

# RESEARCH *in* BRIEF

## EVALUATION OF THE ONTARIO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S ONTARIO LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

School leadership was identified in 2008 as a key supporting condition for achieving the province's three core education priorities: improved levels of student achievement, reduced gaps in student achievement, and increased public confidence in publicly funded education. The development of school district leadership can improve the ability of leaders to act together within and across districts to implement the three core priorities and provide the supporting conditions for learning.

"Transparency and clarity of steps in the formal leadership-track process have generated excitement and enthusiasm for leadership development; vice-principal applications are up 60 per cent."

*– a Board Leadership Development Strategy member*

### SNAPSHOT

In 2006 the Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) was established as a means of engaging education leaders in collaborative deliberations about how to foster leadership development across the province.

The Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS) was launched by the Ministry of Education in 2008 as a comprehensive plan of action designed to support student achievement and well-being by attracting and developing skilled and passionate leaders. The OLS is grounded in the belief that significant progress towards the province's three core priorities can be accomplished by directly improving the quality of school and district leadership, supporting leadership development, and collaborating with other ministries to improve conditions for effective teaching and learning in schools and classrooms.

In the fall of 2009, the ministry committed to embedding the Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) – part of the OLS – in virtually all of its initiatives and resources aimed at improving teaching and learning.



Also launched in 2009 was the Leadership Implementation Team (LIT). It is an internal ministry committee appointed to lead the discourse on leadership development across the ministry and to ensure that the relevant ministerial activities are embracing the key priorities of the OLS.

Other initiatives within the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS) are:

- Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)
- Mentoring for Newly Appointed School and System Leaders
- Principal Performance Appraisal
- Leading Student Achievement: Networks for Learning
- Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS)
- Executive Programs for Supervisory Officers and Directors
- Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)
- Principal Congress
- Minister's Principal Reference Group
- Canada's Outstanding Principals

As the OLS neared the end of its three-year mandate, a comprehensive evaluation of the strategy was conducted under the direction of Professor Emeritus Dr. Kenneth Leithwood, leadership advisor to the ministry. The purpose of the evaluation was both to document progress and to identify features that need to be refined in phase two of the strategy.

## METHODOLOGY

- Each of the OLS initiatives was evaluated to determine the degree to which it had succeeded in meeting specific and measurable objectives, and to judge the scale of its impact.
- The objectives were then linked to one or more of three overarching objectives (A: improving the quality of school and district leadership directly; B: supporting the leadership development efforts of educational partners; and C: working jointly with other ministry divisions to improve the conditions for effective teaching and learning in schools).
- A rating scale was used to indicate the overall impact of each initiative, from “minimally successful on a small scale” (a rating of 1) to “very successful on a large scale” (a rating of 5).
- Finally, through a simple calculation, an overall rating of the success of the OLS was assigned based on ratings for each of the three overarching objectives.

*Note:* The ratings from this initial evaluation of the OLS initiatives must be viewed in the context of circumstantial factors, such as the relatively brief period of implementation, the difficulty of measuring certain types of effects directly (e.g., the effects of mentoring on instructional leadership practices in the field), and the absence of baseline data (e.g., the extent to which the availability of mentoring might attract candidates to a leadership role).

## KEY FINDINGS

- There was a high level of stakeholder satisfaction with the Ontario Leadership Strategy.
- There has been significant progress in implementing the Board Leadership Development Strategy across all boards.
- There is a high degree of “alignment in leadership activities undertaken across the ministry”.
- Of the three charted objectives, objective C (working jointly with other ministry divisions to improve the conditions for effective teaching and learning in schools) rated the highest (with a score of 4.5 on a 5-point scale).

## RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

### ***Impact***

The evaluation pointed to a lack of data on depth of impact – that is, on the impact that leadership development initiatives have had on the actual practices of leaders in the field. For future evaluations of the OLS, the Leadership Development Branch of the ministry plans to implement a data collection process that will provide insight into depth of impact without complicating data collection demands on school boards.

### ***Deeper Implementation***

In the future, once there has been more time for all initiatives to show results, and as more data are collected, the extent to which the OLS initiatives fulfil their mandated goals will be more evident.

### ***Capacity and Facility***

The evaluation recommended development in the following three areas:

- fostering the use of research to build leadership capacity
- facilitating alignment among leaders at the provincial, district, and school levels
- improving utilization of the system’s collective leadership knowledge to further the ministry’s three core priorities

## WHAT IS ONTARIO DOING NOW TO SUPPORT THE PROVINCE’S EDUCATION LEADERS?

The Ministry of Education collaborates with and engages its stakeholders in policy development and implementation to meet the needs of the field and enhance accountability, as is evidenced in the many initiatives of the OLS, such as Leading Student Achievement and Principal Performance Appraisal.

Building on a research project with directors in the southwest region of the province, the IEL is working with Dr. Leithwood and directors of education to finalize a revised set of effective district practices based on Ontario research findings. The research findings will be key elements in focusing leadership development efforts in 2012–13.

Work is also under way to revise the Ontario Leadership Framework to reflect the latest research on leadership development. Dr. Leithwood has undertaken this work and will include findings about effective district practice in the overall leadership framework so that it reflects both individual and organizational leadership practice.

In addition, the ministry is focusing on measuring the impact of leadership development activities and providing benchmarks for districts to support their work in gathering data on the indicators of the impact of their Board Leadership Development Strategy activities.

For an in-depth look at what Ontario is doing to support education leaders, visit the OLS site at: [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/)

## ABOUT THE PRINCIPAL ADVISOR



**Dr. Kenneth Leithwood** is Professor Emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. He is chair of the American Educational Research Association's Leadership and Administration division; co-editor of the journal *Leadership and Policy in Schools*; president of the Canadian Educational Leadership Network; and president of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies. Dr. Leithwood has written over 70 journal articles and his most recent book titles include: *Linking Leadership to Student Learning* (2011) and *Leading School Turnaround: How Successful Leaders Transform Low-Performing Schools* (2010).

## LINKS

Quick Facts: Evaluation of the Strategy, September 2011 – Ontario Ministry of Education  
[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/Evaluation\\_QuickFacts.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/Evaluation_QuickFacts.pdf)

Succession Planning: Schools and School Boards (2008) – Institute for Education Leadership  
[www.education-leadership-ontario.ca/storage/2/1284604393/SuccessionPlanningSummary.pdf](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca/storage/2/1284604393/SuccessionPlanningSummary.pdf)

The K–12 School Effectiveness Framework: A Support for School Improvement and Student Success (2010) – Ontario Ministry of Education  
[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/framework.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/framework.html)

Leading Education: New Supports for Principals and Vice-Principals (2005) – Ontario Ministry of Education  
[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/leadingEducation.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/leadingEducation.html)

## KEYWORDS

*leadership*  
*evaluation*  
*mentoring*  
*education*