

Mid-Year Progress Update Conversation 2009-2010

Summary

All boards participated in reviewing progress with regional ministry teams in January 2010. A member of the regional team entered the information into a recording template which was then submitted to the Student Achievement Division research and evaluation teams for aggregation and analysis. Processes for asking the questions and recording responses varied across meetings. A provincial level summary of the responses recorded during the conversations follows. Please note that each section does not reflect responses from 100% of the boards. The quantitative data reported is based on 72 boards – both English language and French language. Comments are derived from the 60 English language conversations while comments from the 12 French language conversations are in an accompanying document.

A. Overall Progress K-12

Boards were invited to comment on their overall progress towards improving student achievement since September 2009. Recurring areas of focus mentioned during the board conversations included:

- *Aligning efforts* within and across the Board Improvement Plan (BIP), School Improvement Plan, School Effectiveness Framework, Student Success Continuum (used in the former Student Success Annual Action Plan), and along a K-12 perspective.
- *Instructional leadership and capacity building*, including modelling instructional leadership at the systems level; recognising and supporting the key role of the principal; and job-embedded professional learning with a focus on teaching-learning critical pathways (TLCP), differentiated instruction (DI) and coaching.
- *Using data to guide and inform practice, set priorities and allocate resources.*

Some responses commented on the process of the board conversations/visits—the timing in particular.

B. K-12 Board Improvement Plans

In the fall, boards developed goals for each of the four pillars: Literacy, Numeracy, Pathways, and Community, Culture and Caring (CCC). During the mid-year conversation, boards discussed their progress towards meeting these goals and the evidence to support it. Overall, boards were confident in their progress, with at least 85% of boards reporting some progress toward meeting their 2009-2010 BIP goals. Comments from boards noted that creating SMART goals for the Pathways and CCC pillars was a recent requirement. These goals were frequently limited to secondary schools. Additionally, many boards indicated that constructing SMART goals for the CCC pillar was challenging.

Boards, when asked to predict their 2009-10 EQAO performance for the mid-year conversation, used a variety of approaches in preparing their predictions. The aggregated predictions for elementary assessments (based on 52 of 60 English Language Boards and 10 of 12 French-language Boards) indicate that 71% of students will achieve Level 3 and 4 on the combined Grades 3 and 6 EQAO assessments - an increase in overall achievement by 4%. Board predictions ranged from 50% to 88% for the 6 assessment areas.

Boards projected the following results for 2009-10 for five (of the 18) secondary school assessments/indicators:

- Percentage of Grade 9 academic students at levels 3 and 4 on EQAO math to remain at 77%
- Percentage of Grade 9 applied students at levels 3 and 4 on EQAO math to increase by 4% from 2008-09 to 42%
- Percentage of students fully successful on OSSLT to fall by 5% from 2008-09 to 80%
- Credit accumulation in Grade 9 of eight or more credits to increase by 3% from 2008-09 to 84%
- Credit accumulation in Grade 10 of 16 or more credits to increase by 4% from 2008-09 to 75%

Comments were recorded regarding the BIP SMART goals: degree and evidence of progress, and predicted outcomes. These comments were analyzed holistically. Four common themes were identified.

1. *Difficulty in making predictions or measuring progress:*
 - Aggregating predictions and/or setting board-level SMART goals were perceived as not adequately reflecting schools' needs and/or contexts.
 - Boards had trouble using data in the process and felt it was insufficient or not appropriate.
 - The data from different sources provided different pictures of how the board was progressing.
 - Some boards had trouble with the distinction between a 'target' and a 'prediction'.
2. *Boards used a wide variety of data within this process:*
 - Teacher feedback/surveys, feedback from teacher moderation of student work, student feedback, principal or superintendent feedback, EQAO and OSSLT data, credit accumulation and data from common assessment tools.
3. *Use of improvement strategies/activities to justify predictions/progress:*
 - Implementation strategies including teacher moderation, coaching, networking, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Teaching Learning Critical Pathways (TLCP), and Collaborative Inquiry for Learning Mathematics (CIL-M).

- Instructional strategies, such as, implementation of differentiated instruction, integrated literacy instruction, problem-solving strategies or gradual release of responsibility.
4. *Use of a monitoring strategy to justify predictions/progress:*
- Including superintendent walkthroughs, System Improvement Team monitoring, School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) Lead monitoring, district reviews, school self-assessments or monitoring done by principals or subject coaches.

C. Ontario Focused Intervention Partnerships (OFIP)

Forty boards commented on the degree of progress they are making in OFIP 1/2 Schools. Of these, 31 boards indicated making “progress as expected” and six boards, making “more progress than expected”. Only two boards indicated that they were “progressing less than expected”. The most frequent sources of evidence of progress being made were: supervisor feedback, individual school visits, SEF Lead feedback, School Improvement Team feedback, teacher feedback, coach/other feedback, and principal feedback. Boards reported they supported OFIP schools by using coaches/consultants to support schools, developing and involving schools in networks, working on assessment to inform classroom actions, working on teacher moderation and the TLCP process, and working in areas of literacy or numeracy, e.g. balanced literacy, literacy block, numeracy block, common assessment tools etc.

For the OFIP Schools in the Middle initiative, 59 boards indicated the degree of progress being made. Of the 59 boards, 42 boards identified making “progress as expected”, while 13 boards identified making “more progress than expected”. The most frequent sources of evidence of progress were supervisor feedback, system team feedback, principal feedback, teacher feedback, School Improvement Team feedback, SEF Lead feedback, coach/other feedback.

Actions taken by boards to support these schools include: self-assessment, focus on student achievement, student data strategies, school-based PLCs, principal PLCs, short-term planning, teaching moderation, DI, TLCPs, human resources support (e.g. coaches), and school networks. Boards also reported that the school support they provide to the OFIP 1/2 and the Schools in the Middle are blended in a holistic strategy. Boards are using an inquiry-based approach using various sources of data to inform school and classroom action. Additionally, boards in the Student Work Study (SWS) Initiative report using SWS teachers to inform their actions and build capacity, specifically for Schools in the Middle. Lastly, boards reported that they often use various Ministry-supported teacher professional learning strategies, like TLCP, CIL-M and Student Work Study as means to further support professional learning.

D. OFIP Tutoring and Tutors in the Classroom

The most commonly mentioned criteria that boards used in allocating OFIP Tutoring funding were: giving opportunities to all schools, focusing on small

schools, basing funding on applications by schools, focusing on board-identified schools, aligning with specific programs, and basing allocation on grade/division. Boards reported diverse ways in which they used the tutoring program, including funding after school or summer camp programs, and identifying specific populations of students for support, e.g. students working at Level 2 in Grade 3 and/or 6, students identified through report cards, aboriginal students or students based on a social index of challenging circumstances. Additionally, boards collected evidence of program success through mainly three sources: increased student confidence or efficacy, common assessments e.g. developmental reading assessments, and teacher feedback. As in the previous years, logistical issues like transportation in rural areas and staffing the program, as well as concerns from the teacher federations, proved challenging.

Boards identified similar criteria when allocating funding for the Tutors in the Classroom initiative. These were: giving opportunities to all schools, basing allocation on need or achievement, responding to applications by schools, and focusing on board-identified schools. Comments indicated that the program was implemented in diverse ways: funding after-school or summer camp programs, identifying specific populations of students for support, for example students identified through report card grades as working at Level 2 in Grade 3 and/or 6, aboriginal students or students based on an index of challenging circumstances. Logistical challenges like transportation and staffing the programs were noted.

E. Student Success Strategy

Overall, board responses indicate that:

- The majority of boards are implementing and building capacity at a board and school level in all or most areas of the Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy (SS/L18).
- Most boards are connecting the various SS/L18 strategies mentioned and can provide examples of how they are part of the boards' programs and language with the exception of the Nine Student Voice Indicators.
- Examples of how the SS/L18 strategies are utilized at the board- and school-level are wide-ranging and varied.

Differentiated Instruction Professional Learning Strategy (DI)

It was recorded that the majority of boards are building their capacity in providing job-embedded professional learning that supports the development of educator capacity for differentiating instruction. Boards who were recorded as sustaining their capacity in this area indicated that they are participating in PLCs, accessing coaches/consultants (co-teaching, co-planning, modelling), and using Ministry DI resources as well as creating their own.

Mathematics and Literacy Professional Learning Strategy - Mathematics Instruction

It was recorded that in most boards some or the majority of teachers are provided with job-embedded professional learning to build leadership for

mathematics. Those boards who stated that all of their teachers (both elementary and secondary) are trained in this area have either school- or board-based program coaches/itinerant teachers that are ready to provide support to teachers for co-planning, co-teaching and providing in-services in the use of manipulatives, technology, and DI.

Mathematics and Literacy Professional Learning Strategy - Literacy Instruction

Almost all recorded board responses indicate that they are providing the majority or all of their teachers with job-embedded professional learning to build leadership in literacy, specifically in the areas of adolescent literacy instruction capacity building in cross-curricular literacy, subject specific literacy, explicit strategy instruction, and DI. Similar to mathematics, it was recorded that those boards who have provided all their teachers with job embedded professional learning have either school-based or board literacy instructors, coaches, consultants and/or coordinators supporting teachers through regular meetings, teams and/or professional learning sessions.

Student Success School and Cross Panel Teams

It was recorded that:

- The majority of boards are sustaining their capacity in student success school teams by identifying, tracking, monitoring and providing interventions for all students who require support.
- Almost all boards are building or sustaining their capacity for using credit rescue to support students. In many boards, DI is being used as an effective proactive intervention.
- Almost all boards have education and career pathways planning support in place for all students in all their secondary schools. My Blueprint, Career Cruising, and/or board-based future planning websites were frequently mentioned as services available for all students for pathways planning.

Credit Recovery

The majority of recorded board responses indicate that Credit Recovery is fully in place in all their schools. The use of credit rescue/intervention, e-learning, summer courses, and continuing education, among others, were mentioned as the reasons for the slower pace of credits being recovered. Staffing in smaller schools (including need of students to be supported while taking e-learning courses), teachers' resistance, union issues, and inconsistencies in assessment practices were recorded as barriers to the growth of credit recovery programs.

Student Voice

It was recorded that almost all boards have the awareness of Student Voice and the Nine Student Voice Indicators in place in all of their secondary schools, although, of the 37 comments recorded, only one third specifically mentioned the Nine Student Voice indicators including some that said awareness is limited. The majority of recorded board responses indicate that they are building their

capacity in having student voice inform their Community, Culture and Caring strategies. A wide range and number of activities were recorded, including SpeakUp projects, Student Voice forums, Minister's Student Advisory Council, Tell Them From Me and other surveys, Student Councils, Aboriginal youth groups, Ontario Leadership Camps, policy development, etc.

Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)

It was recorded that in a majority of boards SHSM is helping to change school culture by: honouring all four pathways, increasing program choices for students, and increasing inter-discipline collaboration between teachers. There is less focus on SHSM helping to change school culture by developing more links to the community. Recorded comments from boards mention an improved understanding of different pathways and student engagement, and a sense of community and partnership (including local industries, co-terminous boards and colleges/universities). Areas of concern include the size and location of schools as well as addressing the needs of more at-risk students.

Expansion of Coop

It was recorded that almost all boards are offering Coop through a variety of scheduling options in all of their secondary schools. Comments showed a variety of Coop opportunities available to students, including Bruce Power, Youth & Policing, e-Cooperative Education, International Coop, summer school, alternative education, Homebuilders, Hospital, Retirement home, Military, continuous Coop, morning Coop, etc. Comments also included a focus on Coop for specific student populations, e.g. Mennonite, special education, community living, English Language Learners (ELL), and at risk students.

Dual Credits

About half of recorded board responses showed that dual credit programs are made available to students in all or most of their secondary schools. Various partners were mentioned including colleges, night schools, and co-terminous boards. Areas of study include welding, hairdressing, outdoor navigation, motive power, carpentry, technical design, law, cook/chef, Early Childhood Education, mining, and human resources.

F. School Effectiveness Framework (SEF)

Elementary Schools

Most of the recorded responses indicate that the SEF process provided significant assistance to elementary schools in identifying priorities and actions. Comments indicated that the majority of boards found the SEF process a very useful self-assessment tool in providing information to develop a School Improvement Plan specific to students' needs and to build a shared understanding of the need for collaboration and 'professional talk' about students and learning.

Secondary Schools

Approximately one-third of board responses indicated that the SEF process provided significant assistance to their secondary schools in identifying priorities and actions, with another third of responses that indicated the SEF process somewhat assisted in this area. Board examples of SEF use were clustered mainly around five themes: building awareness; using SEF as a school self-assessment tool for School Improvement Planning; planning for board-level K-12 SEF implementation; conducting a pilot for developing a secondary District Review; and using SEF as a process for the Board's K-12 School Improvement Framework.

School Self-Assessments and District Reviews

From the recorded responses, it is clear that there are more elementary school self-assessments and district reviews planned for 2009-10 than for secondary schools. At the secondary level, recorded responses from few school boards indicated that they have an established K-12 district review process in place and most boards stated they were building awareness, researching and systematically planning policies/strategies for implementation of SEF at the secondary level within the K-12 framework. Those boards that have experience with district reviews stated that having principals involved had a high impact on the process and increased the profile of the school improvement planning process.

Plans for the District Review for 2009-10 include:

- Building on and further refining the existing processes in order to become more focused at each participating site
- Engaging in dialogue with school teams about the goals articulated in the school plan, next steps (including the use of selected high yield instructional tools), and evidence of improved instructional practice
- Determining the specific criteria that will be used by the Review Team as they observe learning-teaching interactions.

G. Gaps in Student Achievement

Aboriginal

Seventy-one percent of boards identified aboriginal students as a group for attention regarding achievement gaps. Board actions to address achievement gaps were as follows: bringing in experts including aboriginal elders, facilitators, consultants, mentors, and resource teachers to inform practices and assist individual students; increasing awareness through native-focused classes, units, and early literacy/oral language programs and through differentiated instruction; providing resources inside and outside the classroom and online; encouraging development of an aboriginal community within the school, with specific resources, events and meeting spaces for partnering/networking with local reserves and aboriginal communities; encouraging self identification and conducting student and class profiles; and conducting professional development and capacity building for teachers and staff. Boards are active at different levels

with some implementing all of the above actions and other implementing one or none of the above actions.

English Language Learners (ELL)

Students who are ELL were also identified by 43 school boards. Board actions to address the achievement gaps of ELL students include: professional development for teachers in specific subjects and grades; ELL-specific resources for students and teachers, including dual-language materials; individual support for students who require it, including preparing for the OSSLT; settlement workers in schools and reception centres for new students; and differentiated instruction, specific teaching strategies, adaptations of lessons.

Gender

A large number of boards, 61, identified gender as an area of student achievement gaps. Board actions to address achievement gaps include: differentiated instruction; single gender classes; boys' literacy focus/learning strategies using specific resources, including non-fiction reading and writing and new technologies; and data analysis from many resources (EQAO, internal assessments, etc.) to examine gender differences.

Students with Special Needs

Fifty-six boards identified students with special education needs as a group of students for attention in regard to achievement gaps. Board actions include: use of assistive technologies and accommodations; professional development/training and use of special education resource teachers, educational assistants, coaches and facilitators; encouraging participation in EQAO testing and using this and other assessment data to inform individual education plans for students; differentiated instruction; and individualized programs to meet the specific needs of special education students at schools.

Other

Boards also identified additional and board-specific groups for attention regarding achievement, such as, the special needs of specific populations, for example Mennonite students, students who are Crown Wards, students living in poverty, and students taking applied level courses.

H. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

PLCs were commonly referenced as school and board collaborative teams that work in a focused way. Boards outlined a variety of types of PLCs in both elementary and secondary schools, including: divisional and departmental teams; cross school teams brought together to focus on an area of school need; school leadership teams with teacher representation; head of departments, senior leadership and Student Success Teacher teams; School Improvement teams for elementary schools; and School Success teams for secondary schools. Boards also identified a variety of foci in elementary and secondary schools, including: TLCs, teacher moderation, data driven decision-making, targeted support of

specific student populations, and cross departmental teams focused on whole school needs, e.g. DI or literacy across the curriculum. Additionally, French-language boards noted the formation of cross-curricular teams.

I. Teaching and Learning Networks

Seventy-nine percent of boards reported the majority of elementary schools are engaged in teaching and learning networks, while 71% indicated the majority of secondary schools are engaged in teaching and learning networks. School networking was reported as being more established amongst elementary schools than secondary schools; however, boards reported that networks are widely used in both secondary and elementary schools. Teacher participation in networks at the school level varies for both elementary and secondary schools.

The family of schools structure was frequently reported as a structure from which networks are being established. MISA and EDU GAINS were both frequently cited when discussing networks at the board and school level. EDU GAINS were not cited in the French-language boards as starting points for networks. MISA was cited in reference to a wide variety of strategies including: supporting action research projects, data informed instructional practices in schools, data informed decision-making in schools and boards, and data collection in boards and schools. Lastly, boards reported that the focus of networks in elementary and secondary schools vary. Some of the frequently reported areas of focus include: TLCP and teacher moderation; leadership capacity; collaborative inquiry; data driven decision-making; student-centred needs and targeted support of specific student populations; and DI.

I. Working Together

During this section of the conversation, boards indicated that they appreciate the support and funding provided through the Ministry of Education and they expressed a desire to “stay the course” and a belief that, “change takes time”. They indicated that existing funding, professional development, and structures (e.g. BIP templates) should continue. Areas for improvement offered were: a need to continue to align strategies, initiatives, branches, K-12, etc.; a need for providing consistent communication and messages from the Ministry – by setting clear priorities and expectations, and providing feedback and direction in a timely manner; aligning the timing of the mid-year conversation to better fit the board and school planning cycle; and finally, that the timing and number of Ministry year-end reports continues to be a challenge.