



*The CODE Special Education Project
2006 - 2007*

October 2007

Making systems of schools work for all kids is the most important economic development, social justice, and civil society issue of our time. It's complicated and difficult work, but it's the most important thing you could be doing with your life.

Vander Ark, T. (2006). p. xiv.

INTRODUCTION

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education congratulates the leadership team and the many dedicated educators who have worked with the projects of Phase Two of the Special Education Project.

Implementation of the recommendations of Education for All with a focus on instructional strategies to improve student achievement for special needs students and for all students has been a significant challenge and we are pleased to report many successes.

In this second annual report, you will see many examples of the impact of these initiatives. We look forward to consolidating these impacts in the next year.

Frank Kelly,
Executive Director
Council of Ontario Directors of Education
October 2007

We are pleased to report on the growth and excellence of the Year 2 CODE Special Education Projects. The results of the 2006- 2007 Projects have indicated that the achievement of students with special needs has improved and have enhanced better teacher capacity.

These successes are due in large measure to the work of all school board staff involved in the project and the leadership provided by Supervisory Officers with responsibility for Special Education. The work of the monitoring teams supported by the members of the Leadership and Research Team has enhanced these results.

As Co-Chairs we acknowledge and commend the significant contribution made by the CODE Expert Leadership Team: Liliane Laforest, Joan Fullerton, Kathy Schaffer, Brian Finnigan, and Nancy Tully-Peever. In addition, we thank Erica van Roosmalen and Janet Glasspool for the continued support.

We appreciate the efforts of all who have been involved in the project and thank the Ontario Ministry of Education for funding this initiative. Continuing to address the directions in Education for All, will result in the improved achievement for students with special education needs in Ontario.

John Fauteux and Michelle Forge
Co-Chairs, CODE Expert Leadership Team
Special Education Project 2006-2007

October 2007

THE CODE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROJECT 2006 - 2007 FINAL REPORT

ONTARIO CONTEXT

The Ontario government has made improvement in publicly-funded education the centerpiece of its mandate. In May 2005, and again in 2006, the Ministry of Education allocated \$25 million to the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) to develop a plan to support the recommendations in *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students With Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6. (2005)*.

CODE responded to this recognition and mandate from the Ministry of Education by designing The CODE Special Education Project. The CODE projects in Year 1 and Year 2¹ have supported Ontario school boards in making effective use of student achievement data to design instruction for students with special education needs. The projects supported boards in improving student learning, teaching practice, and instructional leadership. The CODE initiative is working toward the development of province-wide professional networks among superintendents with responsibility for special education.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND DESIGN

The Executive Director of CODE appointed joint coordinators to lead the CODE leadership team in 2006-2007. The coordinators maintained the connection with the Advisory Committee that was appointed in Year 1 to represent provincial organizations and special education interest groups. The Ministry of Education continued to be an important partner as the CODE leadership team developed the parameters for the 2006-2007 project.

CODE continued in Year 2 of the project with a funding model that distributed project money to all school systems based on a consistent and equitable application, selection, distribution, reporting and monitoring process.

CODE created a mixed-model research design to collect quantitative, qualitative and reflective activity data from multiple sources. Monitoring teams visited all of the CODE projects during the designated monitoring weeks at the beginning and end of the project year to conduct structured dialogues. Data collection procedures with school and system project team members included a brief profile survey, a stage of implementation reflective activity continuum, and a "digging deeper" activity. Trained monitors reported results using a web-based survey instrument. All boards completed interim and final reports. In 2006-2007 this reporting included data about the achievement of ten students with special needs and reports about the professional learning of ten teachers as a result of the CODE project. A brainstorming "Fish-Bone" activity was used as part of regional meetings, but this data was not collected for research purposes.

The model emphasized making data collection meaningful to school board participants...the data collection activities themselves helped move the knowledge developed and lessons learned beyond the CODE project team to others within and across schools and school boards. [Van Roosmalen, E. (2007). p. 3]

For the full research report, see van Roosmalen, E. (2007). *CODE Special Education Project 2006-2007: Final Research Report*.

CODE also collected data from a separate "Voices from the Field" monitoring project by visiting a school board in each of the regions of the Ministry of Education, including a French Language board.

Seventy-eight CODE special education projects were implemented in 2006-2007. The implementation included all district school boards, partnerships with school authorities and provincial schools, together with their school teams.

¹Year 1 of the CODE Special Education Project was the school year 2005-2006. The project design for Year 2 in 2006-2007 was developed directly from the lessons learned during the initial year of implementation.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report on Year 2 of the CODE Special Education Project is intended to improve educational outcomes for students with special education needs by sharing effective practices. The report also responds to the responsibility that CODE feels to inform the province about lessons learned during Year 2 and about the next steps and policy directions that need to be taken.

This report is intended for supervisory officers with responsibility for special education, to acknowledge the work that has been done across Ontario, to enhance professional networks, and stimulate further action. The report also describes a successful process for implementing change for superintendents with curriculum and school group responsibilities. The report will interest Special Education Advisory Committees and all who care about student learning.

The Year 1 CODE project focussed board efforts on implementation of Education for All and initiated some dramatic changes in beliefs and practices across the province. It fostered collaboration, effective use of data, and differentiated instruction. In order to build upon the learning from Year 1, further challenge thinking and dig deeper in Year 2 of implementation, the CODE leadership team designed a monitoring process to examine with greater refinement how educators learn professionally and how they change their knowledge and practice. The project design recognized that there will not be sustainable gains in student achievement or school improvement without improvement in teaching. At the same time, the project looked beyond individual teachers to focus on "big picture" evidence that districts are developing a community of practice and supportive context to build teaching capacity and improve schools.

A new view of effective schools is emerging in the research....the focus is shifting to what districts must do and what whole systems must do to support student achievement....Leadership must be shared across a wide spectrum of stakeholders and system-wide capacity must be addressed to get sustainable results. The role of senior administrators is crucial to making this work.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2006). p. 1

This Final Report reflects the CODE project design by seeking out deeper reflections on project outcomes, posing questions to further the conversation, and suggesting future directions.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING AS A CORE VALUE

When conducting a province-wide review, it is just as important to reinforce the gains that have been made in project schools as it is to consider plans to widen and deepen the implementation to all schools and classrooms.

It is possible to provide only a small sample of the excellent board reports submitted to CODE. Included in the following table are a few representative examples of outcomes of the 2006-2007 CODE projects. These excerpts from board reports provide information about the factors that affect student performance and the progress of students with special education needs. Boards have created knowledge and are now sharing that knowledge.

Fullan (2001) explores the business literature to consider the key components involved in knowledge creation. He suggests the very survival of knowledge creating companies requires that individuals share and construct knowledge within a collaborative and supportive culture; and that the process is named as a knowledge creating activity. Fullan...asserts: "School systems, in any case, would be well advised to name knowledge sharing as a core value-and to begin to work on the barriers and procedures to dramatically increase its use" (p. 105).

Hannay, L. M. (2004). p. 8

District leaders are urged to build vertical and lateral networks to create and share knowledge gained from the CODE Special Education Project.

MAJOR PROJECT THEMES: SAMPLE BOARD RESPONSES

CHANGED PRACTICES

LESSONS LEARNED

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

- learning more about multiple intelligences and students' learning styles helps teachers use effective teaching strategies in differentiated instruction
 - professional learning community meetings provide opportunities to better understand differentiated instruction
- (Conseil scolaire de district des écoles catholiques du Sud-Ouest)

- establish class and student learning profiles early in the year
- give greater consideration to students' learning styles when working with students with Individual Education Programs

- the Education for All perspective has increased the willingness of all staff members to think about the needs of special education learners differently
 - teachers are working collaboratively as never before, focused on literacy outcomes for all learners
 - teachers are using SMART goals for an increased number of benchmark students and finding it motivating to work as a team to increase outcomes
- (Greater Essex County District School Board)

- use analysis of data and student work to design differentiated instruction
- use lateral professional learning teams to foster collaboration, sharing and brainstorming of solutions among CODE schools
- use regular, scheduled learning teams as the lifeblood of improved teaching and learning

- teachers are starting to apply assistive technology across the entire curriculum rather than just for English and mathematics
 - assistive technology provides an additional focus for collaboration among teachers who support students who require the technology to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum
- (York Catholic District School Board)

- provide tiered training opportunities (broad training centrally, job-embedded training as follow-up, and student training) as this is instrumental in creating change

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

- exchanges among teachers have become much more scientific in terms of data analysis during collaborative team meetings which enables more effective targeting of students as well as their strengths and challenges in regard to reading competencies.
- (Conseil scolaire catholique du Nouvel-Ontario)

- regional collaborative team meetings of principals enhance best practice sharing and play an important role in school capacity building.

- the Principal Mentorship Program supports instructional leadership; principals implement goals in their schools, supported by a Principal Peer Coach
 - principals model differentiated instruction at staff meetings
- (Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board)

- provide district mentoring and site-based coaching for principals related to program direction, modeling, resource management and learning team development

continued...

MAJOR PROJECT THEMES: SAMPLE BOARD RESPONSES

CHANGED PRACTICES

LESSONS LEARNED

ASSESSMENT OF/FOR/AS LEARNING

- results are disaggregated regularly at the board level
- school portfolios are created using data and student work as evidence
- teachers experience a pre- and post- test, and begin to see the power of this strategy for their students' learning
(Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board)

- use SMART goals and data walls regularly in school improvement team meetings
- disaggregate assessment results at the board level
- monitor that student work is supplied consistently as evidence of achievement

- IEP expectations and report card comments are more closely aligned in Term 3, following specific training
- the MISA coordinator and computer technicians remain an important component of data collection and training
(Northwest Catholic District School Board)

- provide ongoing opportunities for teachers to learn to align Individual Education Program (IEP) expectations and report card comments and marks

SCHOOL/SYSTEM ORGANIZATION

- teachers from the pilot project are given release time to become coaches and support Phase 2 and 3 schools
- curriculum and special education teachers and departments become more aligned in the goal to support improved outcomes
(Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario)

- allocate specific resource teacher support
- provide school-embedded professional learning opportunities to build capacity

- student programming is differentiated according to learning profiles
- schools provide full or increased integration in the regular classroom for students with learning disabilities
- there is increased use of technology as a learning tool through increased Special Education Assistance (SEA) claims and associated training
(Upper Grand District School Board)

- maximize the power of technology to increase student achievement and engagement

COMMUNICATION/PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- 100% of parents surveyed after their child's involvement in the project say that the project improved the child's performance, abilities and confidence
(Near North District School Board)

- ensure that students and parents have a clear understanding of a child's learning profile

- a guide that was designed for parents is a very useful tool; it helps parents learn about learning difficulties and strategies to help their children improve their reading skills and develop their self-esteem
(Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario)

- use pre- and post- tests to identify parents' perception of their child's attitude and self-esteem to show if there has been growth

PROJECT OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS

1. Assessing Student Outcomes

Evidence of student learning is very important to teachers and is a powerful incentive for teachers to change their practice.

The variety of data collection tools and processes identified through the CODE Special Education projects is a clear indicator of a cultural shift occurring at the system and school level. Every CODE Special Education Project team has reflected on the value of data to support both improved student achievement and teacher professional practice.

van Roosmalen, E. (2007). p. 8

Fifty-eight percent of projects made use of individual learning profiles, 47 percent identified the use of assessment schedules and 40 percent used classroom profiles to support improved student achievement. The research report describes the data collection tools and processes used to measure improved student achievement. [van Roosmalen, E. (2007). pp. 8-9]

2. Evidence of Change in Student Achievement

Each CODE project team tracked the achievement scores of ten students with special education needs during the 2006-2007 school year.

Results from the student achievement tracking sheets provided further evidence to support changed instructional practice and noticeable effect on student achievement. ...Seventy-five percent of this convenience sample demonstrated improved academic achievement in areas such as reading, oral language, and writing.

van Roosmalen, E. (2007). p. 16

Board reports also document specific gains in student achievement within the school year, many of them outstanding. These reports state that students are more engaged and aware of the learning process as a result of the CODE project. The reports note that teachers help students develop a sense of proficiency and of having control over learning tasks. Teachers involve students in specific discussions about their progress and use samples of student work to demonstrate strengths and the next steps in skill development.

3. Teacher Responses about the Project Impact on Students

- "The explicit teaching strategy provided the students with a step-by-step approach which translated into success with many students with learning disabilities."
[Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Grandes Rivières]
- "There has been a shift from referral of students to what a students needs, based on data."
- "Our referral rate has gone down." [Greater Essex County District School Board]
- "Exemption rates during provincial literacy testing have decreased."
[Rainy River District School Board]

4. Student Responses about the Project Impact

- "It is great sharing lessons with other kids."
- "I'm doing better and my mother is happy."
[Algonquin & Lakeshore Catholic District School Board]
- "Initially, I didn't like writing and now I can write many sentences."
[Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Grandes Rivières]
- "When the teacher uses the Smart Board I use more parts of my brain."
[Upper Grand District School Board]
- "I write a lot now and my work is better. I use more interesting words. I have less spelling mistakes. I am more interested in doing my work on the computer. I get good on my work without the teacher telling me."
- "I feel that using these programs helps me to improve my learning and the work that I submitted to my teacher. I get more work done and I don't play with stuff in my desk."
[York Catholic District School Board]

PROJECT OUTCOMES FOR TEACHERS

1. Evidence of Change in Knowledge and Practice

All CODE school board projects incorporated evidence-based instructional strategies found in *Education for All*. [van Roosmalen, E. (2007). p. 3]

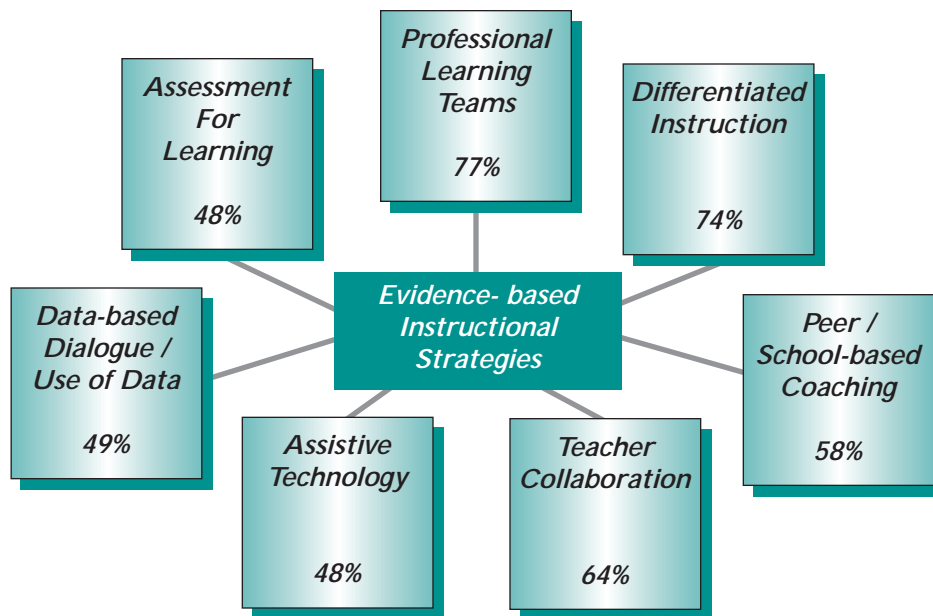
As the CODE project teams implemented the range of evidence-based principles identified in the CODE Special Education Project proposal template and focussed on implementing the professional learning based on instructional content from *Education For All (2005)*, evidence of short term improvement of staff use of effective assessment and instructional strategies that benefit students with special education needs began to emerge.

van Roosmalen, E. (2007). p. 9

Districts report that teachers involved in the project are using student data to design instructional strategies and interventions that provide the required level of support. The reports indicate that classroom teachers feel a growing sense of responsibility for all students. They think of themselves as *being* accountable for student achievement, rather than being *held accountable* by administrators.

2. Professional Practices Used to Support Student Learning

Teachers involved in the CODE projects used evidence-based professional practices to improve student achievement. When project teams were asked to identify the practices that are essential for the support of improved student achievement, the results were as shown on the following chart.



In addition to those identified in the chart, other evidence-based instructional strategies included the use of: student profiles, assessment schedules, classroom profiles and universal design. [van Roosmalen, E. (2007). p. 8]

3. Changes in Stages of Implementation

The CODE monitoring sessions included reflective discussions about the current placement of each school or system team on a continuum of stages of implementation in relation to nine key principles.² Overall research findings from this reflective activity provide early indications of a change in practice from one stage of implementation to another from the first to the second monitoring period. [See the chart on page 10 of this report.] The greatest areas of change were in school-based coaching (69%), access to resources (64%), and application of assessment data (63.4%). Much of the movement was a change from an initiation to developing stage. [van Roosmalen, E. (2007). pp. 9-10]

This finding indicates that both school and system teams believe that teachers demonstrated growth during the Year 2 CODE project in coaching, access to resources and application of assessment data.

4. Interview Responses about the Project Impact on Teachers

The following comments were collected from teachers by members of the CODE leadership team who conducted the Voices from the *Field* monitoring visits:

- "This is a cultural change."
- "My teaching has improved."
[Algonquin & Lakeshore Catholic District School Board]
- "We learned how to use data in a different way...it became meaningful because the analysis moved us into discussing new teaching strategies."
[Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Grandes Rivières]

² The four stages of implementation used for the reflective activity were: pre-initiation; initiation; developing; and sustaining stages. All participants were provided with clear descriptions of the indicators of each stage of development. See page 4 of the *Final Research Report*.

- "We are school teachers not just classroom teachers."
- "We all have ownership over student achievement."
- "Staff room discussions are about kids, teaching strategies, and students' progress."
[Huron Superior Catholic District School Board]
- "Previous professional development days were exciting but the strategies were not applied in the classroom and didn't have much impact on students' achievement; now, the professional learning team, coaching and mentoring provides on-going learning."
[Rainy River District School Board]
- "This project is making a change in professional relationships."
- "Working with the resource teacher in the classroom and directly in team teaching is helping kids."
[Upper Grand District School Board]

5. *Modeling Teacher Learning*

Here is one example that demonstrates teachers modeling their own learning to students:

Teachers shared with students that they were going to learn new strategies at their professional learning team meetings. Teachers used the strategies with their students as part of their "homework" and then shared the student work that resulted at their next team meeting. Students were always eager to find out what the other teachers thought of their work. This process of meeting, implementing a strategy and meeting again to share results will continue to be used by the school teams.

[Huron Superior Catholic District School Board]

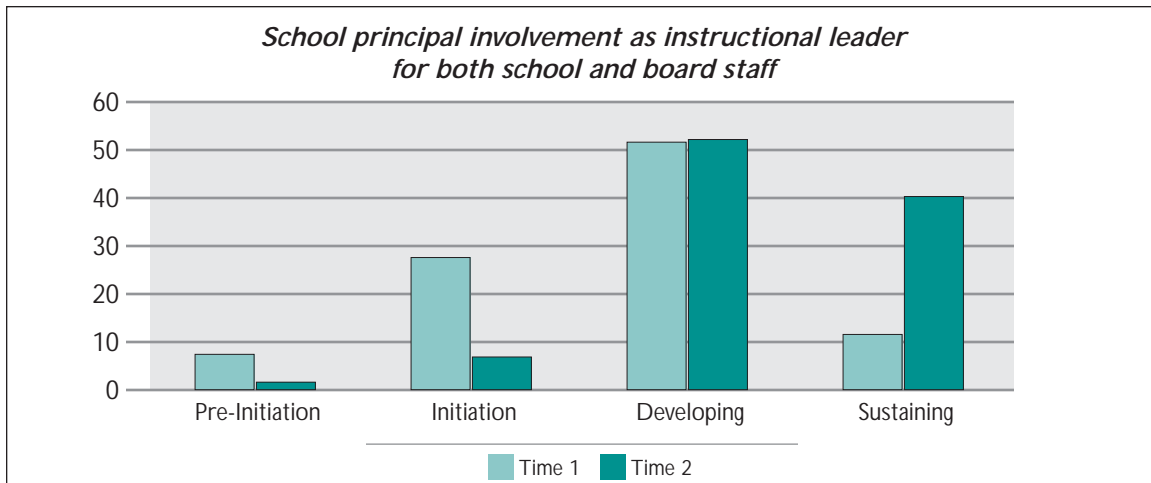
PROJECT OUTCOMES FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

1. *Evidence of Instructional Leadership*

The research results for those involved in the project demonstrate a 69% increase in the use of scheduled school-based coaching and a 58.2% increase in the use of professional learning teams. [van Roosmalen, E. (2007). p. 10] This is a positive outcome for teachers, of course, but also a strong indication of the leadership of school administrators in fostering a supportive climate for joint work. It is the principal who creates the environment in which collaboration can flourish.

Principals are also creating and sustaining the adaptive structures that change the way that classroom and special education teachers work together. Principals are fostering the development of peer coaching and classroom research. Some principals have reported that they are working with the school leadership team to change the schedules of special education resource teachers regularly in response to demonstrated student needs.

The shift in perceptions of school leadership from the first to second monitoring periods is evident in the following graph. Note the reduction of teams reporting that the school principal's involvement as instructional leader was at an initiation stage (26.9 percent at Time 1 to 6.5 percent at Time 2) and the increase in teams reporting the school principal's involvement as instructional leader was at the sustaining stage (12.8 percent at Time 1 and 40 percent at Time 2).



van Roosmalen, E. (2007). p. 18

Board reports and the *Voices from the Field* visits indicate that principals are beginning to:

- articulate a vision and expectation that all students can learn;
- develop a coherent plan for school development in relation to school leadership, professional learning and classroom instruction;
- manage school structures and processes to support capacity building for teachers;
- support expectations for instructional improvement with necessary resources;
- work with the leadership team and division/department teams to use student data to set measurable targets for student achievement;
- provide a variety of professional learning opportunities for teachers-involvement in learning teams, site-based coaching, book studies, workshops; and
- create a safe environment for teachers to take risks, experiment and continue learning.

2. Interview Responses about the Project Impact on Principals

- "Principals have requested an opportunity to focus on learning about instructional leadership." (superintendent)
- "The principal is having an impact on changing teacher capacity." (superintendent)
- "I am learning more about having conversations with teachers about data and what we can do for these kids." (principal)
- "The board should not move our principal." (teacher)
- "The principal is modeling differentiated instruction strategies at staff meetings." (teacher)

PROJECT OUTCOMES FOR EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS

Educational assistants were an important part of the CODE projects, often participated in professional learning opportunities with teachers, and contributed to the dialogues that CODE monitors conducted with school teams. Boards report that educational assistants are involved as members of the classroom team that works together to support student learning.

Educational assistants share their expertise about ways of working with students with special needs. They are aware of school goals, feel part of the work of the teachers to support student learning, and are invited to provide their perspectives.

PROJECT OUTCOMES FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

1. Evidence of Increased Capacity in System Leadership

a) Leadership of a Major Change Initiative

One of the best measures of the leadership provided by superintendents is the percentage of change reported by boards with respect to each of the nine principle elements identified in the CODE Special Education Project.

An initial analysis of the Stage of Implementation Continuum results and consequent evidence provided by school and system team members indicates a cultural change is occurring across Ontario.

van Roosmalen, E. (2007). p. 9

The table below provides a summary overview of the percent change from the first monitoring period to the second, with respect to each of the nine principle elements identified in the CODE project. Much of the movement was a "change" from an initiation to developing stage. When project teams reevaluated their stage of implementation and reported an adjustment at the second monitoring session, the adjustment or clarification was largely from a sustaining stage to developing stage. Some teams indicated that this "clarification" was based on increased understanding of the complexity of project goals and of the difficulty of attaining the sustaining stage. For those project teams who reported "maintaining" their stage of implementation they were largely at the developing or sustaining stage at the first monitoring dialogue.

<i>EVIDENCE- BASED PRINCIPLES</i>	<i>PERCENT CHANGE IN STAGE OF IMPLEMENTATION</i>		
	<i>CLARIFY</i>	<i>MAINTAIN</i>	<i>CHANGE</i>
Assessment practices	1.6	41.3	56.9
Application of assessment data	2.4	34.1	63.4
Use of professional learning teams	4.1	37.6	58.2
Principal as instructional leader	4.4	37.5	58.0
School-based coaching	4.1	26.9	69.0
Access to resources	3.8	32.2	64.0
Organizational structure	2.4	45.6	51.9
Precision in project design	6.6	42.5	50.8
Communication	3.8	37.1	59.0

[van Roosmalen, E. (2007). pp. 9-10]

These final results are most encouraging and demonstrate the ability of superintendents to foster a culture of change.

b) Instructional Leadership

During both Year 1 and Year 2, superintendents noted that their role had changed to include a greater emphasis on instructional leadership as a result of involvement in the CODE project. Many superintendents exhibited a commitment to the project that went far beyond being a sign-off agent, and included ongoing support and monitoring of project implementation. In many cases, the project has been a catalyst for changes in assignments of system leadership roles.

Superintendents are collecting common student achievement data across the district to foster consistency, provide a shared sense of urgency, and nurture collaborative work to design the most appropriate interventions. There is a new sense of cohesion and focus.

Many superintendents are defining system expectations for instructional leadership by principals and making it a priority to provide the required professional learning. They are providing formalized structures to support the distribution of leadership to collaborative teams.

c) Alignment, Coherence and Focus

There is increased evidence of collaboration among system departments, particularly between the special education and curriculum departments. In addition, new initiatives with assistive technology have promoted a high degree of collaboration among curriculum, special education and technology departments.

The monitoring of the 2006-2007 CODE project provides evidence of the alignment of school and system practices. During the second round of monitoring visits there was a remarkable agreement between school and system teams about stages of implementation. A number of school teams reported that superintendents provided a clear focus by communicating a common vision, articulating expectations, and monitoring results.

There is increased evidence of superintendents defining the non-negotiable expectations for all schools—for example, blocks of instructional time, targets for EQAO achievement, and the school resources and time to be allocated to the support of learning teams. Many superintendents recognize the need to monitor the alignment of school improvement plans and professional learning opportunities with project goals.

2. Interview Responses about System Leadership

- "There is a definite commitment from senior administration." (principal)
- "Superintendents are engaged in the project. On school visits they monitor the use of strategies. They believe you inspect what you expect." (principal)
- "The supervisory officer is very informed about what is happening at the school level. Big time. Oh, yes. She knows our successes and challenges and really cares." (teacher)

LESSONS LEARNED

The "Lessons Learned" from the CODE Special Education Project 2006-2007 can be considered when restructuring and redesigning board initiatives. The big story line for Year 2 is change-change in how educators think about system and school organization, teaching practice, and roles.

1. LESSONS LEARNED: SCHOOL LEVEL

(a) School-Based Coaching

School and district teams frequently report that the greatest improvement in teaching practice was brought about by school-based coaching. This finding was also reported during the first year of the project and is very evident in the "lessons learned" section of board reports. Coaching offers ongoing, consistent support for teachers as they implement changes to classroom practices.

(b) Collaborative Learning

School teams are breaking down the traditions of teacher isolation and independence. Many boards mention the strategy of sharing access to student data on data walls as an example of a more open climate. Board reports frequently comment on the power of interdependent work in professional learning teams to change the way people think about their environment.

(c) Effective Use of Data

A major shift in practice is to use PM Benchmarks, literacy assessment data and other assessment tools for students with special education needs, as project schools are now doing. Using data to demonstrate student progress provides the motivation for continuing effort. Using data to drive instruction increases teacher capacity, gives teachers confidence in the changes they are making, and leads to more public recognition of the precision of this professional work.

(d) Changing Roles

There has been an important change in special education service models. Classroom teachers involved in the CODE project are now seeing themselves as responsible for all students. During Year 1 of the project, the change was to move away from withdrawing students and to have special education resource teachers work with them in the classroom. During Year 2, the change was to increase opportunities for special education resource teachers to work as partners with classroom teachers.

(e) The Principal as Instructional Leader

Principals provide essential leadership when they visit classrooms, talk to students about their learning and to teachers about specific successes and concerns. They can provide time for teams to meet, change school structures and processes, and revise role expectations. They can create a common focus and align efforts. Principals create a safe environment for staff learning. Principals, when properly supported, can be powerful change agents in school improvement.

(f) Distributed Leadership

The principal can greatly enhance instructional leadership by encouraging teachers to make decisions about their practice, using evidence-based strategies. Traditional hierarchical school leadership does not effectively use talent within the school and district and makes improvement unsustainable. Principals are recognizing the power of the special education resource teacher's leadership on school teams and the value of system special education support teams.

(g) Student Awareness of Learning Targets

There is increased recognition of the need to present student work as evidence of achievement—not only finished products, but also examples of ongoing thinking processes. Students must be able to describe their own learning needs, preferred ways of learning, and their progress. Students need to know what the targets are and to have examples of work at the level they are trying to attain.

2. LESSONS LEARNED: DISTRICT LEVEL

The final reports from school districts and from members of the CODE team who visited *Voices from the Field* projects demonstrate reflection about practices that work in powerful and practical ways. The reports show that boards are focusing on alignment, coherence, and capacity building to support student achievement and professional learning. The CODE projects have the goal of sustainability and are avoiding simplistic practices and quick-fix reforms. As a result, the reports submitted to CODE provide a wealth of important "lessons learned" that can be shared as evidence-based strategies for ongoing improvement.

(a) Professional Learning

The cognitive sciences teach us that if information is to become knowledge, a social process is required...information becomes knowledge through a social process, and knowledge becomes wisdom through sustained interaction.

Fullan, M. (2003). p. 57

- Use student achievement data to create urgency for professional learning.
- Provide differentiated learning opportunities for adults.
- Include all team members who work together in the classroom in the same learning opportunities.
- Ensure that teachers know which interventions are the most effective responses to needs.
- Train teachers in the use of assistive technology to open doors for students.
- Provide time, modelling and continuous support to apply new learning.
- Provide job-embedded learning as the most successful and sustainable method of building professional capacity.
- Continue to provide at-the-elbow site-based coaching as an essential element of change.
- Provide school teams with regularly scheduled times to engage in team learning activities.
- Roll out professional learning in multiple stages based on assessed needs: for example, in-service session; return to school with time to work together; return together to share artifacts, displays of student work and outcomes.
- Recognize the ways in which staff members occupying different roles, working cooperatively, can positively impact on student learning.
- Communicate information about student progress regularly to enhance staff motivation.

(b) Instructional Leadership

Focused leaders engage in daily disciplines that maximize their energy, bringing the highest level of concentrated effort on the challenges that are most important.

Reeves, D. B. (2006). pp. 167-168

- Develop the capacity of system and school leaders to monitor the use of effective instructional strategies and provide knowledgeable feedback.
- Foster a high degree of collaboration among board departments and system leaders.
- Recognize that the involvement of school administrators as knowledgeable, engaged instructional leaders is key to building leadership capacity.
- Provide professional learning and coaching to support principals in distributing leadership.
- Set district expectations and support principals in accessing the time and resources that are essential to classroom implementation.
- Provide opportunities for principals to participate in administrators' learning teams and develop lateral networks.
- Recognize and support the leadership roles of special education resource teachers and classroom teachers who are becoming proficient in the use of differentiated instruction.

(c) Assessment of/for/as Learning

Data are employed creatively, compellingly, and strategically to focus the community's attention on the children who are the heart of the work.

Wagner, T., Kegan, R. et al. (2006). p. 146

- Articulate the message that assessment drives all programming and instructional practices and must start from the established base line of current student achievement.
- Use common assessment tools and processes district-wide to monitor achievement and allow for focused and collaborative conversations about student learning.
- Disaggregate results regularly at the system level to identify specific groups of students.
- Use a shared model of intervention in which the classroom teacher, resource teacher and other support staff members work collaboratively to support student learning.

- Ensure that teachers have frequent opportunities to examine data collaboratively.
- Monitor that teachers are using ongoing assessment to drive instruction.
- Provide learning opportunities about the importance and use of student profiles.
- Provide support to ensure that the Individual Education Plan is used as a tool for instruction.
- Use individual assessment, prescribed diagnosis and early intervention to decrease identification for special education programs.
- Increase full inclusion in provincial and district assessments by providing students with assistive technology and the training to use it.

(d) School/System Organization

The great challenge for schools is to let go of the comforts of adapted behaviour and to develop the patterns and practices of adaptivity...Adaptivity manifests in flexible responses interacting with changing environmental conditions...It requires a clear identity and lack of attachment to form.

Garmston & Wellman. (1999). p. 8

- Promote a common vision and shared goals about the best ways to support students with special education needs in regular classrooms.
- Monitor the cohesion of tri-level goals and strategic planning.
- Restructure the responsibilities of school superintendents to foster instructional leadership, including regular, focused visits to schools.
- Embed training and learning in all system initiatives and school improvement plans.
- Develop structures to increase collaboration between system departments and leaders.
- Regularly restructure and realign the roles of central resource staff to address priority needs.
- Formalize the regular scheduling of professional learning teams in all schools.
- Promote teamwork and collaboration whenever possible with supporting structures and processes.
- Monitor timetables to ensure that they reflect the needs of students for blocks of time.
- Promote flexibility in assigning resource teacher and educational assistant time in response to changing data to create the most impact on student achievement.

(e) Communication/Parental Involvement

Sustainable leadership reaches out to communities. It invites direct engagement...and meaningful participation by students, parents, and communities in the life of the school....Because it aspires to greater integrity, sustainable leadership also advocates for and has no fear of increased transparency.

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). p. 262

- Develop a central communication strategy to manage consistent communications across multiple school sites and to a variety of community audiences.
- Develop a common language to articulate desired practices to staff members and parents.
- Share professional knowledge across the district.
- Use technology to post messages for staff members and create a useful website for parents.
- Demonstrate that the development of supportive relationships with families is a priority.
- Assure parents that their support is needed to enhance student learning.
- Provide parents with ongoing demonstrations of student work to show progress over time.
- Communicate with parents in a variety of ways, always focusing on student achievement.
- Assist parents in helping students with focused home support that is consistent with school instruction.
- Train volunteers so that they can be used most effectively.

3. LESSONS LEARNED: PROVINCIAL LEVEL

The CODE Special Education Project has been a significant force in fostering collective responsibility and improvement in knowledge and practice across Ontario. Over the two years of the project, districts have demonstrated remarkable gains in the most difficult of all endeavours, changing the context within which people work. Members of the CODE leadership team have identified the following key factors required to replicate this successful initiative.

(a) Alignment with Key Partners

CODE worked in partnership with Ministry colleagues in the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch, the Field Services Branch and with The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat to implement the recommendations in *Education for All (2005)*. Dr. Avis Glaze and Dr. Carol Campbell note that findings from the CODE Special Education Project in Year 1 "reinforce the findings from The Secretariat's local board initiatives analysis, for example: the nature of professional learning combining job-embedded approaches and professional learning communities; the importance of the effective use of data; and the development of the role of the principal as an instructional leader in the areas of literacy and numeracy". [Glaze, A. and Campbell, C. (2007). p. 23]

The CODE Special Education Project supports the current "Sharpening the Focus" phase of The Secretariat's work, which is intended to bring about: goal-oriented and strategic interventions; alignment of board and school targets with the goal of student achievement; selected high-yield strategies for instruction; team-focused and job-embedded professional development; research-based and data-driven initiatives; and a focus on results. [Glaze, A. and Campbell, C. (2007) p. 32]

In some secondary schools across the province, the CODE Project was aligned with the Student Success Learning to 18 strategy. The Student Success Learning to 18 initiative is creating a "dramatic shift toward a culture of evidence-based policy and practice... in a relatively short period of time". The effective use of research and data has "given rise to a shared 'language' that crosses all barriers within the system, provides a basis for informed discussion and decision-making, and encourages leadership and shared ownership of student outcomes...". [Zegarac, G. and Franz, R. (2007). p. 23]

(b) Leadership and Relationships

The CODE leadership team had a strong background of knowledge about organizational factors that affect student learning, current research, and special education and professional learning issues at all levels. Members of the three affiliate supervisory officers' associations and the Ministry of Education developed the project.

The leadership team members understood the challenges facing school and district teams, because they themselves worked through competing commitments and the inevitable conflict involved in developing an effective community of learners. All team members made persistent efforts to be precise about issues important to them. Members reported, "The work was much too important, and the need for wise leadership much too pressing, to 'just be nice'". The ability of the team to develop trusting relationships and to create innovative solutions was an important enabler for the CODE project.

The four elements of what Bryk and Schneider call "relational trust" include respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity. Their research shows that the presence of relational trust in schools correlates more highly with improved student achievement than any other single factor.

Wagner, T., Kegan, R. et al. (2006). p. 136

(c) Project Design

The CODE Special Education Project 2006-2007 was designed with increased precision to highlight the importance of focusing effort on a few authentic priorities related directly to teaching, student learning and leadership. The CODE proposal asked boards to align school and system professional learning activities with the board's strategic plan and to monitor progress with data.

The CODE Special Education Project stressed the need for evidence of change-in teacher knowledge and practice, in student learning, and in the organizational factors that affect student learning.

In addition to other reporting requirements, in 2006-2007 each district was asked to report on the progress of ten students and the growth of ten teachers in professional learning. This requirement for data had a dramatic effect in promoting conversations about student and adult learning, particularly in terms of measuring teaching capacity over time.

(d) Collaborative Effort

The success of the CODE project in both Year 1 and Year 2 was largely due to having every board in the province funded equally to implement a change effort. The CODE team was committed to lateral capacity building and enhancing the instructional role of superintendents. The involvement of all boards resulted in networks of superintendents with responsibility for special education sharing information to support sustainable change across the province.

(e) Monitoring and Self-evaluation

The CODE monitoring teams highlighted the importance of the Special Education Project as a province-wide research project and helped everyone to keep on track with project goals.

The monitoring modeled a process of school and system self-evaluation according to four stages of implementation of nine principles related to capacity building. The dialogues with school and system teams demonstrated for boards the kinds of questions that are most effective in promoting reflection. The CODE project emphasized the need for very precise and accountable self-reviews in schools and districts.

(f) Context and Change

Recognizing that best practices do not always translate well, the CODE initiative provided freedom for each district to shape its project dynamically according to local needs.

At the same time, the key goal of the 2006-2007 CODE project was to provide pressure and support to change the context in which people work at the school and district levels. The interactive process to examine stages of implementation modeled the need to open up professional practice to scrutiny, to share positive and disappointing experiences, to engage in respectful debate and provide constructive ideas for next steps. Many participants in the school and system team dialogues told CODE monitors that they planned to use the same consensus-reaching process in other team meetings to foster best thinking about needed change. This kind of frank reflection creates an urgency to implement more effective practices and can be the foundation for dramatic changes in context.

(g) Sustainability

The CODE project over two school years has worked towards the development of a province-wide professional learning community of superintendents with responsibility for special education. The project has also resulted in the creation of many collaborative professional practices within schools and boards.

Boards consistently report that the CODE project improved the confidence and enthusiasm of many teachers. Educators are motivated to continue to implement project goals by seeing the gains in student achievement. Almost all board reports note that students are more focused and there is an increase in participation and motivation as a result of the CODE project. These are the foundations of systems that are capable of effecting their own continuing transformation.

Well, if context is everything, we must directly focus on how it can be changed for the better... The good news is that once it is under way, it has self-generating powers to go further.

Fullan, M. (2005). p. 16

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: 2007-2008

The challenge for the CODE Special Education Project in Year 3 is to take the changed practices and lessons learned in Year 2 and to make them systemic and sustainable. The funding is to be used to go deeper to change strategies and processes in schools that were not involved in earlier projects. The following directions are provided to stimulate thinking about next steps related to the five major themes of the Year 2 project.

Professional Learning

- In the third year of implementation, the CODE leadership team will support the development of coaching models for superintendents.
- An essential next step is to provide ongoing professional learning opportunities at the school, district and provincial levels for administrators to enhance their knowledge about educational research, effective teaching strategies and instructional leadership.

Instructional Leadership

- During the monitoring sessions, school teams often found it difficult to comment on "precision in system-level project design, implementation and monitoring by supervisory officers". In 2007-2008 it is important to assign a superintendent to "go deep" in monitoring implementation, beyond being a sign-off agent.

Assessment of/for/as Learning

- Self-evaluation is a powerful tool and an important step in building capacity. Engaging in facilitated professional dialogue with the purpose of improving student achievement and instruction can drive sustained, system-wide educational change. System and school teams can benefit from engaging in the kind of reflective dialogue modelled during the Year 2 monitoring process.

School/System Organization

- Future directions must stress the need for a common focus and alignment, both within schools, across districts and across the province. System leaders can leverage alignment by creating networks.

Communication/Parental Involvement

- An area for future growth is to investigate strategies and best practices which promote meaningful engagement of parents in the support of student achievement. Effective communication strategies, which result in common messages and understandings both within school districts and with the broader community, assist boards in building capacity.

QUESTIONS TO FURTHER THE CONVERSATION

This set of questions is a reflective tool to use with school or system teams to improve education outcomes for students with special education needs. The CODE leadership team provides these questions to model reflection on Year 2 successes and challenges. The responses may help with the development of further project refinements in Year 3 of the CODE Special Education Project.

Professional Learning

Q. System-designed professional development sessions should be based on data about staff learning needs. How can we use data about staff learning and student achievement to provide differentiated professional learning?

Q. Who manages the conversation when teachers meet in professional learning teams? How can we support this process so that real change, growth and capacity building occur?

Part of managing this conversation is knowing when to push, to question, or allow an individual to momentarily disengage....The key is to know when to challenge individuals just one level above their current practice and knowledge. The facilitator also needs to have the group collectively construct the meta-cognition through asking what knowledge might be derived through these collective experiences.

Hannay, L. (2004). p. 27

Instructional Leadership

Q. What practices can we develop to monitor students to ensure that they are actively engaged and on task; that student literacy and numeracy products are displayed; that student workbooks and/or portfolios demonstrate a sequence of learning development; that students can describe their tasks and what they are learning?

Q. Do all superintendents use a clear set of common expectations and questions as a focus for their school visit? (eg. What students are succeeding? Which students are not? Why? What are we going to do about it?) How do superintendents and principals collaborate around goals and outcomes of school visits?

Assessment of/for/as Learning

Q. How are we promoting and supporting consistent and effective assessment and evaluation practices to increase teachers' skill and knowledge of assessment of/for/as learning?

School/System Organization

Q. Within the context of our school/system, what have we identified as the most important areas for change in terms of improving achievement for students with special education needs?

Q. How are the recommendations on pages 145-147 of *Education for All* being addressed in our school/system? What really has changed?

Q. Are system and school staff members assigned in a manner that best supports student achievement from both a school and district perspective?

Communication/Parental Involvement

Q. What communication/engagement strategies will we use to leverage the lessons learned from our CODE project to improve educational outcomes for students with special education needs?

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PROJECTS

ALGOMA DSB Special Education Numeracy Support	CSDC DE L'EST ONTARIEN L'enseignement explicite du raisonnement et de la compréhension en lecture	HAMILTON-WENTWORTH CDSB Differentiated Instruction + Assistive Technology = Student Success
ALGONQUIN & LAKESHORE CDSB Building Capacity for Differentiating, Remediating and Assisting Student Success.	CSDC DES AURORES BORÉALES Intégration réussie de la technologie d'aide en milieu scolaire	HAMILTON-WENTWORTH DSB Differentiated Instruction in Action
AVON MAITLAND DSB From Knowing To Doing	CSCD DES GRANDES RIVIÈRES De la pensée à l'écrit 4 ^e année	HASTINGS AND PRINCE EDWARD DSB Improving Literacy Skills for At-Risk Readers
BLUEWATER DSB Education for All	CSDC FRANCO-NORD Vivre l'inclusion au cycle moyen	HURON-PERTH CDSB The Precision Teaching Project
BRANT HALDIMAND NORFOLK CDSB Kurzweil-Moving Beyond Remediation	CSDEC DU SUD-OUEST Application de la pédagogie différencié au niveau des communautés d'apprentissage	HURON-SUPERIOR CDSB Building Capacity to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Achievement
BRUCE-GREY CDSB Hear Us Learn	DSB OF NIAGARA From Congregated to Inclusion	KAWARTHA PINE RIDGE DSB ISM - Instructional Support Model
CDSB OF EASTERN ONTARIO S.T.O.M.P. - Success through Optimizing My Potential	DSB ONTARIO NORTH EAST PHASE 2 - Primary Literacy Intervention Framework	KEEWATIN-PATRICIA DSB Improving Student Achievement in Writing
CECLF DU CENTRE-EST Enseignement efficace des mathématiques	DUFFERIN PEEL CDSB Supporting Catholic Learning Communities	KENORA CDSB Leadership and Learning Through Education for All
CEP DE L'EST DE L'ONTARIO (CEPEO) L'application de la pédagogie de la sollicitude	DURHAM CDSB Research to Practice in an Inclusive Environment	LAKEHEAD DSB Responding to Assessment
CSC DU NOUVEL-ONTARIO Collaborer pour assurer la réussite des élèves ayant des besoins particuliers	DURHAM DSB Early Literacy Intervention using the WBTT and the Observation Survey	LAMBTON KENT DSB Success Through Early Intervention
CSD CENTRE SUD-OUEST Différenciation pédagogique auprès des élèves en difficulté en comportement et DA	GRAND ERIE DSB Knowledge into Action: Implementing Best Practices	LIMESTONE DSB Building Effective Literacy Practices
CSP DU GRAND NORD DE L'ONTARIO Outils pour réussir	GREATER ESSEX COUNTY DSB Education for All - Triple "P" Project	LONDON DCSB Planning for Inclusion
CSD DU NORD-EST DE L'ONTARIO La mise en œuvre du programme d'enseignement différencié	HALTON CDSB Learning Disability Learning Centre	NEAR NORTH DSB Enhance Performance of Students with Special Needs Through Assistive Technology
CSDC CENTRE-SUD Conscience phonologique et fondements de la lecture et de l'orthographe	HALTON DSB Education for All by Working Together	NIAGARA CDSB Transforming Secondary Special Education Programs

PROJECTS

NIPISSING-PARRY SOUND CDSB
Effective Communication for All

NORTHEASTERN CDSB
The DELTA Project: Dedicated to Enhancing Learning, Teaching and Achievement

NORTHWEST CDSB
Technology to Enhance Instructional Practice and Student Achievement

OTTAWA-CARLETON CDSB
R.E.T.E.L.L.S.

OTTAWA-CARLETON DSB
Increasing the Capacity of Regular Classroom Teachers

PEEL DSB
Literacy Partnership

PETERB. VIC. NORTH.& CLARINGTON CDSB
"Deal or No Deal": Differentiated Education, Assessment and Leadership

RAINBOW DSB
Building Essential Learning through Literacy Resource Teachers

RAINY RIVER DSB
Together Everyone Achieves More (T.E.A.M.)

RENFREW COUNTY CDSB
Sharpening our Focus for Student Success

RENFREW COUNTY DSB
CODE Plus 12 Project

SIMCOE COUNTY DSB
The Incredible Years

SIMCOE MUSKOKA CDSB
Many Faces, One Focus

ST. CLAIR CDSB
Growing a Professional Learning Team through Coaching

SUDBURY CDSB
Students With Diverse Strengths and Needs

SUPERIOR NORTH CDSB
Closing the Gap with Assistive Technology

SUPERIOR-GREENSTONE DSB
Reaching All...Teaching All

THAMES VALLEY DSB
Education for All - Best Practice in Assessment and Teaching Strategies

THUNDER BAY CDSB
Tools for Learning

TORONTO CDSB
Enhancing Classroom Instruction and Assessment

TORONTO DSB
Success for All: Stretching and Deepening Instruction

TRILLIUM LAKELANDS DSB
All Students Can Succeed

UPPER CANADA DSB
Going Deeper.....Building the Capacity

UPPER GRAND DSB
Achieve: Programming by Profiling and Targeting

WATERLOO CDSB
Differentiated Intervention Strategies

WATERLOO REGION DSB
Focused instruction for students with reading difficulties

WELLINGTON CDSB
For All The Write Reasons!

WINDSOR-ESSEX CDSB
Improving Literacy Achievement for Junior Grade Students

YORK CDSB
Planning For Inclusion

YORK REGION DSB
Assessment for Learning and Differentiated Instruction

PROVINCIAL SCHOOLS BRANCH ENGLISH
Effective Classroom Practice for Deaf Students with Autism

NW SCHOOL AUTHORITIES
Teaching and Learning for All

NE SCHOOL AUTHORITIES (NEOSA)
Computer-Based Assistive Technology Implementation

ADMINISTRATION SCOLAIRE
FRANCOPHONE DU NORD DE L'ONTARIO (CASNO)
Conscience phonologique

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

August 2007

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the research and evaluation framework adopted to support the '2006-2007' CODE Special Education Project, to summarise the project profiles and key research findings.

INTRODUCTION:

The Ontario government has made improvement in publicly funded education the centrepiece of its mandate. The CODE Special Education initiative is a strategic action to address recommendations from *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6* (May 2005). The CODE Special Education Project has provided district school boards and authorities across Ontario with opportunities to pilot new approaches to improve teacher professional practice and to raise achievement for students with special education needs.

Based upon the lessons learned and successful practices identified in year one of the CODE project, the 2006-2007 CODE Special Education Project¹ focussed on supporting and advancing the capacity of classroom, school and district leaders to use evidence-informed decision-making to improve achievement for students with special needs and teacher professional practice. CODE has adopted a coaching model to support school boards across Ontario to improve learning and achievement for students with special education needs. Project funding was distributed to all school systems based on a consistent and equitable application, selection, distribution, reporting and monitoring process.

As in Year 1, the Belief Statements contained in the document *Education for All* continue to guide the 2006-2007 project.

Belief 1: All students can succeed.

Belief 2: Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students.

Belief 3: Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience.

Belief 4: Classroom teachers are the key for a student's literacy and numeracy development.

Belief 5: Each child has his or her own unique patterns of learning.

Belief 6: The classroom teacher needs the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special needs.

Belief 7: Fairness is not sameness.

¹For a historical review of the CODE 2005-2006 Special Education Project and Research Results please refer to *The CODE Special Education Project 2005-2006 Comprehensive Report* (October 2006).

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK:

The primary focus of the research and evaluation framework was to support and to describe the strategies and action steps school boards implemented that reflect the principle elements identified through the CODE project, and to evaluate the impact the strategic actions had on improving achievement for students with special education needs and on teacher professional practice. All CODE school board projects incorporated evidence-based instructional strategies found in Education for All (2005).

PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS
Consistent use of assessment instruments and practices to measure, monitor and evaluate outcomes for students and staff.
Application of assessment data to inform development of universal design and differentiated instructional strategies.
Use of professional learning teams at all levels to improve teaching and learning.
School principal as instruction leader for both school and board staff.
Use of regular, scheduled school-based coaching focused on effective assessment and instruction.
Timely access to new and existing teacher resources to support learning.
School and system organisational structures designed to meet contextual needs related to improving student learning.
Precision in system-level project design, implementation and monitoring by supervisory officers.
Communication strategies that focus on developing common language, a sense of urgency, consistent messages and building a common vision about effective instruction.

A mixed model research design (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) was used to collect quantitative, qualitative and reflective activity data from a variety of project stakeholder (Superintendents responsible for Special Education, consultants, principals, teachers, Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTS.) and other support professionals within school boards). Several data collection procedures, including focus group discussions with school and system project team members which included a brief profile survey, a brainstorming exercise - 'Fish-Bone' activity² and, a stage of implementation reflective activity continuum, a "digging deeper" activity, a web-based survey for Monitors' reporting, student achievement and teacher capacity building data tracking sheets and, interim and final board reports, were undertaken. The model emphasized making data collection meaningful to school board participants. A key element in the research design included a knowledge transfer component in which the data collection activities themselves helped move the knowledge developed and lessons learned beyond the CODE project team to others within and across schools and school boards.

The purpose of the initial survey was to help profile the CODE projects with respect to the current delivery of special education programs in regular classrooms and the experiences of students with special education needs.

²The fish bone activity was a brainstorming activity used as part of the regional meetings. We did not collect the data for research purposes. The intent of the activity was to support superintendents of special education in working together to help them dig deeper and develop a better understanding of the specific strategies for achieving the specified goals identified in their CODE proposal. The fish bone activity encouraged creativity on everyone's part. It allowed for comprehensive thinking concerning issues and, encouraged non-traditional connections among ideas and issues that emerged

The Stage of Implementation Reflective Activity enabled CODE Special Education project team members to identify where on the continuum the school and/or system was with respect to each of the principle elements identified through the CODE project. The stage approach was adapted from the work of DuFour and Eaker (1998). The four stages were defined as:

Pre-Initiation Stage:	The school system has not yet begun to address the principle.
Initiation Stage:	An effort has been made to address the principle, but the effort has not yet begun to impact a "critical mass".
Developing Stage:	A critical mass has endorsed the principle. Members are beginning to modify their thinking and practice as they attempt to implement the principle.
Sustaining Stage:	The principle is deeply embedded in the school's culture. It represents a driving force in the daily work of the school. It is so internalized that it can survive changes in key personnel.

As part of the CODE interim and final project evaluation, we were interested in collecting a sample of student achievement and teacher capacity building data, at two time points. We asked project teams to select a sample of 10 students (identified with special needs) and 10 teachers³ to track over the course of their participation in the CODE project. Based on the key assessment tools project teams identified in their CODE proposal, teams were asked to select one or two assessment tools as part of the data recording process. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), PM benchmarks, and CASI were the predominant assessment tools used for student achievement tracking.

The profile survey and reflective activity continuum data were gathered at two different points in time (October-November 2006 and May-June 2007); in an effort to gather specific assessment data about pre and post project student achievement and evidence of staff use of effective assessment and instructional strategies that benefit students with special education needs. The Digging Deeper exercise was conducted at Time 2 only. This activity provided the CODE project team members with an opportunity to reflect on the stages previously identified and then to reflect on any examples of evidence to support their stage selection. This exercise was viewed, by both Monitors and Team members, as extremely useful in helping the CODE project teams reflect on their current stage in the process and to identify next steps and future directions.

Digging deeper activity was excellent. It caused the group to question their responses to the reflective activity. Digging deeper caused some changes in determining the overall stage of some of the principles. It also helped to plot a future direction and planning for next year. (System Team Monitor)

Thanks for taking the time especially in leading the 'digging deeper' exercise. The external review helps us bring a focus to our self reflection. (School Team Member)

The visual impact achieved by placing the spring reflections "on top of" last fall's reflections was very evident. The school team was proud of its growth. During 'digging deeper' we were able to develop consensus reasonably quickly on each of the items. It was instructive to compare the results in 'digging deeper' with the results achieved in 'stage of implementation'. In fact, the team changed its overall consensus on two principles after they had a change to "dig deeper". The exercise prompted the school team to move toward a more refined agenda for the future. (School Team Monitor)

³ There was a great deal of inconsistency in the teacher tracking. Only the results of the student tracking will be reported in this review.

Information from all data gathering exercises was monitored, collected, examined and, shared within and across school sites and school boards at regional and provincial levels - to support the goals of the overall CODE project AND to support individual school boards to move forward. Evidence-Informed decision-making requires both the effective transfer of research results by researchers to practitioners, and the uptake and incorporation of those results by practitioners (Broner, et al., 2001, Marzano, et al., 2005). In the words of a CODE Monitor,

This process was very well received and CODE was commended for the instruments developed in monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the project. The process caused the team to dialogue about the various elements of the project. The consensus building on some items took longer in some cases as different team members would see and interpret an item differently than their colleagues. The process provoked excellent dialogue. It provided them an opportunity to get a snapshot of where they are now as compared to the commencement of the project and to set goals to continue the next phase to ensure that the process and directions are sustained.

And as expressed by a classroom teacher,

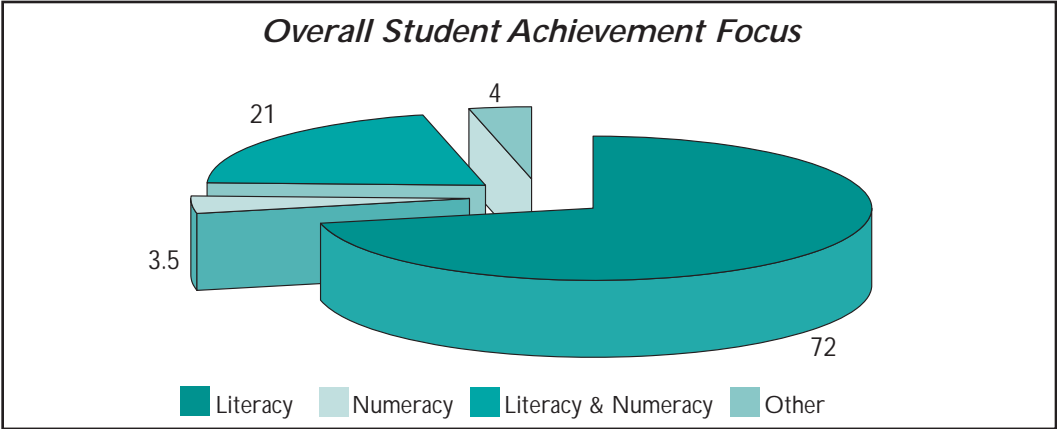
Whoever you get to tell, tell them this has been a wonderful opportunity and has really made a difference, to everyone in the school. (Teacher - School Team Member)

PROJECT PROFILES

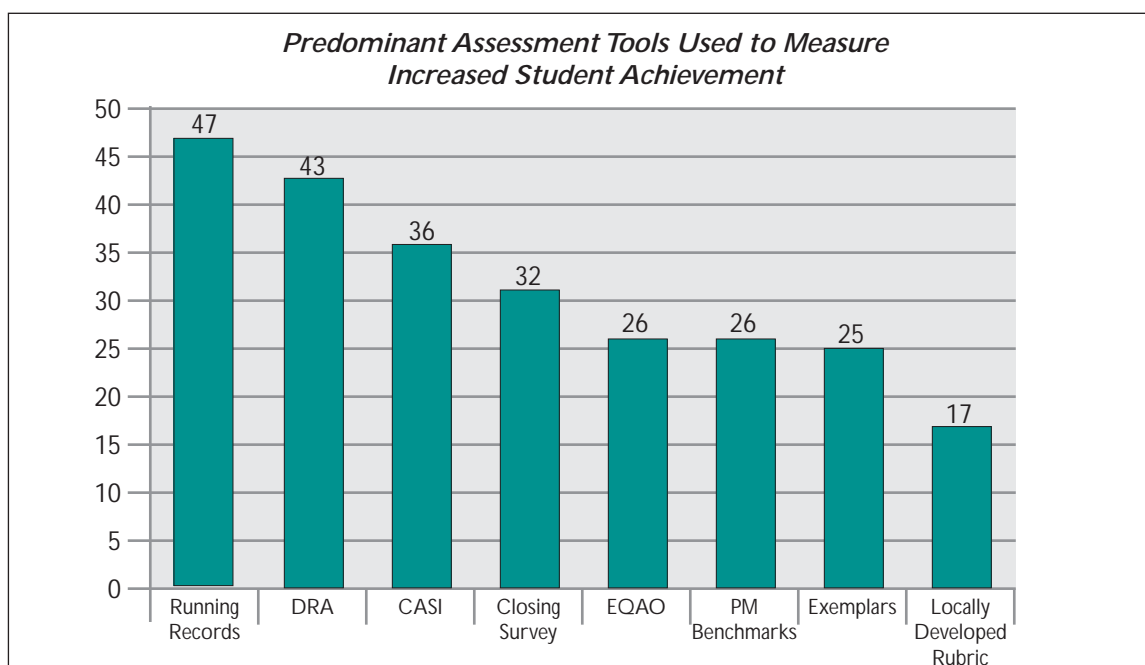
Seventy-eight system CODE Special Education projects were conducted throughout the 2006-2007 school year which included school boards, partnerships with all school authorities, French and English provincial schools and 154 school teams. Both interim and final Board reports suggest that all projects incorporated evidence based strategies found in *Education for All* (2005), in their efforts to impact on improved student achievement and improved teacher professional practice.

Literacy Focus

A review of the CODE Special Education project survey results found that a variety of project designs were developed at the local district level, to support achievement for students with special education needs and teacher capacity building. Thirty percent of projects had a clear Board or School focus and 40 percent had a Classroom based focus. Over 90 percent of the 2006-2007 CODE Special Education projects took place in the elementary panel and focused primarily on literacy achievement.

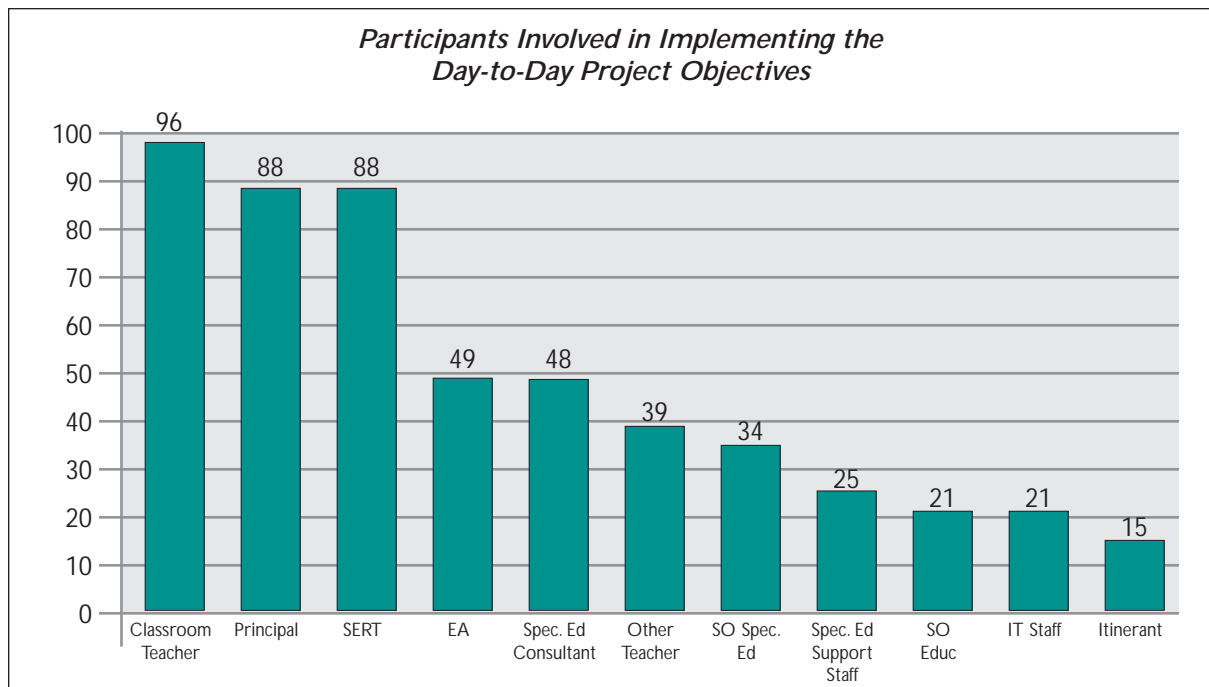


When asked to identify the key assessment tools used to measure increased student achievement, both system and school teams indicated that running records, DRA, CASI and observational surveys were the predominant assessment tools used to measure literacy achievement. For example 47 percent of CODE Special Education projects made use of running records, 43 percent of projects identified using the Developmental Reading Assessment, 26 percent of projects made use of EQAO results and 25 percent looked toward Ministry Exemplars to assess improvement in literacy achievement for student with special education needs.



Team Building and Collaboration

Most school boards established a CODE project team that included a well defined community of learners. When project team members were asked who specifically was involved in the day-to-day project objectives, the majority clearly stated that the classroom teacher, school principal and, the special education resource teacher (SERT) played a key role in implementing their CODE project. There is evident recognition that teachers cannot support student learning alone. Other key team members included educational assistants, special education consultants, other teachers within the school (e.g., student success teacher, literacy lead, reading recovery, literacy coaches, teacher consultants, Reading recovery teachers, early literacy teachers, ESL teachers and, SPED system teachers), the superintendent of Special Education and other special education and system support staff (e.g., psychologist, social worker, speech and language specialist, youth councillors, IT technicians, computer analyst, manager IT, educational researchers).



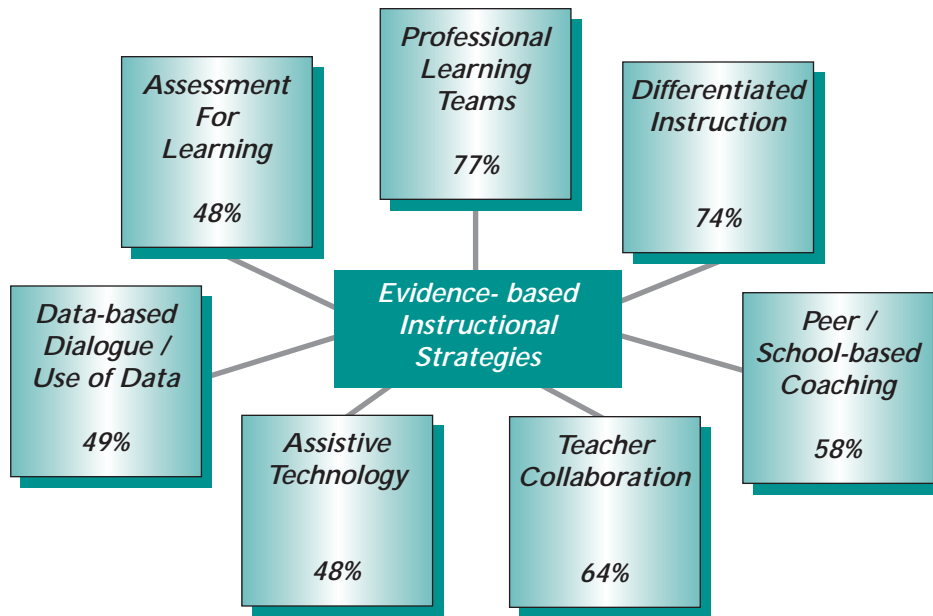
CODE projects teams clearly recognise that although students with special education needs receive support and programming from a number of system and school professionals, the key educator for literacy and numeracy is the classroom teacher. As is illustrated in the chart above, ninety-six percent of CODE projects identify the classroom teacher as the person most likely to have a day-to-day impact on implementing their project objectives. Many classroom teachers reported feelings of self efficacy and importance of being valued by their colleagues as a result of their participation in the CODE project.

I have received a sense of recognition from this project. My assessments have value. When we got together as a group and did the read-a-loud, you could really see the impact on students. (School Team Teacher)

The kindergarten teacher is very involved in the implementation of this project. She is an infectious cheerleader who carries the others along with her. (School Team Monitor)

Key Professional Practices adopted to support Improved Student Achievement

A series of integrated evidence based professional practices were adopted by each of the CODE Special Education project teams when developing their individual projects. As is evident in the graphic below, 77 percent of projects identified the use of PLTs, 74 percent indicated the use of differentiated instruction, 64 percent identified teacher collaboration and 58 percent stated Peer Coaching as key to supporting improved student achievement.



In addition to those identified in the graphic above, other evidence based instructional strategies included the use of: Student Profiles, Assessment Schedules, Classroom Profiles and Universal Design.

Data collection processes to support improved student achievement and improved teacher professional practice

The variety of data collection tools and processes identified through the CODE Special Education projects is a clear indicator of a cultural shift occurring at the system and school level. Every CODE Special Education project team has reflected on the value of data to support both improved student achievement and teacher professional practice. Fifty-eight percent of projects made use of Individual Learning Profiles, 47 percent identified the use of assessment schedules and 40 percent used Classroom Profiles as data collection techniques to support improved student achievement. On the other hand, less than 10 percent of project teams identified tracking Teacher Journal entries and, IEP Reviews to support improved achievement for student with special needs. This may be attributed to the fact that these data sources are often only accessible in paper format and therefore make them difficult to incorporate as a regular data collection process.

<i>Data Collection Processes to support Improved Student Achievement</i>	<i>Data Collection Processes to support Improved Teacher Professional Practice</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Learning Profiles • Assessment Schedules • Classroom Profiles • Electronic Assessment Tracker • Data Walls • SMS/Data Warehouse • Teacher Grade Book • Teacher Journal • IEP Review • EQAO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-service/ PD Schedule • Teacher Surveys • Teacher Annual Learning Plans • Walk Throughs • School Improvement Plans • Assessment Schedule • Minutes of Meetings • Tracking Boards/ Data Walls • Individual Learning Profiles • Classroom Profiles

We similarly note from the survey results that data was also regularly collected and reflected upon through the CODE project to support teacher professional practice. One hundred percent of all CODE projects indicated that they made use of in-service schedules and/or evaluation forms as a way to monitor and evaluate the impact of professional learning opportunities being offered to school staff. Over half of all projects also made use of teacher surveys and Teacher Annual Learning plans to measure improved teacher professional practice. Interesting to note, 48 percent of both System and School teams reinforced the value of School Improvement Plans (SIP) as a key data collection processes to measure improved teacher professional practice. In the words of one school Principal,

This project has made quite a difference in our School Improvement plan; the precision became incredible and we were able to have professional talk about one specific issue.

KEY FINDINGS:

As the CODE project teams implemented the range of evidence based principles identified in the CODE special education project proposal template and focussed on implementing the professional learning based on instructional content from Education For All (2005) evidence of short term improvement of staff use of effective assessment and instructional strategies that benefit students with special education needs began to emerge.

An initial analysis of the Stage of Implementation Continuum results and consequent evidence provided by school and system team members indicates a cultural change is occurring across Ontario. The table below provides a summary overview of the percent change from Time 1 to Time 2 with respect to each of the nine principle elements identified in the CODE project. All CODE projects experienced change with respect to many of the principles. Much of the movement was a 'change' from an initiation to developing stage. When project teams reevaluated their stage of implementation and reported an adjustment or clarification at Time 2 - the adjustment was largely from a sustaining stage to developing stage. For those project teams who reported 'maintaining' their stage of implementation they were largely at the developing or sustaining stage at Time 1.

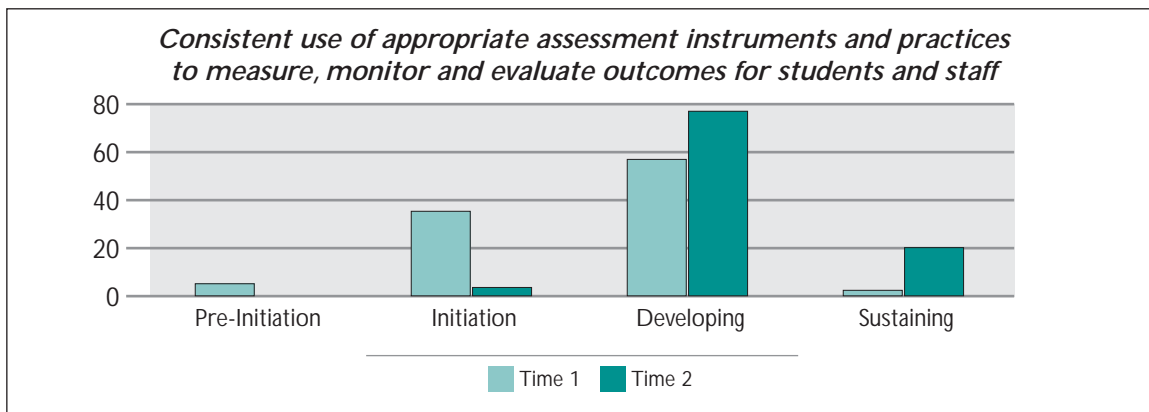
EVIDENCE- BASED PRINCIPLES	PERCENT CHANGE IN STAGE OF IMPLEMENTATION		
	CLARIFY	MAINTAIN	CHANGE
Assessment practices	1.6	41.3	56.9
Application of assessment data	2.4	34.1	63.4
Use of professional learning teams	4.1	37.6	58.2
Principal as instructional leader	4.4	37.5	58.0
School-based coaching	4.1	26.9	69.0
Access to resources	3.8	32.2	64.0
Organizational structure	2.4	45.6	51.9
Precision in project design	6.6	42.5	50.8
Communication	3.8	37.1	59.0

For reporting purposes, the nine evidence based principles identified through the CODE project have been grouped to reflect the predominant themes and patterns that emerged through the stage of implementation continuum activity, digging deeper exercise and focus group discussions. The five major themes that emerged are: Assessment Of / For / As Learning, Professional Learning, Instructional Leadership, School / System Organisation and Communication.

Assessment Of / For / As Learning

An influential body of research has characterised assessment as assessment of learning, for learning and as learning (Earl, 2003, Earl and Katz, 2007). Assessment is a multi-tiered process that occurs in a continuous cycle that is fully integrated into the learning-teaching process (Education for All, 2005) - a process that begins and ends with the classroom teacher.

As the Chart below illustrates, a shift has occurred from the initiating to developing stage and from developing to sustaining. More project team members reported (at Time 2) that a critical mass within their schools and boards have modified their thinking to include appropriate assessment instruments and practices to measure, monitor and evaluate outcomes for both students and staff.



When project teams had the opportunity to provide evidence of their use of assessment, by far the majority of teams reported that staff had begun to modify their thinking and practice around:

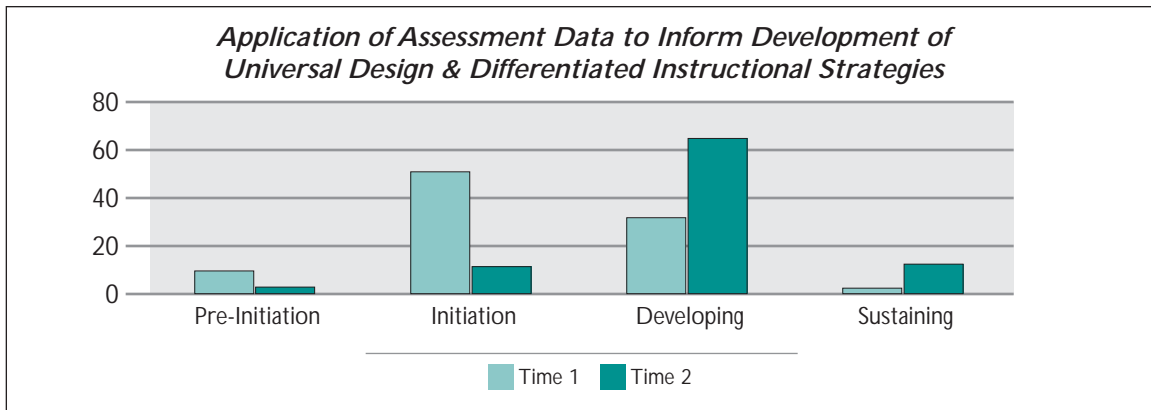
- Using assessment in the classroom to focus their instruction;
- Using evaluation strategies to support both student achievement and staff capacity building;
- Using appropriate assessment strategies and instruments to support students with special education needs and;
- Ensuring time and mechanisms are allotted to provide regular feedback including IEP consultations.

Thirty-eight percent of teams reported that having the appropriate time and mechanisms to provide regular feedback to students was embedded in their school's culture. It has become a driving force in the daily work of the school.

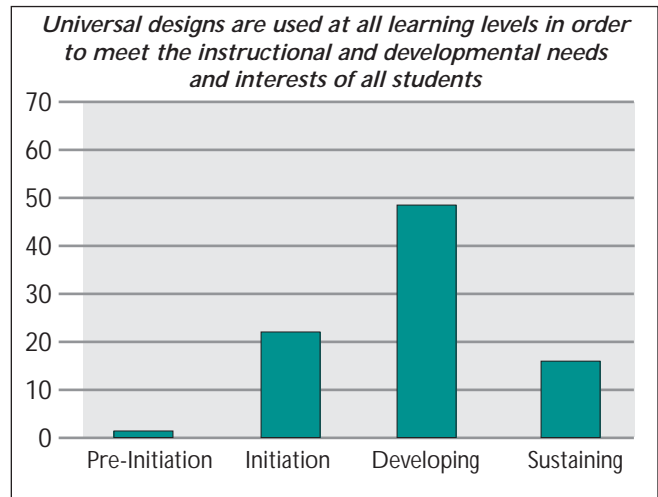
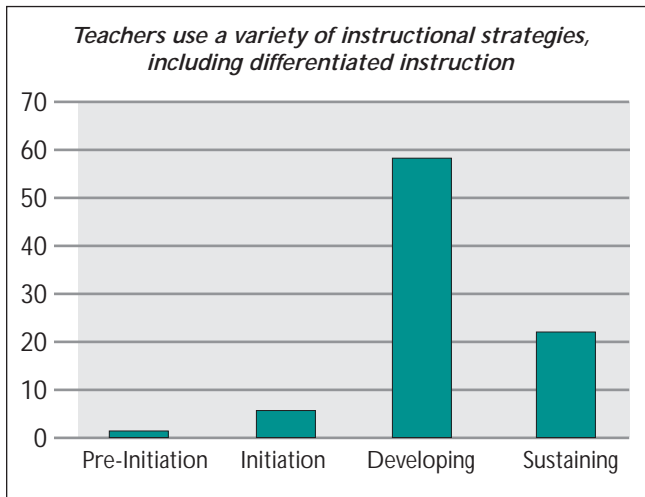
We have made a lot of growth in our focus schools. We know where to go next. There was real growth in teacher learning. They have started to embed these practices throughout their day. (School Team Member)

The team was greatly excited about the CODE project to provide training in assessment tools to teachers of the developmentally challenged classes. They spoke of a new common language and interest with other teachers and using data to make better transitions from one developmentally challenged class to another. (School Team Monitor)

While the previous chart suggests that most teams have fully endorsed the use of assessment data, a cultural shift is still in the making with respect to using assessment data to inform the development of universal design and differentiated instructional strategies. Overall findings from the reflective activity continuum and ensuing discussion provide early indicators of a shift in practice to increased application of assessment data to inform the development of Universal Design and Differentiated Instructional strategies. In the Fall of 2006 (Time 1), many teams were at the discussion or initiation stage; by the Spring of 2007 (Time 2), many teams had transitioned to the application or developing stage.



Through the 'digging deeper' exercise we found that much of the shift from Time 1 to Time 2 in the application of assessment data to inform Universal Design and Differentiated Instructional strategies was supported by teacher practices that support differentiated instruction more so than the application of universal design. For example, when project teams were asked to dig deeper and to indicate to what extent teachers used a variety of instruction strategies, including differentiated instruction - most teams reported that they were at a developing or sustaining stage. Whereas, when they were asked to what extent universal designs were used at all learning levels in order to meet the instructional and developmental needs and interest of all students - more teams reported they were at the initiation or developing stage.



As expressed through a number of CODE team projects, teachers are responding to the specific learning profiles of individual students.

For me, the CODE project gave me better understanding of assessment and using it to drive my instruction. That was huge. I would like to use that more in all areas of my teaching (School Team Teacher).

As a result of the CODE project, among behavioural teachers and classroom teachers with behaviour students integrated into their classrooms, the primary discussion is no longer based on behaviour management, but has shifted to a learning focus, what works to increase literacy skills. (School Team Member)

I have completely changed my teaching practices as a result of this project (Comment by a classroom teacher paired with a behavioural teacher in the CODE project)

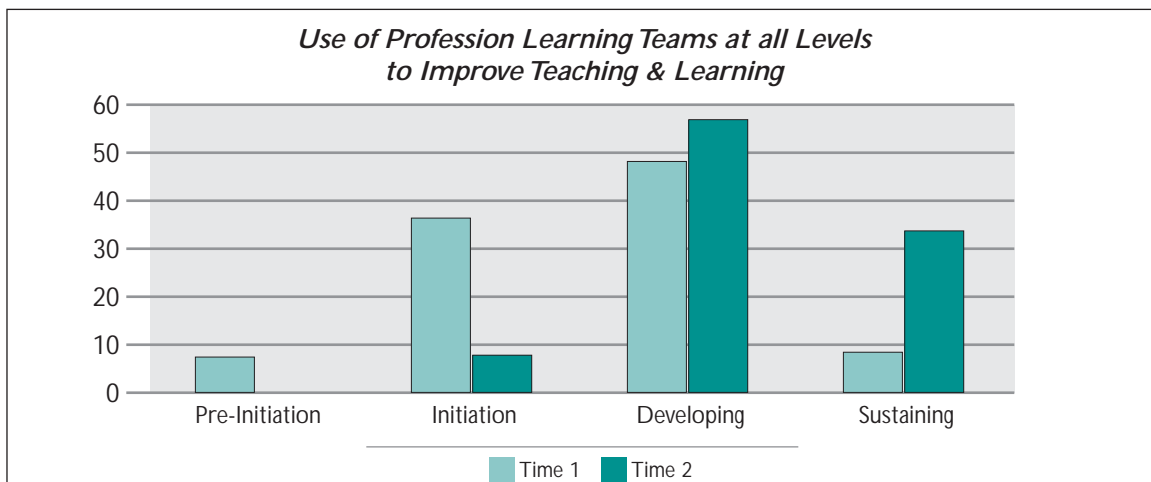
One of the CODE monitors also reflected,

An interesting point was made about differentiating coaching support to provide greater support where it was most needed to increase staff capacity. This small board has been able to use CODE funding to make significant gains.

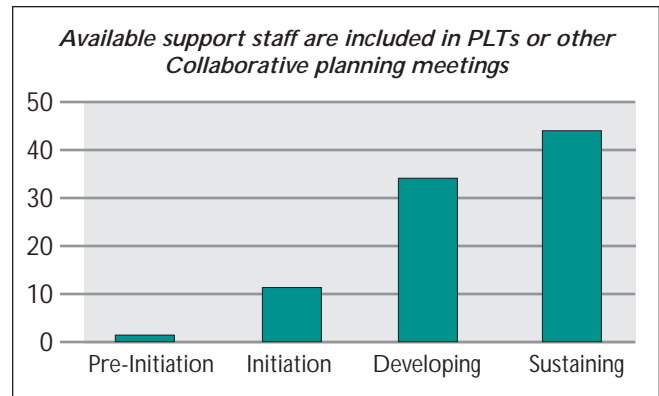
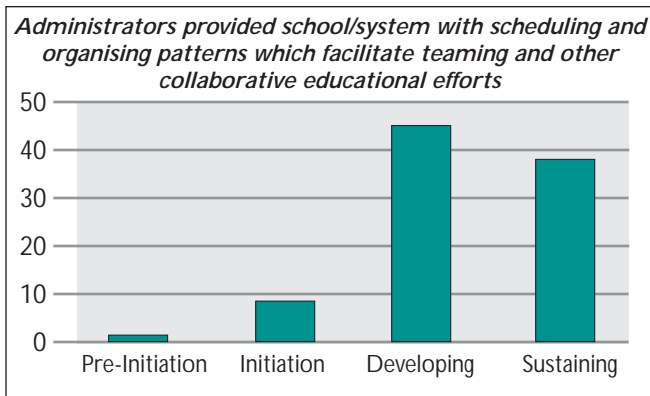
Professional Learning

Current literature recognises that an important key to developing capacity for improved student achievement and teacher professional practice lies in the successful development of professional learning teams (Eaker, DuFour, & Burnette, 2002; Louis, Marks, & Druse, 1996; Scribner et al., 1999). For a school to develop a professional learning culture, schools and school boards must overcome isolation in teaching practice, form educational partnerships both in and outside the school, solve problems collectively, focus on changing teaching and learning, and develop shared values and beliefs about student learning, collaboration and open reflective dialogue among colleagues (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Elmore, 2006; Fullan, 1993; Marzano et al., 2005; Mason, 2003; Wagner et al., 2006).

This view was reflected in the CODE results which illustrated improved teacher capacity around the use of professional learning teams and scheduled school-based coaching focused on effective assessment and instruction of students with special needs in the regular classroom.



As a result of the CODE project, we note a significant shift in teams embracing and embedding the use of professional learning teams as a means to improve teaching and learning. In October/November 2006, 36 percent of teams identified themselves at the initiation stage, 48 percent at the developing stage and only 8 percent of teams identified themselves at the sustaining stage. By May/June 2007, only 8 percent identified themselves at the initiation stage, 57 percent at the developing and 35 percent of teams now identified themselves at the sustaining stage.



The findings from the profile survey and focus group discussions with CODE monitors further support that collaboration occurred at a number of levels and involved a variety of relationships. Both school and district teams were committed to working together - to learn from each other and to identify with the larger purpose of supporting students with special needs. A variety of stakeholder comments indicated a new found collegiality between curriculum and special education staff rooted in their shared knowledge, common language and shared understanding of the role each plays in improved student achievement and teacher professional practice.

The project has made a link between curriculum and special education. Our speech and language pathologists are now part of the literacy teams. Our special education staff are basing their recommendations on what is in the Ministry documents. (System Team Member)

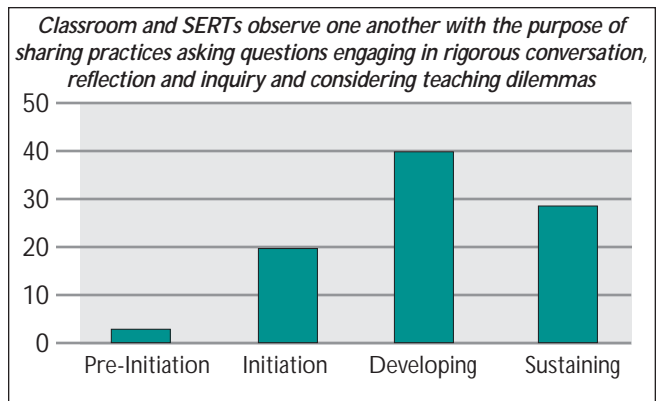
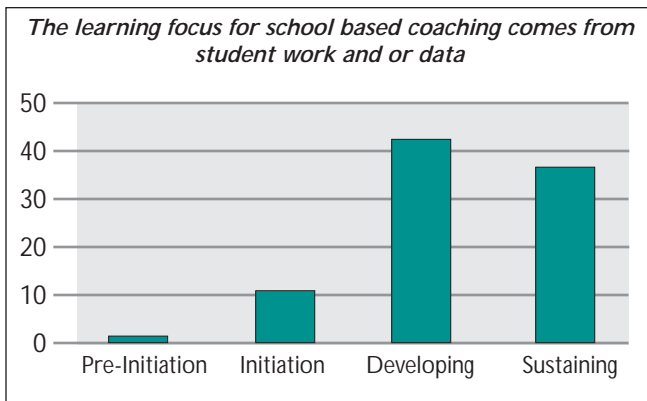
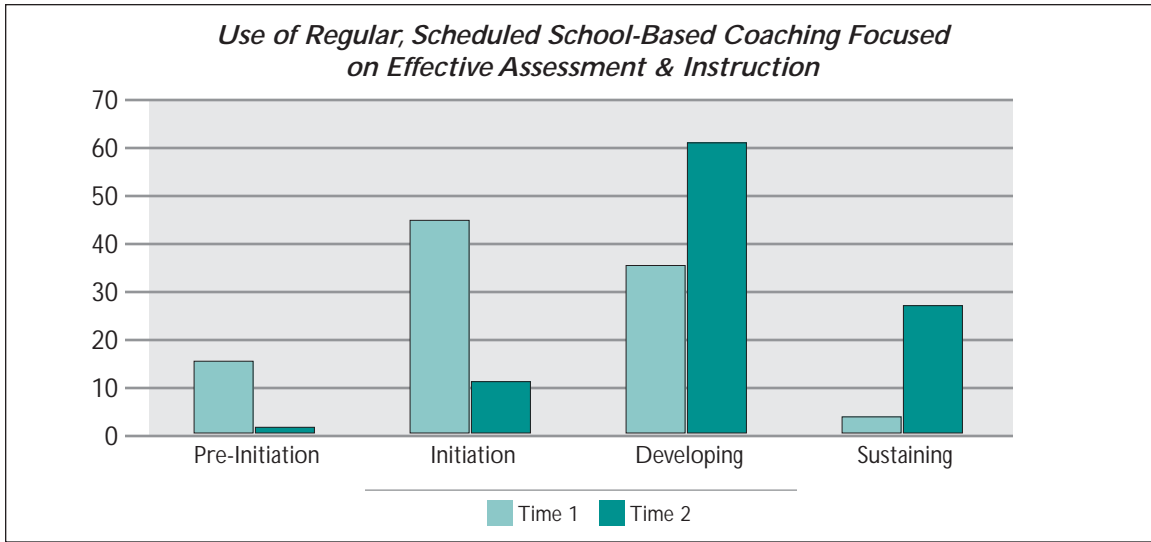
CODE has really moved us along in assessment. There is a whole other level of dialogue that is happening now because the special services staff are now part of our teaching team. (School Team Member)

The fact that everyone is using the same language is very powerful and has caused a shift in teaching practice across the system. (Superintendent of Special Education - System Team Member)

This school team was clearly a "team". They supported each other and listened to each other. As a group they clearly saw themselves as at the development stage in virtually all areas. The 'digging deeper' activity served to reinforce their rankings. (School Team Monitor)

The CODE project provided the teachers with the time to share reflect and communicate with each other. This process allowed the teachers to accept feedback constructively rather than viewing it as a personal attack. They concluded by stating that the CODE project played a significant role in dramatically changing the school even though there had been large turnover of staff.

Further evidence for teacher collaboration, supporting improved teacher professional development and effective leadership to support continuous instructional improvement is demonstrated by the percentage of teams reporting that their staff fully support the use of regular, scheduled school-based coaching. At Time 1 CODE team members reported that 15 percent were at the pre-initiation stage, 44.5 percent at initiation and 35.7 percent at developing. At Time 2 we note a significant shift, with 61.7 percent reporting at developing and 26.5 percent at a sustaining stage of implementation.



Clearly, administrators are providing staff with opportunities for professional growth through experiences in a variety of education settings and roles.

As a result of the CODE project, I've been able to personally get a lot of professional development, be in other classrooms, learn from other teachers and put in my two cents worth. I am excited about what I will do next year as a result of this. There has been a big impact for my students - and also for myself. (School Team Member)

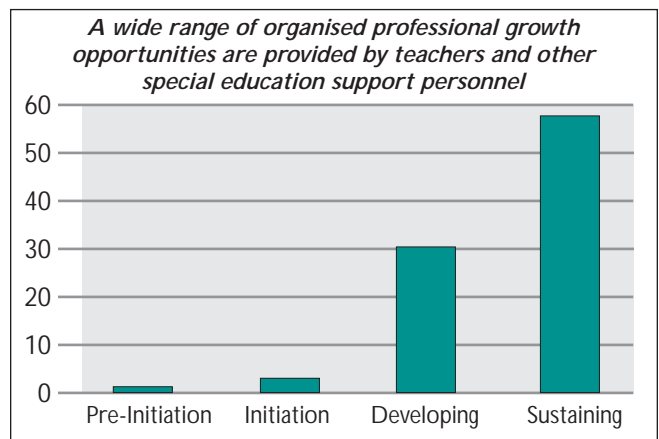
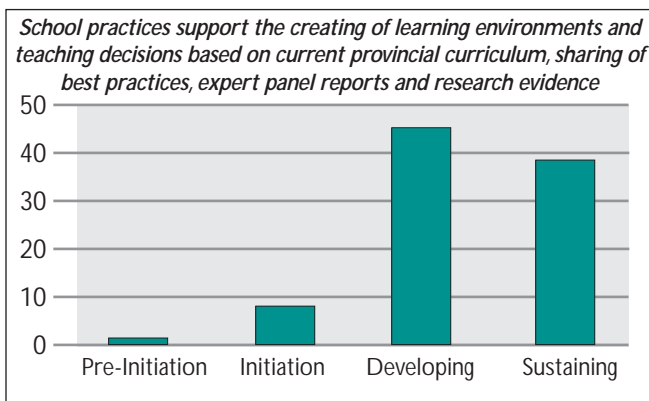
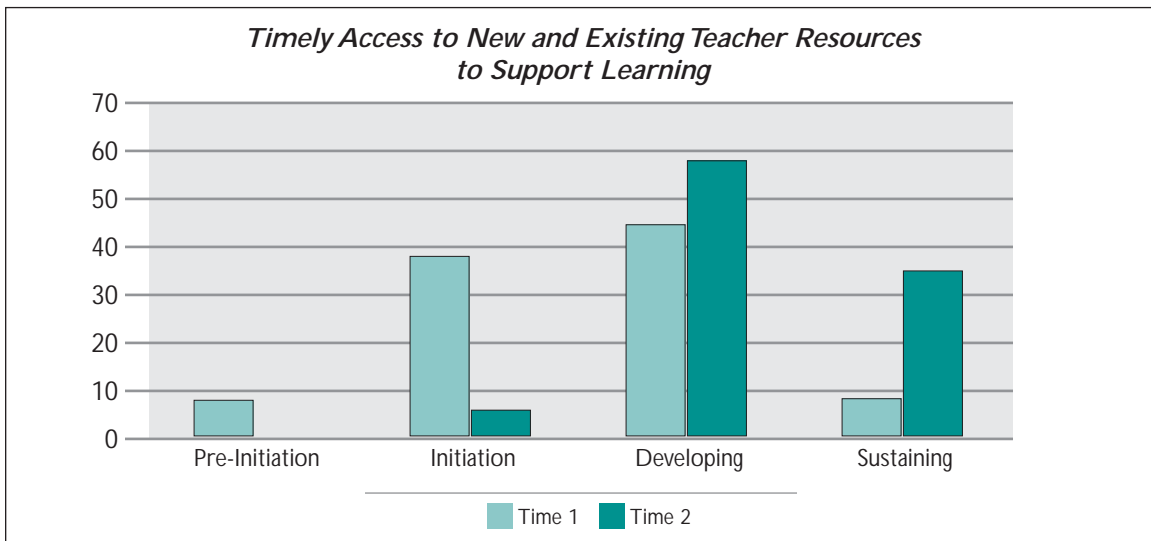
Classroom teachers are much more involved with assessment. All of the students benefited from the strategies being used for the at-risk students. (School Team Member)

This school staff was excited and proud about what they had accomplished in the CODE project. They brought student achievement data, and shared trends and improvements with the monitors. They were eager to talk about what worked in the classroom and the differences they had succeeded in making. Their enthusiasm for the work they had done was contagious.

Results from the student achievement tracking sheets provided further evidence to support changed instructional practice and noticeable effect on student achievement. Each CODE project team tracked the achievement scores of 10 special education students over the course of the CODE project. Seventy-five percent of this convenience sample demonstrated improved academic achievement in areas such as reading, oral language, and writing. The predominant assessment tools used were DRA, PM benchmarks and CASI.

In addition to school-based coaching, other professional growth opportunities, such as workshops, summer institutes, committee work, and school-based PD sessions were also provided by and for teachers and other special education support personnel.

When asked whether teachers had timely access to new and existing resources to support student learning, we note a significant shift from Time 1 to Time 2. In the Fall of 2006 more teams reported that their school/system was at the initiation (37.4 %) and developing stage (45.4%); whereas, in Spring 2007, very few teams reported being at the initiation stage (6.1 %) and many more reported being at the sustaining stage (35.2 %), then they had previously.



Based on our research results, school leaders understand that teachers are not 'fixed' in their teaching practice. School staff are clearly encouraged to be active participants in their own learning. Staff have received a solid, research-based framework and the tools to monitor and improve teaching and learning within the classroom. The access to time and resources made available through CODE funding and the impact that this has had on student learning has not gone unnoticed by project participants:

The opportunity we've had through the CODE project for discussion at all levels, the opportunity teachers have had to talk professionally this year has been incredible; for example, what does an exemplar mean, do we have to follow it if we disagree with it, what else would we use, what do we expect in response from the students -- a lot of really good talk, the opportunity to get together regularly and talk through the work that students are doing. (School Principal - School Team Member)

The system team reported that the DRA and PRIME math training provided a common language for teachers of self-contained classes to join the discussion with other teachers in the school and feel less isolated. The strength of the CODE project was reinforced by both school teams. (System Team Monitor)

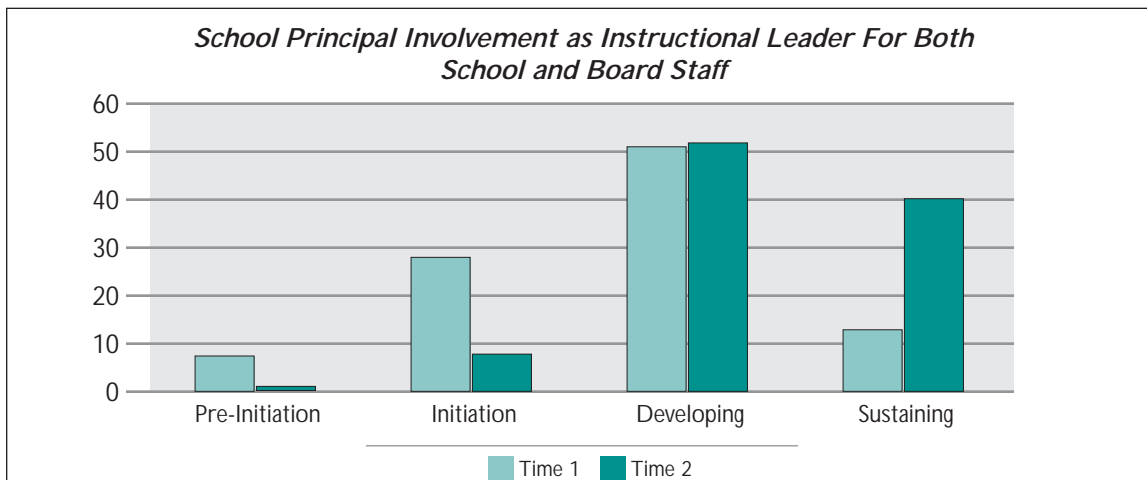
Collectively these results suggest a clear endorsement that professional development must be ongoing, deeply embedded in teachers' classroom work with children and focused on research-based approaches to support increased achievement of all students.

Instructional Leadership

The primary responsibility of all school leaders is to sustain learning (Elmore, 2006; Hargreaves and Fink, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). The results of the CODE project suggest that both students with special education needs and teachers and staff working with students have benefited from the positive effects of strong leadership at both the school and system level.

The CODE projects provided varying degrees of evidence of change from Time 1 to Time 2 in system strategic actions and structures, knowledge and practice of superintendents responsible for special education, school principals, teachers (classroom and special education), special education support staff and student achievement as result of implementing their 2006-2007 CODE special education projects.

The shift from Time 1 to Time 2 is evident in the reduction of teams reporting that the school principal's involvement as instructional leader was at an initiation stage (26.9 percent at Time 1 to 6.5 percent at Time 2) and the increase in teams reporting the school principal's involvement as instructional leader was at the sustaining stage (12.8 percent at Time 1 and 40 percent at Time 2).



As part of the "digging deeper" exercise, school and system team members were unanimous in provided additional evidence that suggest school administrators:

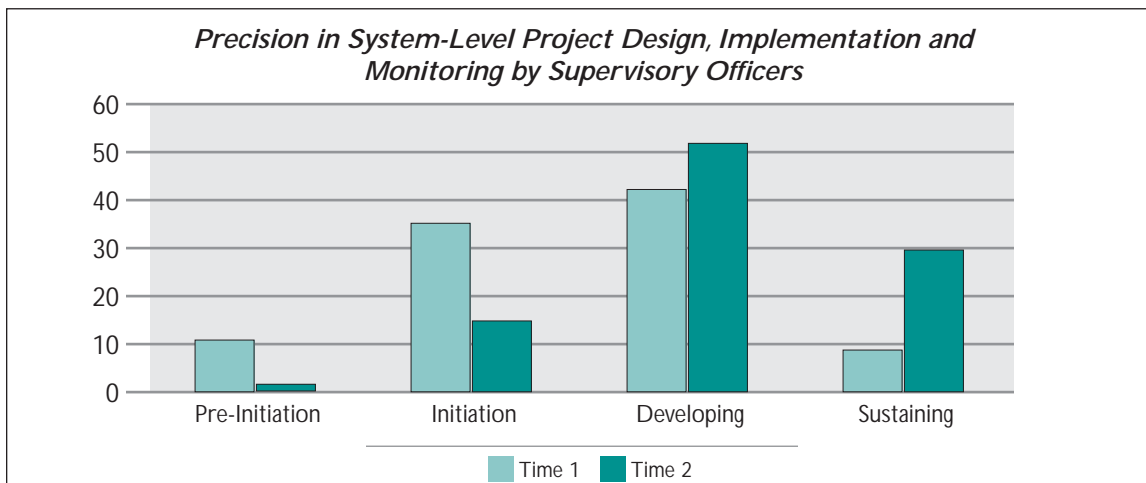
- construct and sustain work environment that encourage teamwork and collaboration
- support the implementation of curriculum and practices for students with special education needs
- help plan, participate in and encourage staff to seek out and engage in professional learning that will contribute to student success
- ensure accountability of personnel and recognise that everyone plays an important role in the school in providing special education services and programs

Across each of these sub-areas over 30 percent of all project teams report that they are at a developing stage and well over 50 percent report that they are at a sustaining stage. These results are further supported by the comments made by School Team Monitors.

The school has made a number of significant strides in terms of implementation over the last 5-6 months. They were realistic in their self-assessments, with much credit due to the Principal for her ongoing leadership and support. (School Team Monitor)

All members were clearly excited about the progress that had been made; a great deal of excellent work has been completed at this school. The principal seemed to have a very good relationship with the staff and was open to evidence from classroom teachers and the special education resource teacher. (School Team Monitor)

Many project teams also provided short term evidence of a positive change in the projects implementation and monitoring by supervisory officers. Here we note a similar shift, from Time 1 to Time 2 that we saw with the school principal. At Time 1 (Oct/Nov 2006), 12 percent of project teams stated that they were at the pre-initiation stage, 35 percent at the initiation stage, 43 percent at the developing and 9 percent at the sustaining stage, with respect to this principle. By Time 2 (May/June 2007), less than 1 percent identified being at the pre-initiation stage, 16 percent at the initiation, 52 percent at the developing and 30 percent identified now being at the sustaining stage.



Although many school teams found it challenging to identify the exact stage of implementation with respect to the Supervisory officers involvement with the CODE project, it is clear from those teams who did report back that supervisory officers were very much involved in the development of the CODE project; are knowledgeable about the key strategies from *Education for All* that are being implemented by staff in their schools and; play an instructional leadership role with respect to being informed about what is happening at a school level in relation to teacher practice and student outcomes for students with special education needs.

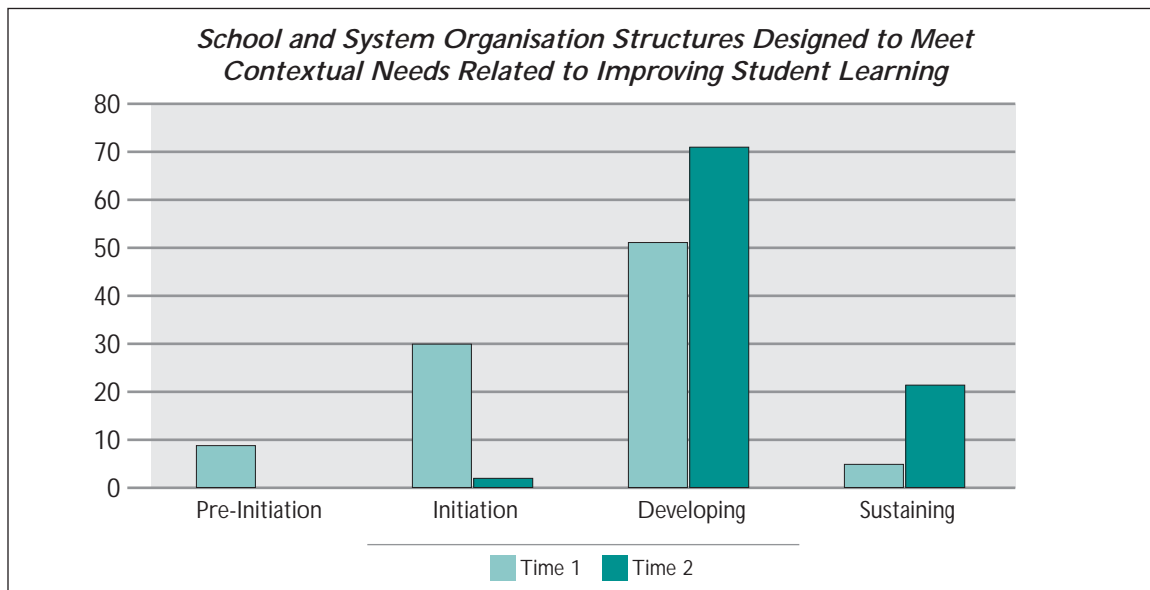
This system team obviously works closely together. All members knew the board CODE project in detail and were closely aligned in their assessment of progress. Members in all positions were open to being convinced by evidence presented by others. (System Team Monitor)

The system level team is very strong and cohesive. The related discussion gave them further insights into next steps for the project. They are already beginning to plan for 2007-2008 with a focus on the further implementation of best practices throughout the year. (System Team Monitor)

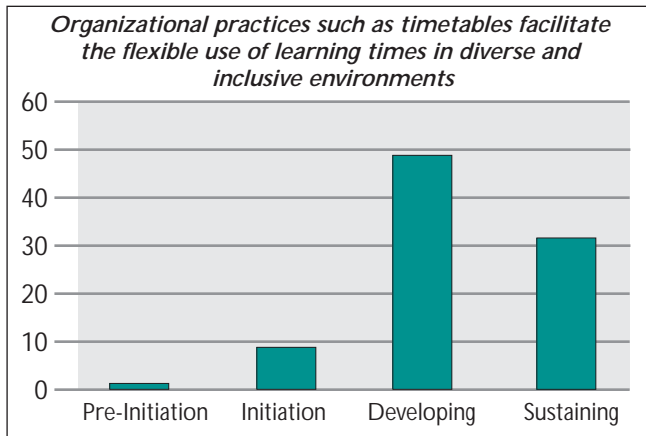
School / System Organisation

At the core of solid leadership are two overriding characteristics, providing direction and exercising influence. Previously we outlined the impact of the CODE project on developing and sustaining strong instructional leadership evident in both school principals and supervisory officers; the results of the CODE special education project also provided evidence that school and system administrators are willing to think outside the box -- to provide adequate time and inclusive space for staff to collaborate, to share planning, and to reflect on their new learning and practice.

At Time 1 many project teams did not believe that their school / system's organisational structure was designed to meet the contextual needs related to improving student learning. Nine percent of teams identified themselves at the pre-initiation stage, 30 percent identified themselves at initiation, 52 percent at developing and only 6 percent at the sustaining stage. At Time 2, when asked the same question, no team identified themselves at pre-initiation, only 4 percent claimed initiation, 71 percent identified developing and 23 percent saw themselves at the sustaining stage.



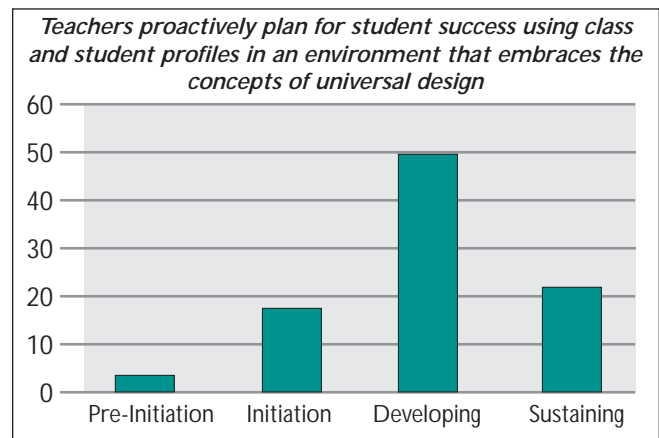
Almost 90 percent of project teams reported that, system and school leaders facilitated organisational flexibility, collaborative planning, timetabling, updating of special education programs and services so that teachers working in teams had the opportunity to provide a variety of diverse and inclusive learning opportunities for students.



These findings are echoed in the words of a School Team Monitor,

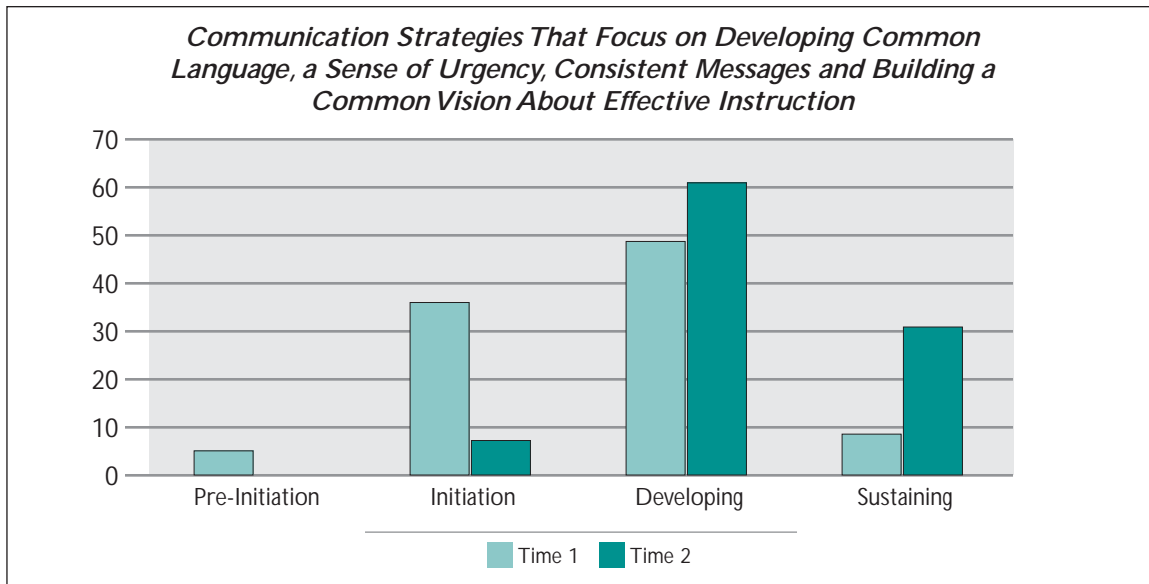
Team members were enthusiastic about the training on the DRA assessment tools and the bridge this formed with other teachers in the school - room for growth in terms of a real learning team approach, joint planning and observation of each other's practice. (School Team Monitor)

Leadership is not only about formal leadership but also informal leaderships. And here too results from the CODE project suggest that classroom teachers are leaders in their own right. Seventy-four percent of code project teams report that classroom teachers, by the end of the CODE project, had either endorsed (53%) or had fully embedded (21%) the principle that "teachers proactively plan for student success using class and student profiles in an environment that embraces the concept of universal design".



Communication

By the end of year 2 (June 2007), all CODE project teams reported some level of sharing of information about the development, implementation and impact of their CODE special education project to senior management, school principals, teachers, Trustees, SEAC and/or parents. During the first few months of the CODE project (Sept - Nov 2006) just over 50 percent of CODE project teams reported that a communication plan was a systemic part of their CODE project. By June 2007, 60 percent of CODE teams reported having implemented and 30 percent of teams reported having embedded in their school board's culture a communication strategy that focused on developing a common language, a sense of urgency, and building a common vision about effective instruction.



CODE project teams used a variety of communication strategies with several stakeholder groups. Communication strategies included an assortment of: formal presentations, agenda items at regular meetings, newsletters, board web site, e-mail, video conferencing and board wide celebrations.

School and System project teams appear to be best at communicating at the school level - communication directed at principals and teachers. When teams reported on their stage of implementation at the end of year 2 (May/June 2007), 11.3 percent reported being at the initiation stage, 49.1 percent at the developing and 38.3 at the sustaining stage, when communicating with school staff. Comparatively, 11 percent reported being at the initiation stage, 40 percent developing, and 39.6 percent at the sustaining stage, when communicating with senior management. Communication strategies directed at parents and community members was more variable across CODE projects. Here we noted that 21.7 percent of teams identified being at the initiation stage, 41.7 percent at the developing and 32.2 percent at the sustaining stage.

CONCLUSION

The CODE Special Education Project was a strategic action to address recommendations from *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6 (2005)* and to assist school boards across Ontario to develop lateral capacity building projects to improve teacher professional practice and raise achievement for students with special education needs.

Overall the findings from the CODE 2006-2007 projects provide early indications of a positive shift in school and school system thinking and practices to increased inclusion and effective assessment and instruction of student with special education needs, with evidence of increased teacher professional capacity, collegiality and belief that all students can learn.

More specifically, the research results provided clear evidence of the following:

- Improved academic achievement of students with special education needs, specifically in the areas of reading, oral language and writing;
- Increased application of assessment data such as DRA, PM Benchmarks, Running Records, CASI to inform differentiated instructional strategies for students with special education needs;
- Increased capacity of special education teachers to collaborate with and support regular classroom teachers in effective literacy instruction;
- Enhanced use of regular, scheduled school-based coaching focused on effective assessment and instruction;
- Increased use of professional learning teams at the school and system level, to support improved teaching and learning;
- Increased capacity of supervisory officers, school principals, and other school leaders to serve as instructional leaders for both school and board staff, and;
- A clear appreciation of the value of the CODE Special Education Project to support improved student learning and teacher professional practice

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