The Institute for
Education Leadership

L'Institut de leadership
en éducation

ONTARIO

www.education-leadership-ontario.ca

Deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic DSB

RATIONALE

Reviewing the Strong Districts and their Leadership (June 2013) research study, discussions among Board staff responsible for the review and submission of the Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board case study revolved around some of the daily work that takes place across our system. It was decided that among the nine characteristics identified in the study, two of the characteristics speak directly to areas that have been central foci to system leadership development and school improvement efforts during the past years. The team decided that this case study would be the perfect opportunity to review the system progress in these areas and identify areas where success is taking place and areas for continued growth within the two selected characteristics: deliberate and consistent use of multiple sources of evidence to inform decisions; and learning-oriented improvement processes.

Preliminary work as a system in the selected areas highlights a clear overlap between the two characteristics and how they are contributing to the precision of our systems' efforts and the empowerment of our leadership teams in adopting shared ownership for the responsibility of favorably impacting student achievement. The overall system work resulting from the intentional professional development that has been provided related to the identified characteristics appears to support a greater devolution of control from the system center out to the schools and classrooms where closing the gap and enhancing student achievement is impacted daily. School staffs are embracing the significance of the processes which have included the daily monitoring of student achievement, shared planning to identifying effective teaching strategies to bring about necessary improvements, precision in the daily work of staff, and the timely and meaningful feedback provided to students from staff are properly aligned to the goal of improved student achievement. Collaborative staff inquiry structures continue to take shape within schools and as a result, opportunities to further support and extend the established school structures to include regular and meaningful collaboration between school leaders at different schools and all system leaders in the school improvement planning process appears to be the areas where our efforts are in need of continued refinement.

CASE STUDY SUBMISSION – August 2014

PROCEDURE

The feeling expressed by the review team in preparing to embark on the submission of this case study noted that over the past years the system has experienced significant transitions among the leadership teams at all levels – superintendent, assistant superintendent, principal, vice-principal, assistant to the principal, principal intern and trustee. With this being the case, the case study was seen as the ideal time to review the status of our systems' efforts and to identify where we continue to meet with success and where further work is required. Gathering the feedback necessary to best inform and understand the current picture in our board required the creation of a survey. The survey was designed to gain insight into the state of the seven specific leadership practices identified in the Strong Districts and Their Leadership study. These leadership practices are also outlined in the District Effectiveness Framework of the Ontario Leadership Framework where what strong districts do to encourage effective data use is described. In the Strong Districts and Their Leadership study, K. Leithwood identifies what system leaders in strong districts do:

a) use data from all available sources to assist decision making in the central office;

b) insist on the use of the best available research and other systematically collected evidence to inform decisions wherever possible;

c) encourage collaboration in the interpretation and uses of data;

d) build system's capacity and disposition for using systematically-collected data to inform as many decisions as possible;

e) provide training for principals and staff on the use of data and research literature to sustain decision-making;

f) model evidence-informed decision making to school staffs;

g) ground interactions with, and advice to, trustees in sound evidence.

The survey also included opportunities for system and school leaders to comment on specific practices identified in the characteristic create learning-oriented organizational improvement processes that address current board practices and structures in place. Creating this feedback forum afforded leaders the opportunity to provide input on matters related to School Improvement Planning, the Collaborative Inquiry process and timelines, current and proposed reporting structures and required supports to enhance the process.

The survey that was devised met with approval and was distributed using an electronic data tool that solicited responses from the director of education,

superintendents, assistant superintendents, trustees, principals and vice-principals from across our system. In the case of the principals that were selected, they were identified in an effort to be representative of the systems' family of schools geographic distribution, school size, demographics, presence of a vice-principal, principal intern or assistant to the principal and the duration of placement of the current principal in that specific school. This sampling was deemed significantly appropriate enough to provide meaningful and representative insight into the state of each specific practice in our system. The intent of this survey distribution format was to validate that the respective leadership group's responses would indicate the general state of implementation progress across the hierarchy of the system. The resulting responses are captured in the remainder of this report and will assist in setting the direction on celebrating our system successes and identifying the gaps that will require continued monitoring and support.

Current state of the characteristic aligned with specific practices in Strong Districts and Their Leadership

a) Use data from all available sources to assist decision-making in the central office: Leaders across the system were asked to respond to the questions:
   a. What forms of data do you gather and monitor with your School Improvement Planning (SIP) teams?
   b. For what other purposes do you gather and use data to inform decisions? Details please.

Evident through the responses to this question is the fact that stakeholders can clearly articulate the wide variety of data sources used to provide insight into all aspects of a school.

Formative Assessment Data, Report Card Data, EQAO Data, ongoing Student Achievement Data, Trillium Reports specific to each panel, Census Data, Early Development Instrument Data, Safe School Surveys, School Climate Surveys, Tell Them From Me Survey Data, Annual Learning Plan data, Principal Performance Appraisal data, Teacher Performance Appraisal and New Teacher Induction Program data and a wide range of observational and perceptual data sources including both quantitative and qualitative data forms were noted in responses at all levels of the organization. Some respondents went so far as to detail why specific data sources were used for certain purposes which demonstrates a rooted understanding for the data source, while others listed sources but did not consistently report the purpose for the source being used.

The role of data in School Improvement Planning and Collaborative Inquiry processes surfaces in the survey data as consistent areas where current levels of data use supports the belief that ownership of both learning and the process for learning is embraced at the school level and supported by school and system leaders. The depth and degree of consistency in this work as articulated by

respondents varied within each level of the organization suggesting a need to elevate system expectations related to collaboration among leaders within each level of the organization to bring about greater consistency across leadership groups in the system. Further to this finding, the varied expectations articulated by System Leaders regarding their work with School Leaders in survey responses from both levels suggests that a similar collaborative process be considered for these learning partners with the intent of seeking greater consistency and precision in the expectations communicated by the senior team to school leaders and vice versa across families of schools. The findings are indicative of continued progress in this area with an emphasis on ongoing growth aimed at establishing enhanced consistency.

b) Insist on the use of the best available research and other systematically collected evidence to inform decisions wherever possible. Leaders across the system were asked to respond to the question, how and what research do you use to support your work and the work of your team in systematically collecting and using evidence to inform decisions? Responses from leaders at all levels across the system support the need to fully understand the vision of the Board that its Catholic leaders must be well read, well informed, well-versed and skilled in their presentation style. The Catholic principal, and by extension, the Catholic superintendents must operate from a growth mindset and must have earned the trust of their teams through the authentic demonstration of their own knowledge as they exude confidence in their efforts. References in responses from stakeholders to personal leadership resources noted in the Ontario Leadership Framework, personal integrity, knowledge, leadership self-awareness and well-developed emotional intelligence are leadership qualities for all leaders to be well versed on. Leaders must encourage, affirm and support the leadership of others, including students, and encourage risk taking in trying new things while being visionary in their leadership style and reflective in their practice. Respondents attribute their school improvement team's efforts and collaborative inquiry work to specific educational researchers that have been brought in to speak to school and system administrators about their own work and how to embark on that respective journey with their schools, namely Donohoo, Katz and Searle. The work of other educational researchers referenced in the survey responses as a result of personal reading and professional development, provincial conference participation and the current landscape of education in Ontario include Leithwood, Hargreaves, Marzano, Hattie, Dweck and Fullan as further supports to the variety of improvement efforts that different schools have undertaken related to school improvement team work. Evident in many responses is the recognition that all work in Professional Learning Communities is most successful when leaders are able to create an environment which is rich with expertise around the inquiry table, which welcomes professional dialogue, is comprised of the joint efforts of leadership and staff collaborating inquisitively around school improvement team efforts. This composition and mindset of the team is critical in creating an environment in which

authentic learning, teacher leadership and ownership around the school improvement plan can effectively occur.

The system responses further offer insight into the level of awareness around the collection and use of evidence to inform decisions across the hierarchy of leadership. Similar to the first specific practice identified in a) the specific practice in b) would benefit from ongoing, non-evaluative opportunities for system leaders to transparently share their work with all leaders within and across the hierarchy as part of the ongoing job embedded professional development and inquiry skill development that can be made readily available at scheduled meeting opportunities. Dr. Steven Katz talks about the shift to informed professional judgment as the next wave of "evidence use" that needs to take hold in systems, survey results in this area support Dr. Katz findings.

c) Encourage collaboration in the interpretation and uses of data:

Leaders across the system were asked to respond to the question, how do you support teams of staff in gathering and interpreting data? Devising an action plan based on data?

Effective monitoring is a system expectation. It is not enough to have a "chat" about how things are going. All meetings with school principals, and by extension through survey feedback superintendents, must be focused. The school improvement plan for student achievement must shape the dialogue of all monitoring visits, both classroom and school based visits. Data must be continually gathered and reviewed as it relates to progress or the need for further interventions. Outcomes must be measured against stated goals and verified through analysis of the data. Regular and meaningful follow-up is essential by all system and school level leaders in the board. Principals must be held accountable to how they are moving their plan forward and should be seeking support from central staff to assist with the precision and intricacies of instruction and assessment where necessary. Concrete evidence of student achievement must be provided to support the decision to continue the inquiry path or to identify a new learning need and embark on a new inquiry pathway.

Survey results further identify that principals are using data, especially classroom level data, with their school improvement teams to determine courses of action. Opportunities to share the leg work behind the identification of a learning need and associated success criteria in a school with the involvement of a system leader would enhance the level of accountability on stakeholders and further strengthen the network of leaders involved in the school improvement planning process – all of whom are accountable at varying degrees for student achievement. Across the board and through the hierarchy, the survey indicates that there are few decisions that are made that would not have a rationale supported by data for the direction that is planned. From aligning budgets with school and system priorities to

monitoring student progress in an effort to capture evidence of increased student achievement, data used effectively drives these processes.

Moving forward on this specific practice, suggested structures and timelines have been proposed and are quite varied. At this point, the board has predefined templates and suggested timelines on how and when different aspects of the school improvement plan for student achievement (SIP) process are to take place. Sharing of the plan outside of the school is something that has been known to be a one-time event. Survey respondents suggest a need to incorporate the data collection, sharing and analysis into the process as an embedded part of the cycle to be monitored by school and system leaders at different times of the year. This sharing can take the form of using a centrally prepared template with guiding questions that have been proposed which will establish a structure to open up discussion among stakeholders and move from being an event to being open communication of the process and the learning that is generated through the inquiry efforts of the staff.

d) Build system's capacity and disposition for using systematically collected data to inform as many decisions as possible

Leaders across the system were asked to respond to the question, are there designated times during the course of the year when specific data should be utilized by staff? What are the specific data sources and how should they be used? Who is involved and how? Across all leadership groups in the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board, the belief that School Improvement Plan for Student Achievement data should be reviewed at the start of the year is a foundational part of the improvement planning process. Report card data and EQAO data inform the plan's development early in the school year. School Improvement teams in preparation for the planning must review data for the development of the school plan, for Catholic Student Achievement pre-visits, visits, and post visits. The data should be reviewed on an ongoing basis and definitely prior to regular monitoring visits in classrooms and schools as well as before reporting periods to parents. Principals are required to submit School Improvement Plans and supporting materials when they are involved in the Catholic School Student Achievement Visit (CSSAV) process. Secondary schools involved in regular Student Success Visits also prepare reports to share their school data. Student attendance appears to be an area that requires added attention and a more formal transparent process may be needed to address this as identified by some members of the senior team. A revised School Improvement Plan for Student Achievement (SIPSA) may also support a more transparent process with added precision in the alignment between Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement (BIPSA) and School Improvement Plan for Student Achievement (SIPSA). A proposed data gathering template to further support leaders and SIP teams in tracking progress on a regular basis will allow

teams to monitor trends in the tracked data. Transparency between school and system leaders elevates the status of the process bringing system leaders into the process at different points in the planning, implementation and review phases of the school improvement planning and monitoring cycle.

School level leaders speak to the value of the collaborative inquiry process and point out that the process is most successful when staff embrace it and engage in the opportunity to moderate student work, identify the greatest student learning needs, develop the inquiry question together and collaboratively develop a plan whereby teaching strategies will be implemented and revealing data sources will be identified to support the need. These meetings take place at different intervals in different schools but monthly sessions bring staff together over short intervals as check in opportunities on the journey. At these sessions, the team reviews the inquiry question, the action plan and the data collection planning template to determine what forms of data need to be collected for the next session and to determine what areas of the action plan need to be updated in order to accurately address the evolving inquiry question. All of the teachers involved in the planning sessions come to the table with student work samples to share in a moderated marking session that serves to bring greater precision among staff in their evaluation techniques as well as provides them with a scaffold look at what the identified need looks like across grades in a job embedded manner. All members of the team are invited to provide their input on what the next inquiry cycle should look like and what forms of data will need to be collected. Teachers are able to speak to how well the data is measuring the success at which the learning needs of the students are being met. This approach to capacity building achieves success again because teachers are able to see the value of planning based on student needs and sharing the instruction and assessment journey with colleagues as a built in support network where everyone is working towards the same cause.

e) Provide training for principals and staff on the use of data and research literature to sustain decision-making.

Leaders across the system were asked to respond to one of the three questions depending on their role within the system. The question was refined to be reflective of their school level or system responsibilities.

Director: What training is provided to the Board's leadership on the use of data and research to support decision-making?

Superintendent: How is the professional development of principals' data collection and use supported through your family of schools meetings via planned intentional job-imbedded learning opportunities?

Principal/Vice-Principal: How do you support your staff in the proper collection and use of data to inform decisions? Is your approach rooted in research literature? Be specific please.

As a board, training on the collection and use of quantitative and qualitative data has been provided through professional development sessions offered at general principal meetings and family of schools meetings. These sessions were provided as a result of a defined need established by our team of assistant superintendents and common requests from principals for elevated levels of support. Special training sessions on the use of specific data collection instruments (Scopus, Trillium, EQAO data tool, etc.) and data analysis supports are offered to enhance understanding and further develop the skill to effectively pinpoint and utilize EQAO data. Efforts by senior administration to create opportunities that bring together principal learning networks and coaching opportunities by peers have been utilized. These networks and supports should be used more regularly and on both a scheduled and as needed basis. In addition to the formal leadership being provided training and support opportunities, all board leadership programs offered through the Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS), must be aligned to the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and as such, must have similar opportunities for training and support provided to them. This should happen both on the job by their principal mentors as well as during the monthly meeting opportunities. Whereby sharing of their school's plans and improvement efforts should take place, it is through networking of this nature among Catholic leadership candidates that true capacity building can take place.

The team of senior administrators report in the survey that their roles in supporting the professional development of principals in the collection and use of data takes place generally through the family of school meetings and during school site monitoring visits. During these opportunities, sharing of data from school improvement plan efforts and collaborative inquiry work by the principal tend to take place. The depth of discussion and joint planning that result from this, between administrative teams was not defined with clarity in the responses and suggests that the format and exchange may be happening but no formal structure could be drawn from the survey data as to how it is happening. Assistant superintendents have reported that data informs the type of professional development required and requested by principals. Further to this, assistant superintendents report that time has been spent over the last two years working with principals around the collection of data - EQAO web tool, and on the use of Scopus and Gemini. The board has invited presenters to highlight the importance of collecting data- quantitative (Katz and Donahoo) and qualitative (Dr. Searle). The sentiments commonly expressed coming out of the survey data is that there is a continued need to support principals with respect to identifying key data indicators to guide their work. Mindful of the diverse approaches undertaken by senior administrators as a result

of personal style and approach, the survey results show diversity in the depth and range of how professional development for principals in data usage is being supported by mentors. With such a substantial variation among the survey participants in their responses on how and where the professional development of principals is happening, a valid suggestion is to work towards developing a more common framework of professional development in this area. This could be accomplished in the creation of a data-sharing template to be used by classroom teachers, school principals and superintendents. These templates are supported by a sample series of guiding questions to aid in generating conversation that speaks to the progress being made on the school improvement plan that aligns with the board improvement plan.

At the school level, principals and vice-principals identify themselves as being the sole provider of data for teachers outside of the daily student achievement data that teachers collect. How this data is used from school to school is not uncommon but how the staff is being empowered to seek out data sources or gain insight to specific practices through personal professional development available in the research literature is not mentioned in survey responses in general beyond research provided to educators through centrally provided professional development. In many cases, principals do indicate the use of their own learning from personal professional development in conjunction with centrally provided professional development to support their school improvement plan but they tend not to be specific in how the data is used in alignment with the Board's improvement plan for student achievement. This variation in the depth of responses is also suggestive of the fact that a standardized format for sharing be considered system wide.

f) Model evidence-informed decision making to school staffs

Leaders across the system were asked to respond to the question, how do you model evidence- informed decision making to your staff? How does your team model it for the rest of your staff?

Our director of education, in her survey response to this question, identifies with a close working relationship with the superintendents and assistant superintendents to ensure that the latest best practices are reviewed, understood, and are collaboratively shared amongst the senior team. Further, the Director reports that she remains well read and "connected" to the prime system goal of improving student achievement. In an effort to model what is expected of her staff. Our director ensures that the use of data in all monitoring reports to the Board of Trustees is utilized properly. Further, data at the system level is also a key component of all meetings with our student achievement officers thereby effectively providing evidence of progress and the identification of areas for growth.

At the superintendent and assistant superintendent level, survey responses indicate that they too use data to support their board reports and to support their efforts

with principals during visits. Some members of the senior team indicated that they take time to speak with teachers privately during monitoring visits to support their efforts. Other superintendents report that the work that surrounds the Catholic Student Achievement visits has been referenced as being an effective way to engage in healthy dialogue around evidence informed decision making to support best practices during these visits. With this being the case, the extension of learning here suggests that similar such dialogue take place with schools and staffs who are not formally engaged in the Catholic School Student Achievement Visit process. This may in fact be the case however it was not indicated as such in the survey responses.

The assistant superintendents report how they reference data as a key support to their efforts with staff on all levels. Opportunities to root practice and new learning for system leaders in current research at professional development sessions offered by the assistant superintendents are referenced. Further, members of this team indicate that school leaders involved in the Catholic School Student Achievement Visit process have seen the importance of using key data indicators to identify urgent student learning needs. With that, school improvement teams have started this revised process this year and have come to appreciate that this work is not easy and requires time. The general feeling is that school improvement teams are moving away from determining "next steps" based on a "hunch" to setting up collaborative inquiries based on urgent student learning needs which are determined after reviewing and understanding the data.

At the level of the school leader, consistent reference is made to the concept of transparency in the process. From the data collection to the data interpretation to the decisions and actions to follow, school leaders reference their direct involvement alongside staff in every step of the school improvement planning process. They also indicate that a highly collaborative discussion with the school improvement team involving the analysis of current data with the intent to identify trends and greatest student learning need is a critical step in the planning. Positioned to advance this process through effective inquiry, school leaders must be able to ask the right probing questions that will require staff to look for the right data. Over time, staff must adopt the skill of inquiry as they take on more engaging and active roles in the data analysis and inquiry process. Learning from school improvement team meetings is made transparent to all staff through divisional team and staff meeting sessions. All school staff members are provided with access to copies of the school improvement plan that they understand they share the ownership for and the creation and monitoring of. The actual structure of the team and the communication strategy of the plan vary slightly from school to school and across the elementary and secondary panel. Evidence informed decision-making is further enhanced and brought to the teachers through their regular work in teacher moderation practices. These sessions take place based on actual student generated

work and so the ensuing discussion is based on concrete examples of what has been produced across grades in the school. Discussion must be grounded in knowledge and awareness of best practice and next steps identified are reflective of that knowledge. Decisions are rooted in concrete work, not teacher perceptions. To further share the process among staff, structures of changing composition of school improvement team members through the year and shared presentation of learning formats at staff and divisional meetings are noted in survey responses.

Response from the survey on this specific practice suggests that all levels of leaders have an understanding of the importance of evidence informed decision making and the need to remain current both in the technologies available to gather the data but more importantly in gathering the right data and using it properly to inform the school improvement planning process.

g)   Ground interactions with, and advice to, trustees in sound evidence

Leaders across the system were asked to respond to the question, how do you use data as evidence when interacting with your superintendent? When preparing reports for the stakeholders in your community (parents, superintendents, trustees, director)?

Results from the survey on the system level regarding this specific practice is consistent with responses from the previous section of this report that indicate that data, and specifically, the right data is used to support findings and proposed actions at all times across the hierarchy of the leadership. For this portion of the survey, a response from the trustee representative indicates that reports coming forward to the board be complete, timely and useful in terms of supporting decision-making. In addition, the trustee reports that this data be used to assess strengths and weaknesses in specific board initiatives with particular attention to the board's Equal Opportunity initiatives – our highest needs communities of learners.

At the school leadership level, responses were similar in the sense that consistent reference was made to the use of EQAO and report card data to inform decisions. Little reference was made to the day to day student achievement data which we all know does in fact play a greater role in decision making and is used in schools to inform decisions. What was strongly highlighted was where school administration used data with the superintendent to better profile the site specific needs of the school. This statement captures the essence of most survey feedback and represents the unique nature of the needs across the system. The data serves as evidence of needs when advocating for resources, support staff and most importantly, the need for the professional intervention of current teaching staff to best address the identified learning need. In some cases, opportunities for this type of explicit sharing were not afforded due to the nature of monitoring visits with the superintendent or some other detractor that took away from the opportunity for this rich professional exchange.

By nature of the school composition, the possibility for a monitoring visit to be disrupted exists, but efforts to reschedule should be actively pursued so we collectively continue to emphasis the importance of our roles in our primary system goal of raising student achievement. To support the validity of the importance of these professional monitoring sessions, a suggestion to support the system moving forward is the creation of an electronic school improvement planning template that is readily accessible anywhere on the system network for review and discussion at all times. This type of transparency enhances the level of accountability to the process for the purpose of remaining current in addressing the greatest student learning need. This will also eliminate the need for large amounts of time to be focused by school administrators on preparing for a site visit since the plan and corresponding data can be updated on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, the evidence will always be on hand if structures like the use of student, staff and school data binders are put in place. These recommendations come from looking at both prior experience and some of the input shared in the survey, which suggests a need for the sharing of best practices across schools to a much greater extent. If it is working effectively in some locations, others may not be aware of how it may better support their efforts and therefore it should be shared – further supporting the suggestion to open up networking opportunities for school level leaders (principal, vice principal, assistant to the principal, principal intern) on a formal basis.

Finally, regarding the use of data, it is consistently articulated that having multiple sources of evidence is very important to help inform decisions, but equally as important is the fact that students should be afforded multiple ways to demonstrate their learning. Differentiated assessment practices must be in place to allow students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning while at the same time accounting for the variety of learning styles reaching out to each child's preferred demonstration mode. Consensus on the fact that data at the school level needs to be simple, easily accessible and readily available is clear.

The barriers standing between accessing the data and interpreting the data must be removed when they should surface. The most significant barrier identified from all survey participants is this concept of the use of teacher professional judgment in assessment and evaluation which in some cases suggests that there is a disconnect between the intentional efforts of school level administrators to include a wider range of data sources and the professional judgment of teachers to use their professional judgment to exclude data as they deem appropriate. This is a reality and the outcome of a political and collective agreement type of challenge that needs to be addressed on a provincial level sooner rather than later. Where the improvement planning process is succeeding is where all stakeholders are in alignment and teachers have embraced their role in the process for the sake of the learner.

CONCLUSIONS

As a district we are continuously working towards improvement. We recognize the importance of the need to implement goals and actions to support student achievement. We have also recognized that in order to measure the effectiveness of our BIPSA plan, we require the right data. As we have worked with, reviewed and evaluated our BIPSA over the last number of years, we have questioned how we were measuring the success of our plan. What data were we using? Was it reliable? Was it the right data? Should we be using other sources? Were our leaders aware of all potential sources of data, which could be used to track improvement plans? This impetus called us to implement visioning around how we move our plan forward while at the same time, support our school level leaders in understanding the need to gather the right data through their own SIPSA efforts. Senior administration and principals have been working to develop a greater awareness of the importance of using data at family of school meetings and professional development sessions as a way to develop greater understanding of the available data tools and of how to use the data to gather insight into what the learning needs of the students we serve are. The use of guest speakers has helped to identify for school leaders current approaches that are supportive to school improvement planning efforts. Previously mentioned are system level professional development in the form of hosting hands-on sessions for looking at tracking data - EQAO web tools, sessions on Scopus, online webinar on the Tell them From Me survey have all been provided. It is acknowledged that there are still gaps with respect to leaders at all levels having a full command of effectively using data. This is on-going work that needs to be monitored and supported by all leaders in the organization and recognition of our own individual needs must not be negated. All leaders are brought to the table as co-learners and this open to learning stance will serve us well as we continually engage in our collective work.

Noted consistently in this case study is the fact that improvement effort for our system in these two characteristics of the Strong Districts and Their Leadership work will come as a result of recognition by members of senior administration that greater and more effective use of data was required to measure effectiveness of school level and board plans. This journey of continued precision will help us get to the core of what matters most as it relates to enhancing student achievement. In addition to this area for growth, credited in the survey response for promoting professional exchanges is the work accomplished with the Catholic School Student Success Achievement Visit process. Similarly attributed to our success is the learning that is generated as a result of Student Success visits. Schools involved in the processes credit the processes for assisting in moving the school forward, supporting staff in more professional exchanges, affording schools with release time to engage in collaborative processes that staff were able to take ownership for. Learning from the Catholic School Student Success Achievement Visit and Student

Success visits indicated that schools were not using data to its greatest potential. Principals also identified the need to delve into data more deeply in order to determine applicable collaborative inquiries and more accurately develop and apply successful theories of action. To support these efforts, leaders in the organization begin to better moderate authentic student generated work and the data that it is telling us.

Educators became more proficient in identifying assessment tasks that would provide meaningful data to the planning team on how the improvement process is impacting student achievement. Thus our focus on schools developing collaborative inquiry work led to a need to better understand the importance of using data and changing the way we gather and use it. This remains a work in progress.

Our constant review of planning and inquiry efforts on a system level have also lead to recent revisions to our BIPSA which will require specific data to be collected and monitored and as a system we see this as a critical turning point that will help us to better measure the progress of our plan more accurately.

Supported best by the changes in practice taking shape around the system where data collection and use is concerned is the fact that there is a much greater awareness across the system of the importance placed on data, its collection, its use and its overall intended purpose as it relates to the work we do daily. As a result, we have been able to increase our own individual levels of accountability when it comes to monitoring and looking for implementation strategies and best practices. The use of properly identified data in action plans is becoming more evident from year to year. Consistent modeling of and an emphasis on high expectations for the usage and analysis of data be done throughout professional learning cycles, when reviewing BIPSA and SIPSAs, and remaining central to monitoring visits between principals (and their SIP teams where possible) and superintendents will ensure its effective use.

SUGGESTIONS AND KEY LEARNINGS

The key to understanding and preparing to examine the status of these characteristics in a system must be founded on the fact that this is a journey that will take time. Our board, like many others, has been actively working with these characteristics on an ongoing basis for years but more recently has focused efforts on building capacity while learning about how to use the tools most effectively at the same time. This will take time but if well planned will ensure competent and capable use of data as it relates to all aspects of school improvement.

Working through the process of getting better at more effectively using data has endured cultural changes and we confidently report that we are at a place where the way schools and the district looks at data sources is in alignment, how we live and breathe its use every day is under continued and conscious refinement.

Success in moving the organization forward on this front requires all stakeholders working together, monitoring results, and being accountable to one another for the data in order for change to happen. We must all adopt the belief that by tracking and monitoring, all stakeholders share the key role of ensuring that improvement happens - and more importantly that each responds to make changes in their own practices when necessary.

LEARNING AND EXTENSIONS FOR OUR SYSTEM

The following is a list of strategies that must be considered as a result of the learning generated through the process of preparing this case study. If the survey feedback is to be put to its most effective use, senior administration should consider the following:

1) Revised electronic SIPSA template aligned to revised BIPSA and a principal data-gathering template for the classroom and school level.

2) The creation of supportive guiding questions provided to school and system leaders to support dialogue during monitoring visits at the system, school and classroom levels.

3) Sharing of the findings with senior administration for their August visioning session.

4) Sharing of the findings with the Strong District and Their Leadership project team.

5) Sharing of the findings with the leadership group facilitators with next steps on roll out of findings to leadership group participants which will see them come to monthly meetings prepared to discuss their involvement in and leadership for aspects of the school SIPSA and collaborative inquiry work that has transpired during the previous month.

6) Regularly scheduled networking opportunities for school and system leaders as partners on the journey through school improvement efforts.

7) Suggested use of student, class and school data binders/portfolios to track progress over time using sample formats already in place in some schools in our system.

8) Discussions at the level of senior administration begin around looking at the remaining seven characteristics of the Ontario Leadership Framework's District Effectiveness Framework and as a system where we find ourselves in their developmental stages to give us a more complete system picture.