



ONTARIO
The Institute for Education Leadership
L'Institut de leadership en éducation



Leading Safe and
Accepting Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leading Safe and Accepting Schools Project

2014 Survey Results and Views from the Field

March 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)

The IEL brings together representatives from Ontario's Principals' Associations, the Supervisory Officers' Associations, Councils of Directors of Education, the Council of Senior Business Officials and the Ministry of Education in a unique collaborative partnership. It advances and advocates for tri-level leadership (school, district and system). The Institute explores leading edge thinking on education leadership and applies that expertise to develop high-quality resources and learning opportunities for school and system leaders.

The Leading Safe and Accepting Schools' (LSAS) Project

The survey results and views from the field outlined in this executive summary are a component of the second phase of a multi-phase Leading Safe and Accepting Schools' project being led by the Institute for Education Leadership (IEL).

The goal of the second phase was to elicit views from school and system leaders across Ontario School Board Districts to understand the progress of implementation of safe and accepting schools' initiatives and to determine leaders' ongoing needs.

As part of the first phase of the LSAS project, the IEL's Leading Safe and Accepting Schools section of the website includes "A Comprehensive Toolkit for Safe, Inclusive and Accepting Schools: Strategies from the Thames Valley District School Board" which was launched in 2012.

THIS REPORT

The report is divided into two distinct parts:

Part I: Leading Safe and Accepting Schools Survey Results

Part II: Views from the Field - Interviews with Diverse Safe and Accepting Schools' Stakeholders

Part I - The Survey - Building on Experience

At the outset of the second phase of the IEL Leading Safe and Accepting Schools' Project, the Project Advisory Group, composed of Safe and Accepting Schools' Leads from across Ontario, provided input that formed the basis of the survey. The information gathered was used to develop the thirty-three survey questions in the survey. The survey results are intended to lead to a better understanding of school and system leaders'

challenges and achievements experienced in implementing, aligning, evaluating, and sustaining a safe and accepting schools' approach in districts and schools. Specifically, the themes of the questions focused on:

1. Leading Safe and Accepting Schools' section of the IEL website www.education-leadership-ontario.ca;
2. programs and practices that districts are using to support the implementation of safe and accepting schools;
3. obstacles and challenges that districts have faced; and
4. resources and strategies required to support capacity building and implementation.

The online survey was made available to all 72 districts' Safe and Accepting Schools Leads who were encouraged to involve their Safe and Accepting Schools team in the survey completion. The survey took about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected beginning with demographic questions. The survey included closed-ended questions such as rank ordering, agreement and frequency scales, along with open-ended items.

The Results - A Snapshot

The survey results are a snapshot of school and system leaders' perceptions in Ontario in the fall of 2014.

Who responded?

- 65 percent or 47 of the 72 school districts across Ontario completed the online survey in the Fall of 2014.
- 12 Francophone and 35 Anglophone districts completed the survey representing a 100 percent and 58 percent completion rate respectively.
- An individual rather than a team of respondents completed approximately 75 percent of the surveys; 33 surveys were completed by a member of the senior administrative team.

What School and System Leaders are saying about the LSAS website:

- Many of the respondents were unaware of the website, possibly reflecting the soft launch approach and limited communication and marketing of the site.
- Respondents indicated limited website use, but reported moderate satisfaction with the content of the website.
- Identified improvements to the website include: a more aesthetically appealing homepage to entice viewing, a

more concise menu, and a reduction in the number of clicks needed to access resources.

Building and sustaining positive school climates – what school and system leaders reported:

- 70 percent of districts reported being in partial (12 districts) to full implementation (11 districts).
- Results show that there is a need for more support for implementing the safe and accepting schools' strategies as only 9 school districts have reached sustainability.

Factors Cited as Important to Implementation and Sustainability

- 1. Strong Communication** – communicate within the school, the district and beyond with stakeholders and partners, build awareness, share information and successful strategies.
- 2. Partnerships** – work with external agencies and community partners, engage in consultations with stakeholders in all steps of the process from vision and planning to implementation.
- 3. Strategic Alignment** – develop a consistent approach across the district and system level with a clear framework for changing practices and ensuring alignment of mental health/wellness and equity/inclusive education initiatives.
- 4. Whole School Approach** – develop respectful and caring relationships and inclusivity among all members of the school community and work toward a common vision integrating the approach across school culture.
- 5. Cohesive Team** – develop a team comprised of representatives from all policy areas, stakeholder groups; work collaboratively on a plan for implementation.
- 6. Evidence-based Research** - create and implement effective practices and develop innovative material.
- 7. Vision** – develop a clear framework of goals and outcomes; positive school climates should stem from a need established by the school; create a team vision supported by senior administration, and a school champion; articulate the congruence to staff; provide time, and support to embrace change rooted in a common vision.
- 8. Systemic Approach** - develop a global system across the entire district; evenly and systematically distributing resources and information across the district.

Reported Barriers to Implementation and Sustainability

- 1. Resources and Time**
 - a. Difficult and expensive to release staff, few resources in place for teacher professional development, time needed

- a. for knowledge, collaboration and in-servicing.
- b. Lack of adequate personnel to deliver the resources, lack of leadership and few system leaders who are eager to take charge of projects; difficult to scale up.
- c. Too many ministry initiatives at the same time for principals who have a heavy administrative load.

2. Strategic Alignment

- a. Develop a system that is consistent across all schools.
- b. Support collaboration and communication
 - information is not always communicated quickly enough between members of the districts and the Safe Schools team, difficult to engage all members.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

- a. Over half the districts report limited to intermediate capacity in their ability to analyze data.
- b. Barriers include properly trained personnel, effective and concise measurement tools, and adequate time and resources to survey broadly.
- c. Software for data processing as well as personnel with a background in data analysis and interpretation were cited as supports in aiding in data capacity.

For details about the programs districts report using and capacity building challenges and supports refer to Part 1 of the report. See pages 17 and 26 respectively.

PART II - VIEWS FROM THE FIELD

In addition to information received through the survey, the LSAS Project Lead and Coordinator met with Safe and Accepting Schools' stakeholders in 2014. The stakeholder groups included representatives from the Ministry of Education, policy advisors and academics from a wide range of community organizations, which had links to the school districts.

The key themes identified by these stakeholders as important in the Safe and Accepting Schools' policy implementation process included:

1. inter-organizational and interpersonal relationships;
2. support for initiatives;
3. unique student needs;
4. an aligned vision;
5. positive school climate; and
6. effective communication.

The above themes are closely aligned with the survey responses cited by school and system leaders as important to implementation and sustainability, with unique student needs emerging as an additional theme.

CONCLUSIONS

A Snapshot

The survey is a snapshot of Ontario school and system leaders' perceptions of progress, best practices and challenges to implementing safe and accepting schools' initiatives in their districts.

Commitment and Experience

The high survey completion rate and trends reflected in the qualitative data demonstrate school and system leaders' strong commitment, expertise and extensive experience in building and maintaining positive school climates at the school and district levels across Ontario.

Capacity Building Priorities

Survey findings and the information gathered during discussions with stakeholders point to a number of priorities for capacity building. Themes that emerged include support for:

1. strategic alignment of related safe and accepting schools initiatives at the district and system levels;
2. strategic planning, setting priorities, and aligning resources with the flexibility to make local choices; and
3. data collection and analysis for decision making and improving practice.

Few respondents were aware of the LSAS website which likely reflects the use of a soft launch approach that was accompanied by limited website marketing.

- Survey results will inform the next step LSAS website enhancements to make it more appealing and increase its practical value for those who access it.

Next Steps

The IEL will continue to collaborate with school and system leaders with a focus on addressing challenges faced by schools and districts, support capacity building, and ongoing sharing of evidence-based and promising practices across the province.

Next steps include:

1. an Ontario LSAS Bilingual Summit for school and system leaders in the Fall of 2015. The summit conference will be developed by school and system leaders and build on the capacity building areas identified in the LSAS survey results;
2. a Leaders' Learning Network that will be launched as part of the summit to allow ongoing discussion and networking, thus leading to a sustainable process for progress in the area of safe and accepting schools and continued development of positive climates for student achievement and well-being; and
3. an Enhanced LSAS website that supports leaders' access to relevant and current resources, supporting the sharing of evidence-based and promising practices, upcoming events and ongoing networking.