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LEARNING-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES

OTTAWA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

How can the leadership team foster a learning-oriented organizational improvement process for 4200 employees spread out over 84 sites that impacts student achievement?

IDENTIFICATION

Initial discussions at executive council (academic superintendents, business superintendents, Associate Director and Director of Education) identified a need to scale our existing networks if we hoped to impact system change. EQAO data and quantitative indicator data combined with qualitative data signaled a need for strategic action to impact system change.

INITIAL CONDITIONS

The Board Priorities had been established centrally for many years. The Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement (BIPSA) was being created by an expanding central team, and School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement (SIPSA) were created by school principals and small school-based student success teams. These key areas that had the ability to help the Board staff focus its strategies were loosely coupled and appeared to be add-ons to the existing good work in the District.

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

The Board Priorities are precise and targeted. The three (3) key priorities of: Success for Students, Success for Staff, and Stewardship of Resources, became the key framework at all major retreats and strategic planning sessions. The Board priorities are now reviewed on an annual basis during the Trustee Retreat, during the Senior Executive Team retreat, by our Catholic School Parent's Association and by all Principals, Managers and Coordinators during a larger Catholic Learning Leaders meeting (CLL). Google Docs was the tool used to allow for collaboration and input. Each review ensures that budget, time, and strategies are aligned.

SCHOOL INNOVATION PLAN FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND WELL-BEING (SIPSAW)

Rebranded as School Innovation Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being, SIPSAW's are now dynamically created and reflect the Catholic Professional Learning Cycle (Plan/Envision – Act/Sow – Observe & Gather/Nurture – Reflect/Discern). Schools receive central release time to work on their plans. School teams are brought together in clusters to share and exchange strategies used in their plans. School teams analyze school data to determine challenges of practice that are identified as the school focus of learning for the following school year. Professional Development days include time allocated to monitoring

and modifying the (SIPSAW) to ensure that the plan is a living document. The plan is created in Google Docs and shared centrally and accessible to each family of school superintendent. Family of school superintendents monitor the progress of each challenge of practice during school visits. Tools such as Google Hangouts allow for networking and collaborating across the district without the need for mandatory face to face meetings. Student Success staff engage in a “SIPSAW Sort” where they go through all 84 plans and group them by common focus. This creates a natural network of schools that can work collaboratively and share practices. The SIPSAW Sort is also used to inform the Board Innovation Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being (BIPSAW).

BOARD INNOVATION PLAN FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND WELL-BEING (BIPSAW)

The Board Innovation Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being is divided into four main pillars. A superintendent is assigned to lead each of the pillars. An interdepartmental team is created to ensure that each of the pillars reflects major ministry initiatives and reflects the information gathered from the SIPSAW sorts. Time for common meetings is scheduled a year in advance to ensure that priority is given to monitoring and modifying the Board Innovation Plan. A researcher is assigned to each of the four pillars of the BIPSAW to ensure that evidence-informed decision-making is leading to action. The Board Innovation plan is also created in Google Docs to allow for continuous input and modification. The BIPSAW is reviewed by all principals, managers and coordinators and is presented to Trustees at Board meetings and during a Trustee retreat for further modifications. This cyclical process creates the necessary accountability to ensure that the plans are no longer binders on shelves that are only looked at once a year.

LEARNING NETWORKS

School Innovation Plans, the Board Innovation Plan and the Board priorities are key to the success of each of our learning networks. Principals meet with their family of school superintendent at pre-scheduled times during the year to focus on research-based practice that is reflected in their School Innovation Plans. In addition to the family of school network, each Principals are encouraged to participate in a smaller cluster of schools that are often based on the outcome of the SIPSAW sort and/or based on like neighborhood clusters where they can focus on similar aspects of their School Innovation Plans. Technology is used to facilitate the sharing of evidence and school staff is provided with release time to meet as clusters of schools or networks.

TURNING POINTS

A significant turning point in the success of our structure involved scheduling team BIPSAW meetings one year in advance. This simple step took away many of the competing schedule conflicts that existed in previous years. Scheduled time to monitor SIPSAWs during school visits and during PD days has helped to create a dynamic review process and provides time for reflection. Providing time at family of school principal meetings allowed principals an opportunity to modify and review their plans with a trusted critical colleague who was focused on a similar goal. Providing staff with a tool such as Google Docs, allowed for more collaboration and helped to keep the school improvement plans dynamic. Keeping the same three (3) targeted Board priorities has allowed all employees across the organization to see their important role in a learning organization.

LEARNING ORGANIZATION

The structures that have been put in place have allowed our Board to transition from a system that was focused on a performance stance to a system that is now focused on a learning stance. Evidence includes the increased number of staff participating in learning networks, the evidence gathered during student success visits and the district support process, and our overall EQAO data and student success indicator data. A common measurement tool has been implemented to review the effectiveness of each learning network. The creation of a central coherence committee has helped provide an interdepartmental approach to supporting staff and students with a common, agreed-upon language that focuses on deep learning.

FINAL POINTS

A culture of learning requires a commitment of all employees regardless of their role in the system. Providing leadership opportunities in all areas of the Board will result in distributed leadership and validation of the ability to lead without a title. Staff that are fortunate to serve in a formal leadership position need to create the structures to allow others to share their talents and ideas. Technology can help to provide tools to improve collaboration if a trusting environment has been fostered. Innovation and change can flourish in a learning culture where all staff see their role in the overall success of students.