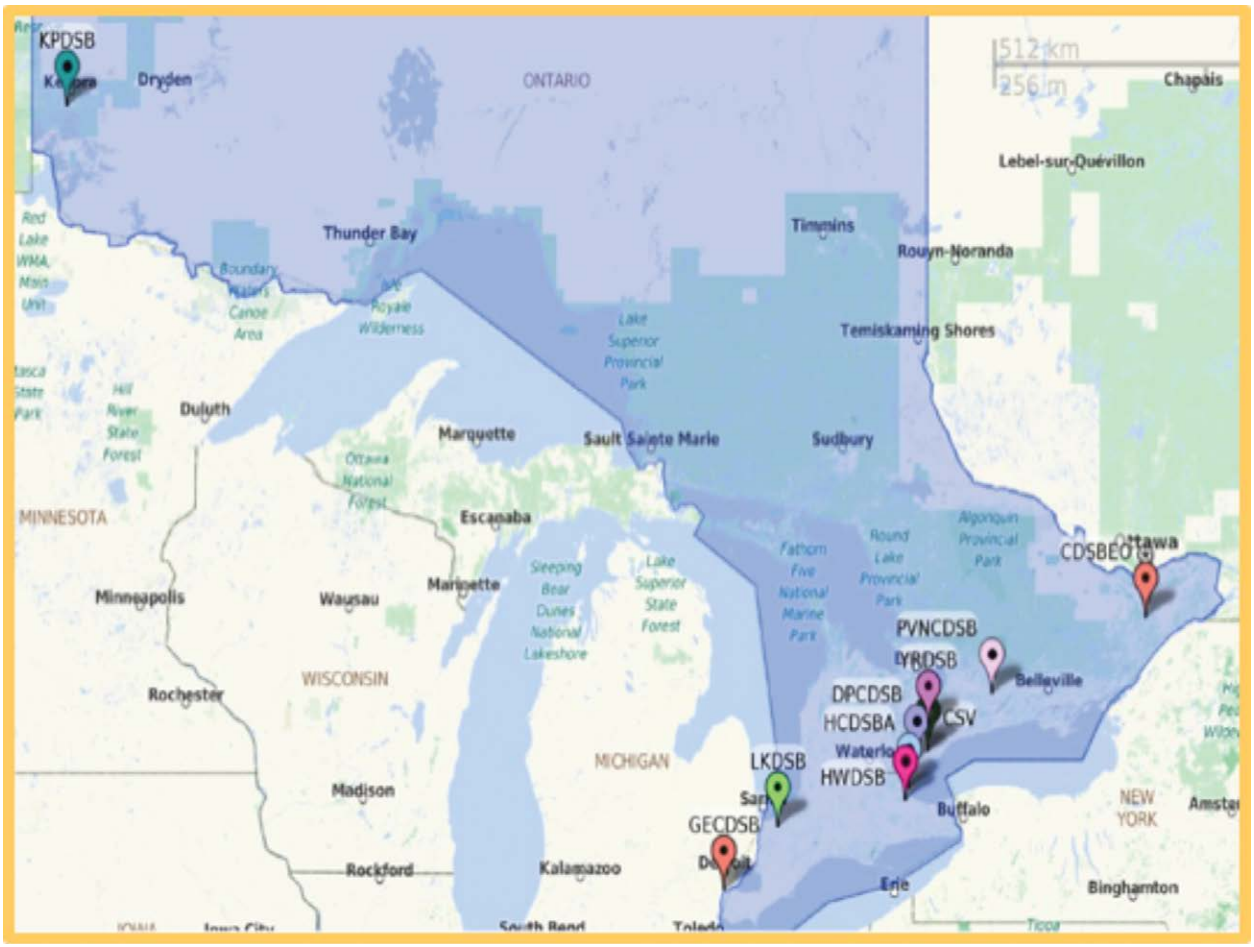

Figure 21: Locations of the Boards

Appendix B:

The Interview Protocol

CODE CONSORTIUM FOR SYSTEM LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE PROJECT – Interview Protocol

1. **Describe your Leading from the Middle (LfM) project. What are the overarching goals of the project? How do they connect to LfM (and/or) the pillars of *Achieving Excellence document (Identity, well-being, engagement, and achievement)?***
   A. Who are the leaders of the project? To what extent have they clearly articulated and garnered support for the project. or How effective have the leaders been in articulating and garnering support for the project.
   B. Do the "on the ground" staff see the project as coherent with other system priorities? What is their level of engagement?

2. **How does the project promote identity, well-being, engagement, and/or achievement in both students and teachers?**
   A. Identity
      a. What parts of your personal or cultural identity are most important to you? Why?
      b. How do these affect you in your work?
         i. How does your identity impact the vision you have for your school or district, the way you teach or lead, and what you hope to accomplish?
      c. Can you tell a story about how your school or you personally acknowledge or celebrate the identities of students as individuals and groups?
      d. Can you tell a story about a student whose identity issues were or still are a problem for them, and how your school or district has attempted to address those?
      e. How might your school/board improve in terms of addressing issues of identity?
   B. Well-being
      a. How do you feel identity connects to well-being at your school/board?
      b. What is your understanding of the ministry's strategy to improve well-being? What are your thoughts on the ministry's approach to well-being?

c. What impact have you seen in regards to:
    i. Teacher sense of self and belonging?
    ii. Student sense of self and belonging?
    iii. Teacher sense of student?
    iv. Student sense of teacher?
    v. Mental and physical health?
d. How might your school/board improve in terms of addressing issues of well-being?

C. Engagement
a. How does your school/board define engagement? How do you know when you're seeing it?
b. How do you feel identity and well-being impacts engagement?
c. Is your project engaging for everyone? Please explain.
d. Are teachers and students provided with rich learning experiences? Please explain or give an example.

D. Achievement
a. What are your thoughts on the Ministry's approach to student achievement?
b. What impact has your project had on student and teacher achievement? Please provide examples and evidence.

3. How are school boards leading from the middle together to strengthen achievement, engagement, identity, and/or well-being for all students and their teachers?

A. Is there anything that you've done or started together related to this work?
B. What initiatives have you taken together for improvement?
C. How are you responding to local needs and diversity?
D. How are you taking collective responsibility for all students' and each other's success?
E. How are you exercising initiative rather than simply implementing other's initiatives?
F. How are you integrating your own efforts with broader system priorities?
G. How do you establish transparency of participation and results?
H. How are you exercising humility and openness?

4. How will the system use the results of the project for future planning, decision making and influencing?

A. Would you describe the project as successful? Did it achieve its intended goals? Please explain.
B. Is there a plan for sustainability/up-scaling?
C. How might the outcomes of your project have an impact beyond the district, e.g., other members of the Consortium, regional colleagues, and/or provincial policies?

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