

## **Ontario Leadership Strategy: Summary of the Mentoring and Coaching Pilot Evaluation**

*Mentoring for Newly Appointed School Leaders is a key component of the Ontario Leadership Strategy. The strategy is designed to ensure that Ontario's education system attracts and develops leaders of the highest possible quality, and acknowledges the critical role they play in supporting student well-being and achievement. This document summarizes the findings of a Mentoring and Coaching pilot evaluation which served as an important foundation for the province-wide rollout of Mentoring and Coaching in June 2008.*

### **Context**

In 2007-08 a Mentoring and Coaching pilot took place in twenty Ontario school boards, including:

- Algoma District School Board
- Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board
- Avon-Maitland District School Board
- Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario
- Conseil scolaire catholique de district des Grandes Rivières
- Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud
- Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien
- Halton Catholic District School Board
- Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
- Huron Perth Catholic District School Board
- Keewatin-Patricia District School Board
- Limestone District School Board
- Northeastern Catholic District School Board
- Rainy River District School Board
- Thames Valley District School Board
- Toronto Catholic District School Board
- Toronto District School Board
- Trillium Lakelands District School Board
- Upper Grand District School Board
- York Catholic District School Board

The Ontario principal, supervisory officer and director associations were active participants in the pilot which involved approximately 800 newly appointed leaders.

The pilot explored a range of models, drawing on Canadian and international research and experience with mentoring. The ministry contracted Parker Management Consulting, Inc. to conduct an evaluation of the pilot to determine the impact of the models, or components of models, on leadership development and leadership effectiveness, and to identify critical success factors. The evaluation was intended to inform future ministry directions.

Data sources for the evaluation included interviews and focus groups with provincial associations and pilot participants including mentors, protégés, project leads and senior administrators in the pilot boards. Two rounds of site visits were made to the twenty pilot boards. A web-based survey provided rich data from a large number of mentors and protégés who reported on their experience during the pilot. Data from two provincial sessions, bringing together teams from all participating boards and provincial associations, completed the data set.

## Benefits of Mentoring and Coaching

Overall, participants perceived the pilot as a success, and reported benefits to both themselves and the broader system.

### **Individual benefits included:**

- Support in learning the day-to-day skills involved in leading a school
- Increased confidence
- Better understanding of the role
- Opportunities for professional reflection.

### **System benefits included:**

- Improved performance of new administrators
- Capacity building
- Support of system priorities
- Access to external ideas and support.

## Summary of Findings

Mentoring/coaching programs are generally seen as “win-win” and are positively received. They can, however, be ineffective if they are unfocused or if they are limited to ‘buddy programs’.

Paying attention to the underpinnings and principles of effective design and implementation for Mentoring is important. Mentoring implemented as an integral part of a well developed succession plan and leadership development strategy, linked to system priorities, will be a powerful contribution to improved leadership at the school and district level and thus to improved student achievement.

Based on the results of the evaluation, several effective practices have emerged for school boards/authorities that may be at different stages in implementing Mentoring for Newly Appointed School Leaders, as summarized in the following table.

Component	Effective practices
<b>System/Board Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentoring is supported and communicated as a priority by system leaders</li> <li>• Mentoring is closely connected with system priorities and ongoing work of the board</li> <li>• Clarity about goals and objectives for Mentoring, both short and longer term</li> <li>• Mentoring is closely connected to the board succession plan and leadership development strategy</li> <li>• Agreed upon general focus or “curriculum” for</li> </ul>

	<p>mentoring/coaching – linked to board/system priorities and leadership development expectations (based on Ontario Leadership Framework)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity about what would serve as indicators of success for Mentoring in the board (links to monitoring and evaluation below)</li> <li>• System/board capacity available to take on, lead and support Mentoring</li> <li>• A person or group (e.g. steering committee) has assigned responsibility for the planning, coordination and oversight of Mentoring implementation; time and resources are formally allocated.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Planning and Design</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criteria for the selection of mentors (whether they are volunteers or are requested to serve, and whether they are practicing or retired administrators)</li> <li>• Process for matching (taking account of needs, strengths, input from participants, flexibility)</li> <li>• Systematic structured professional learning for mentor/coaches, includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understanding mentoring role</li> <li>- development of skills for mentoring/coaching</li> <li>- understanding of mentoring and coaching relationships.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Preparation of mentees, including understanding of mentoring relationships and of coaching process</li> <li>• Structure or framework for mentor/mentee interaction (suggestions for agreements or contracts, learning plan, setting out expectations), continuum from informal to formal</li> <li>• Allocation of time with reinforcement from senior administration that (and why) mentor/mentee meetings are a priority.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Implementation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation strategies – the how – are clearly articulated and understood by participants</li> <li>• Continued visible support of senior administrators/leaders (in boards, this would be director)</li> <li>• Ongoing connection of mentoring/coaching with system goals and priorities</li> <li>• Participants have access to expertise and knowledge as needed and appropriate (could be through principal associations or other organizations if not already present in board)</li> <li>• Clarity about timelines and process for implementation</li> <li>• Maintaining “push” and momentum, especially when other issues/agendas threaten time for mentoring/coaching</li> <li>• Structure and consistency in taking time for</li> </ul>

	<p>mentoring/coaching; meetings are regular and are not cancelled</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing monitoring/feedback to identify problems in early implementation and quick action to address these.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement on intended/expected outcomes (short term and medium term)</li> <li>• Development and agreement on indicators of progress or success</li> <li>• Good quality, appropriate and easy to use instruments/methods for gathering data</li> <li>• Consistent and professional data collection and summary/analysis</li> <li>• Understanding of nature of data, including limits and what can reasonably be concluded.</li> </ul>