

What Is the Ontario Leadership Strategy?

Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education, 2008 identified school leadership as a key supporting condition for achieving the province's core education priorities: high levels of student achievement, reduced gaps in student achievement, and increased public confidence in publicly funded education. To strengthen school leadership in Ontario, the Ministry of Education reviewed the research and consulted with education partners to create the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS). The OLS is a comprehensive plan of action designed to support student achievement and well-being through a coordinated and strategic approach to leadership development.

If we see an increase in the best practices and our case studies show that the practices work and student achievement is increasing over the long haul, time and again, then we can be confident about the difference that leadership practice is making. Leadership has made the difference in Ontario – it's undeniable – we can trace it, feel it, see it.

Michael Fullan at the Ontario Leadership Congress, April 2012

What Is the Theory of Action for the OLS?

The OLS holds that significant progress towards meeting the province's core education priorities can be accomplished by:

- supporting districts in developing, implementing, and measuring the impact of their leadership development strategies;
- inviting and facilitating the influence of partners to advance the goals of the OLS; and
- championing the development of initiatives that will enhance the coherence of leaders' work across the province.

The Goals of the OLS

- Attract the right people to leadership roles.
- Develop personal leadership resources in individuals and promote effective leadership practices in order to have the greatest possible impact on student achievement and well-being.
- Develop leadership capacity and coherence in organizations to strengthen their ability to deliver on education priorities.

What Are the Key Components of the OLS?

- Board Leadership Development Strategy, which focuses on four key areas:
 - recruiting and selecting leaders through structured and innovative succession planning;
 - placing and transferring leaders in ways that sustain school and system improvement;
 - developing leaders through mentoring, performance appraisal, and differentiated learning opportunities that meet the needs of leaders in diverse contexts and at various stages of their careers;
 - coordinating support for leaders to buffer them from distractions, make information easily accessible, and assist them in building coherence across different initiatives
- Supports for system leaders
 - incorporates mentoring for system leaders, executive leadership programs, and orientation for newly appointed system leaders
- Ontario Leadership Congress
- Minister's Principal Reference Group
- Supervisory Officer Performance Appraisal (SOPA) pilot project
- Institute for Education Leadership
- Leadership publications
- Leading Student Achievement (in partnership with the Student Achievement Division)

Achievements to Date (2008-13)

- The **Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)** was revised in 2012 to reflect the latest research on the personal leadership resources and leadership practices that impact student achievement and well-being through effective leadership by individuals and organizations.
- **Board Leadership Development Strategies (BLDS)** have moved from developing infrastructure to measuring impact. Sixty-five of 66 districts that reported in 2012-13 said that "using the BLDS Impact Assessment and Planning Tool has influenced their setting of goals and selection of strategies", and 61 of these 66 districts indicated that "progress was made in building coherence between BLDS and BIPSA [the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement] in 2012-13".

- **Succession planning and talent development** have been recognized by districts as important responsibilities; funding and resources have been prioritized to support work in these areas.
- **Mentoring**, in 2012–13, reached over 700 newly appointed principals and over 900 vice-principals who benefited from the support of a trained mentor.
- **Principal/vice-principal performance appraisal**, which is focused on goals that promote student achievement and well-being, has been implemented province-wide, and a **supervisory officer performance appraisal** model has been piloted.
- **Terms and conditions of employment of principals and vice-principals** (particularly those resulting from the provisions in the Putting Students First Act) have been agreed at a joint discussion of principals’ associations, board representatives, and the ministry. Policy/ Program Memorandum 152, “Terms and Conditions of Employment of Principals and Vice-Principals”, remains in effect to guide local discussions of other terms and conditions.
- **Supports for system leaders** ensured that in 2012–13, over 90 newly appointed supervisory officers and directors of education had access to a trained mentor or coach through the support of their professional associations. System leaders also have access to executive leadership programs; more than 250 leaders have participated in such programs to date.
- **Leading Student Achievement** created a large network of principals focused on improving instructional leadership, reaching 2200 school and system leaders over the past eight years.
- The **Principal Congress**, held in 2009, 2010, and 2011, engaged 600 school leaders in sharing practices that supported closing achievement gaps. A handbook, *Closing the Achievement Gap: Advice from Expert Ontario Principals*, was developed and shared across the province to put these practices into the hands of all principals.
- The **Ontario Leadership Congress**, held in 2012 and 2013, engaged leadership teams from districts, school authorities, and provincial schools in discussions about building leadership that fosters a positive school climate and improves student achievement and well-being. Congress 2013 provided the first opportunity for teacher leaders to participate.
- **Leadership publications** – *Ideas into Action* (10 issues to date), *In Conversation* (10 issues to date), and *Principals Want to Know* (21 issues to date) – have engaged leaders on topical issues and shared research insights and practical strategies.
- The **Minister’s Principal Reference Group** (73 principals and vice-principals in 56 districts over the past seven years) has provided invaluable advice on numerous policy and program areas that contributed to successful implementation; this group continues to meet at least three times a year.
- The **Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)** has commissioned research on succession planning, district effectiveness, transitions to leadership, and the role of the district leader. As well, it continues to sponsor the annual orientation for new supervisory officers and promote leadership development across the province, especially with regard to the application of the OLF and the sharing of resources to support leading a whole-school approach to safe and accepting schools.

What’s Next?

- Reviewing the broad **spectrum of leadership learning** opportunities currently offered for leaders at all levels with an eye to determining gaps and strengthening supports
- Reviewing findings from the **Supervisory Officer Performance Appraisal (SOPA) pilot** to inform next steps
- Releasing Dr. Kenneth Leithwood’s research paper **Strong Districts and Their Leadership** (2013) to the field through the IEL and the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)
- **Revising the OLF** to reflect the findings in this paper

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

- The Ministry of Education’s Leadership Development website, at www.ontario.ca/eduleadership
- Ontario’s Institute for Education Leadership, at www.education-leadership-ontario.ca
- Your regional office
- The ministry’s Leadership Development Branch, at 416-325-2623