



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

[www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca)

## *Ontario Leaders Collaborating for Student Achievement and Well- being*

### PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Association des directions et  
directions adjointes des écoles  
franco-ontariennes

Association des gestionnaires de  
l'éducation franco-ontarienne

Catholic Principals' Council of  
Ontario

Council of Senior Business  
Officials

Council of Ontario Directors of  
Education

Ministry of Education

Ontario Catholic Supervisory  
Officers' Association

Ontario Principals' Council

Ontario Public Supervisory  
Officials Association

## **Module Three: Strong Districts and Their Leadership** *Job-embedded Professional Learning for all Members of the Organization*

### Contents

Module Description \*

Agenda

Samples of Relevant Research

Appendix A: Hamilton Wentworth District School Board\*

Appendix B: Algoma District School Board\*

Appendix C: Waterloo Catholic District School Board

Appendix D: Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District  
School Board

Focus Group Interviews\*

Final Comments\*

Self-assessment

Evaluation

## **Module Description \***

This learning module focused on how to provide evidenced based job embedded professional development.

Strong districts approach professional development as an important function towards their improvement efforts and where PD is an integral part of school and system improvement planning processes. They develop forms of professional development that is reflective of the best available evidence on the components of effective professional development. Strong Districts closely monitor the progress toward improvement goals and hold staff accountable to apply the learning towards improving their practice

### **Characteristics of Job-Embedded Professional Development in Strong Districts**

- Devote very little time to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and principals. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional development.
- Most professional development is carefully aligned with board and school improvement initiatives.
- Differentiated professional development opportunities are provided in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.
- Extensive opportunities are provided for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.
- Almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.
- All system-sponsored professional development is closely aligned with the best evidence about how people learn.
- A key function of their improvement efforts and craft forms of professional development for both teachers.

This module explored through exposure to the most current research, case studies and focused conversation the characteristics of exemplary professional development.

## Agenda

### 1. Objectives

As a result of participating in this module, district leaders will be more likely to:

Restructure the use of meeting time with teachers and principals so that very little is devoted to routine administrative matters. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is devoted almost entirely to professional development.

Design most professional development opportunities so that it is carefully aligned with board and school improvement initiatives and reflects the best available evidence about how people learn.

Ensure that almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with professional development in how best to facilitate such work.

### 2. Review of relevant theory and research

- [Power Point Presentation](#)

### 3. Appendix A: Hamilton Wentworth District School Board \*

*What can be learned from this case study about how to provide effective job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization?*

- Presentation and discussion
- 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 study and interviews

### 4. Appendix B: Algoma District School Board \*

- 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 study and interviews.

### 5. Appendix C: Waterloo Catholic District School Board

*What can be learned from this case study about how to provide effective job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization?*

- Presentation and discussion
- 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 study and interviews

## 6. Appendix D: Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board

*What can be learned from this case study about how to provide effective job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization?*

- 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

## 7. Compare and contrast learnings from the case studies and the summary of 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) making as many links as possible to the case studies and research.

## Samples of Relevant Research

Bransford, J., Brown, A., Cocking, R. (Eds.) (2000). *Brain, mind, experience and school*. Washington: National Research Council.

Mangin, M., Dunsmore, K. (2015). How the framing of instructional coaching as a lever for systematic or individual reform influences the enactment of coaching, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 51, 2, 179-213

Perkins, D., Salomon, G. (1992). Transfer of leaning – Metacognitive strategies. In N. Postelthwaite & T. Husen (Eds.). *International Encyclopedia of Education* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

Sun, M. et al (2013). Shaping professional development to promote diffusion of instructional expertise among teachers, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 35, 3, 344-369.

## Focus Group Interviews \*

This module focuses on Job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization. It identifies and illustrates, through the case studies, one of the nine characteristics of high performing districts or strong districts. The characteristics of strong districts have been identified through empirical research conducted in Ontario school systems, as well as research carried out in other contexts.

A summary of what is included in this characteristic of district work appears below.

### Strong districts:

- devote very little time to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and principals. Meeting time formerly used for such matters is now devoted almost entirely to professional development.
- most professional development is carefully aligned with board and school improvement initiatives.
- differentiated professional development opportunities are provided in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.
- extensive opportunities are provided for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.
- almost all schools provide time for collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives. Schools are provided with the resources they need to provide this time and leaders are provided with training in how best to facilitate such work.
- all system-sponsored professional development is closely aligned with the best evidence about how people learn.

### QUESTIONS

1. Your district may or may not do what you consider a good job in the area of job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization. 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 providing job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization in their districts by enacting the five leadership practices in the box below.

- Provides extensive PD opportunities for both teachers and school-level leaders, most of it through some form of learning community or on-the-job context.
- Uses internal system networks as central mechanism for the professional development of school-level leaders.
- Aligns the content of professional development with the capacities needed for district and school improvement.
- Requires individual staff growth plans to be aligned with district and school improvement priorities.
- Holds staff accountable for applying new capacities by monitoring the implementation of school improvement plans.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Does this list overlook any district leadership practices that you consider particularly helpful in developing job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization for the district? If yes, what are they? What makes them important?
2. Are any of these five district leadership practices especially crucial in your experience? If so, why? What makes them especially important?

## Final Thoughts Arising From The Discussion Of Cases and Review of Research By: Kenneth Leithwood \*

This module was field tested with a large group of senior district leaders and principals in Sudbury on September 15, 2017. Key features of the module included a review of research on selected aspects of how districts successfully enact professional development for school staffs and the examination of two case studies of such work provided by the Algoma and Hamilton Wentworth District School Boards. The research and case studies provoked considerable discussion among participants about professional development efforts in their own districts. By way of concluding the discussion, four issues are summarized below:

### **1. The first question to be answered by districts in designing professional development is about *what not how*.**

What approaches to instruction should we use for our teachers' professional development? How can we make the professional development as engaging as possible? Over what period of time should the professional development take place? Who should facilitate the professional development? What can be done to encourage teachers to use what they learn through their professional development in their classrooms? How will we evaluate the effects of the professional development?

These are all important questions for district staff to ask in the course of designing a professional development initiative for some target group in their organization. But all of these questions are about the processes associated with delivering the PD. One obvious additional question to be asked is what goals do we intend to achieve through the PD? The answer to this question is likely to be an increase in the capacity of participants [to do something different which, in turn, will increase [some desired learning] on the part of students.

And this brings us to the heart of the issue. How certain are you that whatever capacity or practice it is that the PD is designed to help participants master will actually contribute to the desired learning of students? What evidence do you have that it will? How good is that evidence? The "gold standard" for evidence that warrants a change in most fields of practice currently comes from meta-analytic reviews of a significant body of prior research. Not evidence from a couple of studies. Not policy-copying from other jurisdictions. And not some guru's own "clinical experience" or theory delivered in a charismatic way.

This is an admonition not to waste a lot of money and a great deal of participants' time developing whatever is the new practice advocated by your professional development unless you have a high degree of certainty that it will produce its desired effects. Absent of such evidence, leaving people alone to figure out their own ways forward may be your more cost-effective strategy.

## **2. Be wary of creating a culture of dependency. Not all new capacity development requires organizational intervention.**

This second comment is closely related to the first. There was a time long ago when teacher unions began to argue that their members should not be expected to implement anything new in their classrooms unless districts or schools first provided them with professional development. At that time, the implementation of new curriculum guidelines was mostly what was meant by new. This was the beginning of what now often seems like a culture of dependency on formal professional development for all new professional learning. Which is, of course, absurd!

Consider, for example, some recent data collected from two large samples of principals involved in networks (called *principal learning teams*) as part of their participation in the *Leading Student Achievement* project. LSA has sponsored, by now, two studies of the characteristics of leadership networks that are productive sources of learning for their members. As part of those two studies, principals were asked to rate the value for their own learning of 11 different sources of professional learning. Networks were highly rated (second). But the highest rated source was “my own professional reading.” And almost as highly rated as networks were “learning from a district colleague with close knowledge of my work” and “learning from a staff member in my own schools” (both sources rated the same). The type of propositional knowledge requiring “high road transfer” (powerful but relatively abstract ideas and concepts), as we noted in the module, is likely more available through professional reading than most other sources.

This leads me to argue that, as important as it is for districts to provide their members with meaningful professional development, it is likely just as important to nurture a norm of individual responsibility for continuous learning on the part of all district staff.

## **3. Learning “through the job” is often a much more powerful form of capacity building than is learning “about the job.”**

Another longstanding line of evidence about professional growth on the part of school leaders confirms the power of on-the-job learning. This evidence always places the perceived value of on-the-job learning far ahead of other sources that school leaders typically have available.

Using one of the distinctions introduced in the module, nothing beats actually performing the job as a source of “near road transfer.” The job is as near as it gets to job-embedded PD. The huge proportion of tacit knowledge required to do the job is much more available in the direct feedback resulting from being in the context and relationships that are part of the job than any other source. It is mostly the relatively small proportion of explicit knowledge required for the job that is available from less direct sources.



Districts often encourage teachers aspiring to be principals to prepare themselves, at least in part, by participate in school and district work groups and to exercise leadership in those groups. Perfect. District leaders are confronted with a wide array of thorny challenges to deal with. Engaging school leadership in helping solve these district problems is a highly authentic strategy for the continuing professional development of practicing school leaders. District challenges as the curriculum for principals' further development.

**4. Capacity building aimed at deepening instructional expertise should be structured so that people with very similar instructional duties are able to learn together and from one another.**

A key question to be addressed when designing professional development is how the interaction among participants will be organized. As we heard in discussions during the module field test, districts often seem to prefer organizing participants so that they are learning with and from those with diverse responsibilities rather than those with similar responsibilities. The assumption underlying this form of organization is that the focal capacities for PD are best developed through “breadth.”

However, taking the provincial challenge of improving students' mathematics performance as an example suggest just the opposite would be best form of organization, and two of the papers we discussed as part of the module provided a basis for this claim. Most evidence points to the need for more mathematical content knowledge among elementary school teachers and more knowledge and skill about specifically how such content is best taught. The knowledge required of teachers in this case is very specific—how best to teach the specific content included in the curriculum for the grade that I teach and how to do that with students much like the ones in my classroom. These capacities require depth not breadth, so the best organization for PD designed to develop such capacities would be a job-alike organization.

The larger point to be stressed here is that the interactions encouraged by the structure of PD should be determined by the capacities to be developed rather than some general preference unrelated to those capacities. Neither breadth nor depth of interaction is preferable. It depends.

## Appendix A: Hamilton Wentworth District School Board \*

### Guiding Questions

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's approach, since 2010, to supporting job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization 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 job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization to be supported.*

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 study?*

### CASE STUDY

## Appendix B: Algoma District School Board \*

### CASE STUDY

## Appendix C: Waterloo Catholic District School Board

### Guiding Questions

Waterloo Catholic District School Board offered professional development opportunities to a team during the 2011 to 2013 school years on instructional rounds in order to develop district support models to improve instructional practice. In May of 2014, they brought a team from Harvard to Waterloo Catholic District School Board to provide a two-day workshop for all administrators, consultants, and literacy/numeracy coaches on facilitating school-based instructional rounds. This is now used in the board in that the focus is on a problem of practice at individual schools. Principal learning teams are connected and aligned to the instructional rounds process in an explicit way to support their own capacity building. The principal learning teams meet regularly and follow a consistent protocol as they collaborate on each other's presented problem of practice.

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

1. *What is your overall reaction to this job-embedded practice used by Waterloo Catholic District School Board and other boards in the province?*
2. *How would you measure the impact of this approach to job-embedded professional development on the capacities of staff?*
3. *What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of supporting this approach to job-embedded professional development with "principal learning teams"?*

### CASE STUDY

## Appendix D: Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board

### Guiding Questions

During the fall of 2012, administrators in Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board were led through an exercise to develop growth plans with a focus on the domains of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF). The majority of leaders indicated that they wished to focus on OLF's Personal Leadership Resources as part of their growth plan. After reading the relevant section of the case study, please address the following three questions with your colleagues:

1. *How do the approaches used by Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board compare with approaches you have used in your district to support your leaders and other support staff in developing their Personal Leadership Resources?*

Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board chose to incorporate the principles and practices of Cognitive Coaching and conducted extensive professional development sessions for all on Cognitive Coaching.

2. *How does this Cognitive Coaching approach compare with the approach you use to support the ongoing learning of your aspiring and incumbent leaders?*

To further the professional development for all staff, Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board offers a leadership-training series, S.A.L.T. (Student Achievement Leadership Training) to support aspiring formal leaders, instructional leaders and to offer general leadership development opportunities to teachers in the system. These sessions were offered in the evenings.

3. *How does the approach used in your district for such leadership development compare to the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board approach. What challenges have you encountered and how have you addressed those challenges?*

### 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 providing job-embedded professional learning for all members of the organization:

1. Significantly reduce the time devoted to routine administrative matters in meetings of teachers and principals. Ensure that meeting time formerly used for such matters will be devoted, almost entirely, to professional development.
2. Carefully align most professional development opportunities with board and school improvement initiatives.
3. Differentiate professional development opportunities in response to the needs of individual schools, administrators and teachers.
4. Provide extensive opportunities for both teachers and administrators to further develop their expertise.
5. Provide time for schools to engage in collaborative work on instructional improvement initiatives and offer professional development opportunities for leaders to learn how best to facilitate such work.
6. Closely align system-sponsored professional development with the best evidence about how people learn.

---

## 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](mailto:communication@education-leadership-ontario.ca).**