



The Institute for
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*Ontario Leaders Collaborating for
Student Achievement and Well-being*

Module Two: Strong Districts and Their Leadership

A Coherent Instructional Guidance System

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Association des directions et
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Module Description *

When a district's curriculum standards and frameworks, instructional practices, professional development emphases and assessment tools are all focused on achieving the district's mission, vision and goals, the district is providing "**coherent instructional guidance**" to its schools, an important part of what strong districts do.

Within such a coherent system, strong districts encourage their staffs to be innovative and support to schools is differentiated in response to variability in student performance. The coherent system is intended to establish some legitimate boundaries around what can be done without stifling the innovative efforts of staffs to improve their practices and the achievement of students. This feature of strong districts reflects evidence about the importance of focusing "on the core function of the organization as the primary driver of success."

Strong districts encourage their staffs to be innovative and support to schools is differentiated in response to variability in student performance.

This module explored, through the use of case studies, discussion and a sharing of the most recent research, how school districts were striving to achieve the following characteristics.

To achieve a coherent instructional guidance strong districts:

- support schools' efforts to implement curricula that foster students' deep understandings about "big ideas", as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings.
- work together with their school staffs to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.
- work together, district and school staff, to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards.
- include teachers in instructional improvement work and assist them in developing sophisticated understandings of powerful instruction for students; collaboration for this work is extensive, ongoing and involves all key stakeholders.
- demonstrate "in-classroom" leadership. District and school level leaders are frequently in classrooms acting as instructional leaders and providing "just-in-time" or job embedded professional development.

Agenda

1. Objectives

As a result of participating in this module, district leaders will improve their capacities to:

- Ensure that the school system strongly supports schools' efforts to implement curricula that foster students' deep understandings about "big ideas", as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings.
- Help system staff work effectively with schools to establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards and to provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.
- Design the board's work with schools to align curriculum, instruction, assessment and teaching resources so that it is extensive, ongoing and involves most stakeholders

2. Overview of relevant research

- [PowerPoint presentation](#)

3. Case Study: Hamilton Wentworth District School Board *

What can be learned from this case study about how to create a coherent instructional guidance system?

- Overview of case study from HWDSB senior leaders (video)
- 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
- Synthesis of key findings from written case

4. Case Study: Halton District School Board *

What can be learned from this case study about how to create a coherent instructional guidance system?

- Overview of case study from Halton senior staff (video)
- Discussion of 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 written case study

5. Case Study: Waterloo Region District School Board:

What can be learned from this case study about how to create a coherent instructional guidance system?

- 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
- Synthesis of key findings from written case

Module 2: A Coherent Instructional Guidance System

** indicates supplementary information since 2016*

6. Compare and contrast learnings from Halton DSB, Hamilton Wentworth DSB and Waterloo Region District School Board.

- Full group discussion
- Consider relationship to relevant research and to the approach currently being taken by one's own district

7. Synthesis about how to build a coherent instructional guidance system

- 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

8. Focus group interviews (Principal groups, Senior leader groups)

9. Key insights from module and focus groups

Samples of Relevant Research

Ben Jaffer, S. (2006). "An alternative approach to measuring opportunity to learn in high school classes." *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 52, 2.

Bransford, J., et al (2000). *How people learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

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Leithwood, K. (2011). *Leading Student Achievement: Networks for Learning Supplement to Final Evaluation Report for the 2010 –11 Project Cycle: Analysis of Student Achievement Data*.

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Scardamalia, M. (ND). *The 12 Principals of Knowledge building*. Toronto: OISE/University of Toronto.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Barr, M. (2004). Fostering student learning: The relationship of collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 3(3), 189-209.

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Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research*, 68(2), 202-248.

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[Zeiser](#), K., Taylor, J., Rickles, J., Garret, M., Segeritz, M. (2014) Findings From the Study of Deeper Learning: Opportunities and Outcomes. Report from the American Institute for Research

Appendix A: Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board *

Guiding Questions

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's approach, since 2010, to developing a coherent instructional guidance system has emphasized collaborative inquiry, shifted resources, and changed meeting formats to allow for multiple points for engagement. The case study illustrates a number of approaches to create coherent instructional guidance.

1. *Identify (3) approaches that you currently are utilizing in your district to ensure that the right conditions and supports are in place for coherent instructional guidance to occur.*

Building principals instructional leadership capacity is inherent to success in your district. Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board began the use of a critical friend as a strategy in moving forward and developed a protocol to ensure a consistent approach to the relationship

2. *What did you find most helpful about Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's approach and what approach have you used in your district to develop your principal's instructional leadership capacity?*

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board created a number of conditions to support collaborative inquiry including the role of the Supervisory Officer in this process.

3. *What conditions do you create in your district for collaborative inquiry and what role does the Supervisory Officer play in such inquiry?*
4. *What is the number one "take away" for you from reading this case?*

Case Study

Appendix B: Halton District School Board

Guiding Questions

Halton District School Board is a high achieving board, which has developed over time a very targeted professional development model. The board identified a concern they had with the percentage of students who were being left behind. Their professional development was premised on the goal of differentiating support to their lower performing schools.

1. *What do you do in your district to raise the standards in your neediest schools? Do you differentiate support to your schools and if so how?*

Over the years Halton District School Board identified that they collected data with little or no follow-up in terms of intervention. Halton District School Board put in place an approach that would ensure the effective use of data (example PM benchmarks) in a more targeted approach.

2. *How in your district do you ensure that there is an effective approach to the sharing of data and approach aligned to what the data is telling you?*
3. *As a result of the discussion around this case study what changes have you made in your approach to sharing and using data in a meaningful way?*

Successful student achievement in Mathematics continues to be a concern in the province of Ontario. As described on page 6 of the case study. Halton District School Board adopted a number of intervention strategies as outlined.

4. *What about Halton District School Board’s approach resonates with you and what additional approaches have you taken to improve your student’s success in Mathematics?*
5. *Halton District School Board has defined their job-embedded strategies. What have you learned in your experience about the do’s and don’ts of job-embedded professional development?*

Case Study

Appendix C: Waterloo Region District School Board

Case Study

Appendix D: Local Evidence

Relationships between Grade 6 Student Achievement & Key Learning Conditions

<i>Key Learning Conditions</i>	Reading	Writing	Math	Mean
<i>Rational Path</i>				
Academic Emphasis	.41**	.37**	.46**	.45**
Disciplinary Climate	.49**	.40**	.50**	.51**
Collaborative Inquiry Processes	-.01	.07	-.02	.01

<i>Emotional Path</i>				
Individual teacher efficacy	.33**	.31**	.33**	.35**
Teacher Trust in parents, students, colleagues	.32**	.30**	.35**	.35**
Teacher Trust in Leader	.06	.01	-.03	.01
<i>Organizational Path</i>				
Uses of Instructional Time	.23**	.23**	.15	.21**
Professional Learning Communities	.11	.14	.12	.13

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

[From Leithwood, K. (2011). *Leading Student Achievement: Networks for Learning Supplement to Final Evaluation Report for the 2010–11 Project Cycle: Analysis of Student Achievement Data*]

Strong Districts Focus Group Interview Questions *

District Leader Interview

This module identifies and illustrates, with one or two case studies, one of 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.

To help you recall what was outlined and illustrated during the module, a summary of what is included in this characteristic of district work appears in the box below.

Strong districts:

- support schools’ efforts to implement curricula that foster students’ deep understanding about “big ideas,” as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understanding
- work together with their school staffs to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction
- work together, district and school staff, to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards
- include teachers in instructional improvement work and assist them in developing sophisticated understanding of powerful instruction for students (collaboration for this work is extensive, ongoing and involves all key stakeholders)
- demonstrate “in-classroom” leadership: district and school level leaders are frequently in classrooms acting as instructional leaders providing “just-in-time” or job-embedded professional development.

Questions

1. Your district may or may not do what you consider a good job in this area of its work. When it does (or if it did), however, how do you build on or take advantage of your district’s efforts in this area?
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 you? 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 your school leadership efforts? If so, what are they and how do they matter?

District Leadership Practices

Available evidence suggests that district leaders increase their success in ensuring a coherent instructional guidance system in their districts by enacting the six leadership practices in the box below.

- Adopts a service orientation toward schools
- Aligns curricular goals, assessment instruments, instructional practices and teaching resources
- Insists on ambitious goals for teaching and learning
- Advocates for attention to the best available evidence to inform instructional improvement decisions
- Expects schools to focus on needs of individual as well as groups of students
- Encourages staff to be innovative within the boundaries created by the district's instructional guidance system.

Questions

1. Does this list overlook any district leadership practices that you consider particularly helpful in ensuring a coherent instructional guidance system for your district? If yes, what are they? What makes them important?
2. Are any of these six district leadership practices especially crucial in your experience? If so, why? What makes them especially important?

Self-assessment

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

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

Take 10 minutes to reflect on the extent to which you feel that participation in this module has extended your ability to improve the coherent instructional guidance system of your district so that:

1. The school system strongly supports schools' efforts to implement curricula that foster students' deep understandings about "big ideas", as well as to develop the basic skills students need to acquire such understandings.
2. District-level staff works effectively with schools to help provide all students with engaging forms of instruction.

3. District-level staff works effectively with schools to help establish ambitious but realistic student performance standards.
4. The district works with schools to align curriculum, instruction, assessment and teaching resources so that it is extensive, ongoing and involves most stakeholders.
5. The district's instructional improvement work is designed so that it includes teachers in most schools and assists them in developing sophisticated understandings of powerful instruction for students.

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 Ontario 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.