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*Ontario Leaders Collaborating for
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Ontario Catholic Supervisory
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Ontario Principals' Council

Ontario Public Supervisory
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Module Description

Improvement processes at the district level typically begin with some formal planning activities like board improvement planning.

Almost all Ontario schools base their improvement efforts on school improvement plans developed in a wide variety of ways. Such planning identifies goals and strategies for their achievement at the district and school level and aligns structures, staff and fiscal resources in support of such achievement.

Evidence about organizational improvement processes suggests strong districts:

- Have a coherent approach to improvement which usually includes a small number of key improvement goals consistently pursued over sustained periods of time.
- Proceed in manageable stages using the early stages as learning opportunities.
- Do not overload schools with excessive numbers of initiatives.
- Make considerable effort to build the capacities needed by school staffs for successful school improvement.
- Encourage improvement efforts in schools guided by explicit and well-tested frameworks, policies and practices, as well as widely shared goals that permit local adaptation. All stakeholders have clearly defined roles to play in this approach to school improvement.
- Integrate new initiatives into existing routines and practices. Established structures and procedures are maintained and built. Care is taken to ensure continuity and extension of core values.

In this module, through the use of presenting the latest research, providing additional research articles, case studies and focus group questions, participants explored a variety of approaches taken by three different school systems towards improving learning-oriented improvement processes.

Agenda

1. Objectives

As a result of participating in this module, district leaders will deepen their understanding of what is entailed in:

- One-on-one conversations (e.g., superintendent/principal, teacher/principal) about improvement processes that result in greater capacity for productively engaging in those processes;
- Creating structures and relationships which foster authentic collaboration between central office and school staffs;
- Creating networks within districts that stimulate the professional learning of most participants.

2. Review of research with an emphasis on networks

- [Power Point Presentation](#)

3. Case Study: Waterloo Catholic District School Board *

What can be learned from this case study about how to create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes?

- Discussion of the written case study (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the case study by each team
- Synthesis of key findings from video overview and written case study

4. Case Study: Ottawa Catholic District School Board

What can be learned from this case study about how to create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes?

- Listen to the video overview of this case study
- Discussion of the written case study (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the case study by each team
- Synthesis of key findings from the written case study

5. Case Study: Upper Grand District School Board

What can be learned from this case study about how to create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes?

- Discuss the written case (in teams of four or five people)
- Debrief what was learned from the case by each team

- Synthesis of key findings from the written case

6. Case Study: Algoma District School Board

What can be learned from this case study about how to create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes?

- Discussion of the written case study (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case study by each team
- Synthesis of key findings from the written case study

7. Case Study: York Catholic District School Board

What can be learned from this case study about how to create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes?

- Discussion of the written case study (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case study by each team
- Synthesis of key findings from the written case study

8. Case Study: Huron Perth Catholic District School Board

What can be learned from this case study about how to create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes?

- Discussion of the written case study (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case study by each team
- Synthesis of key findings from the written case study

9. Case Study: Durham District School Board

What can be learned from this case study about how to create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes?

- View video overview of case study
- Discussion of written case study (in teams of four or five people)
- Debriefing of what was learned from the written case study by each team
- Video-recorded interviews with directors and colleagues

10. Compare and contrast learnings from these case studies and the research – Full group discussion

- Consider relationship to relevant research and to the approach currently being taken by one's own district
- Highlight key lessons (what to do for sure, what not to do at any cost); full group discussion making as many links as possible to the case studies and readings

Module Four: Learning-oriented Organizational Improvement Processes
** indicates supplementary information since 2016*

Samples of Relevant Research

- Bransford, J., Brown, A., Cocking, R. (Eds.) (2000). *Brain, mind, experience and school*. Washington: National Research Council.
- Hoppe, B., Reinelt, C. (2010). Social network analysis and the evaluation of leadership networks, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21, 600-619.
- Finnegan, K., Daly A., Che, J. (2013). System wide reform in districts under pressure: the role of social networks in defining, acquiring, using and diffusing research evidence, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 51, 476-497.
- Robinson, V., Sinnema, C., & le Fever, D. (2014). From Persuasion to Learning: An Intervention to Improve Leaders' Response to Disagreement, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 13, 260–296.

Strong Districts Focus Group Interviews *

This module identifies and illustrates, with several case studies, one of the nine characteristics of high performing or “strong” districts. These characteristics have been identified through empirical research conducted in Ontario school systems, as well as research carried out in other contexts.

Questions

1. After having reviewed this module, have you identified any refinements you would like to make to your district's process to learning-oriented organizational improvement? If so, identify those possible refinements.
2. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that are (or could be) especially helpful to schools? If so, what are they and why do they matter?
3. Are there *particular things* your district does (or could do) in this area of its work that have negative consequences for schools? If so, what are they and how do they matter?

Appendix A: Waterloo Catholic District School Board *

CASE STUDY

Appendix B: Ottawa Catholic District School Board *

Guiding Questions

This case study is a very concise description of how the Ottawa Catholic District School Board has developed learning-oriented organizational improvement processes.

1. *What conditions allowed the board to develop these processes.*

Ottawa Catholic District School Board uses Google Doc and Google Hangouts to gather input from the system on their school improvement priorities. Then a school improvement-planning for student achievement (SIPSA) sort is carried out to identify priorities.

2. *How does your process for determining priorities for board improvement planning compare to those used by the Ottawa Catholic School Board?*

Ottawa Catholic District School Board has identified turning points for improving the lessons learned in developing their learning-oriented improvement processes.

3. *What have been the turning points in your district?*

CASE STUDY

Appendix C: Upper Grand District School Board *

CASE STUDY

Appendix D: Algoma District School Board

Guiding Questions

The Algoma District School Board case study illustrates how one board approached the development of two strong district characteristics. For this module, you should focus your attention on how the board went about developing learning-oriented improvement processes.

Algoma District School Board has adopted instructional rounds as its main strategy for creating learning-oriented improvement processes.

1. *What do you see as the challenges and opportunities created by this approach?*

Instructional rounds, to be effective, depend on significant and consistent support from superintendents.

2. *How did Algoma District School Board develop such significant and consistent support and would this work in your district?*
3. *How does your system provide professional development for your Supervisory Officers to ensure consistency of approach in supporting schools?*

CASE STUDY

Appendix E: York Catholic District School Board

Guiding Questions

This case study describes how one school district approached the development of two key characteristics of strong districts, *learning-oriented organizational improvement processes* and *job-embedded professional learning for all members of the organization*. As you read the case, please focus your attention on how the district approached the first of these key characteristics.

School Boards have been striving to effectively implement 21st century learning in their elementary and secondary schools for a number of years. York Catholic District School Board committed itself to engaging all stakeholders in this effort through the use of high quality learning-oriented improvement processes. The board aligned professional development and other resources with this initiative and monitored its' implementation.

1. *How does York Catholic District School Board's approach to implementing 21st century learning compare to approaches used in your district?*

York Catholic District School Board researched the work of leading education thinkers with the goal of achieving equity in 21st century learning opportunities. Instead of piloting the approach in a few schools they began by having a 21-century team in all 104 schools.

2. *How are you addressing the issue of "equity" of access? What other learning-oriented organizational improvement processes do you have a challenge with and how have you managed this challenge?*

York Catholic District School Board used a Google form to gather feedback on the impact of its' approach and the degree to which teaching practices were impacted by the approach.

3. *How does your approach to monitoring the implementation and impact of your 21st century learning initiative compare to the approach used by York Catholic District School Board?*

CASE STUDY

Appendix F: Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board

CASE STUDY

Appendix G: Durham District School Board

Guiding Questions

Durham District School Board created an academic council that included the director of education, school superintendents and educational officers. The council met monthly for a two-hour dialogue consisting of job-embedded conversations. These meetings were nonhierarchical in nature and were inquiry based. Durham District School Board recognized the importance of transferring knowledge from its' academic council sessions to principals meetings and school improvement discussions so that there is clearer alignment and minimizing administrative matters.

Once you have read the relevant section of this case study, please focus the discussion in your group on three questions:

1. *How do the structures you currently have for your senior administrative meetings compare to those evident in the Durham District School Board case study and how do you address the issue of ongoing learning and accountability for your senior team, as compared with Durham District School Board's approach?*
2. *How do you focus your priorities for your monthly principal meetings, as compared with Durham District School Board's approach, and how do you ensure there is alignment to your school and board improvement priorities? What challenges do you face as compared with Durham District School Board?*
3. *How do the lessons outlined in the Durham District School Board case study compare to the lessons you have learned from your own district's efforts at job-embedded professional development?*

CASE STUDY

Self-assessment

In order to assist you with your learning, use a rating scale in response to the following:

(1 = not at all, 2 = a modest amount, 3 = significantly, 4 = a great deal)

Please indicate the extent to which you feel that participation in this module has extended your ability, or increased your awareness of the need, to address the following challenges associated with creating learning-oriented organizational improvement processes:

1. One-to-one conversations about improvement processes that result in greater capacity for productively engaging in those processes
2. Creating structures and relationships which foster authentic collaboration between central office and school staffs
3. Creating peer networks that stimulate the professional learning of most participants.

Evaluation

1. If your participation in this module has caused you to consider doing something different in your own system, please describe what that is.
2. Please identify any changes or refinements that could be made to this module that would improve participants' learning.
3. How can this work best be used with others in the future?

The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) invites you to share your responses to the above questions with the coordinator of the IEL at communication@education-leadership-ontario.ca.