

# CODE CHRONICLES LES CHRONIQUES DU CODE

ISSUE NO. 8  
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**WELCOME TO ISSUE EIGHT! BIENVENUE À LA HUITIÈME ÉDITION!**  
Read on and enjoy the contributions of our many writers from school districts across Ontario. Prenez connaissance des contributions de vos collègues de par tous les conseils scolaires de l'Ontario. Bonne Lecture!

## CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks to the following for participating in this issue

CODE Team  
Barrie Region Boards  
French Language Boards  
London Region Boards  
Ottawa Region Boards  
Sudbury/North Bay Region Boards  
Thunder Bay Region Boards  
Toronto and Area Region Boards

## Letter from the Editors

Brian Finnigan, Nancy Tully-Peever

**WE ARE** pleased to present to you this eighth online edition of CODE Chronicles. The focus of this edition is the 2009–2010 CODE JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Special Education project, which built on the lessons learned from the previous CODE Special Education project of 2005–2009. This latest CODE initiative was designed to identify existing effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for Kindergarten and Grade 1; share these through leadership networks; build teacher/school board capacity to implement them; and develop a monitoring tool to support school boards in the implementation process. Unlike the earlier CODE Special Education project with its focus on individual board work, the JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies project was designed to encourage a regional process focused on common goals.

We especially want to thank the lead board superintendents representing the seven regions of the province for submitting articles summarizing each region's processes and results. We encourage you to post comments to the authors of these articles using the email links provided at the end of each article.

CODE Chronicles has proven to be an effective tool for communicating what boards are doing in the area of special education. Chronicles has promoted best practices in special education and has encouraged dialogue amongst boards, staff, and SEACs. The CODE Chronicles website has had over 10,000 hits over the past two years.

We continue to welcome your feedback and encourage you to continue to share your successes and challenges in your own

school districts, as well as with colleagues across the province.

Your editors,

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## On the CODE website

If you haven't yet explored the Council of Ontario of Directors website, come on over and take a look at [www.ontariodirectors.ca](http://www.ontariodirectors.ca)

This month we're posting a new feature on the CODE website for the JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Project. You will find the Final Report, the Evaluation Report, the Monitoring Framework, and an Executive Summary. Check it out at [www.ontariodirectors.ca/pages/jkgr1\\_assessment/](http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/pages/jkgr1_assessment/)

## Contact CODE

**IF YOU** have a response to any of the articles in this or any issue of the CODE Chronicles Les chroniques du CODE please use the email link found at the end of each article, or if you have a general suggestion for this publication please drop us a line.

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# The JK-Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Project: The View from the CODE Team

Michelle Forge  
T. John Fauteux

*"The skinny is that nothing succeeds like collective capacity."*  
(Michael Fullan, Motion Leadership, 2010).

During the 2009–2010 school year, the Council of Directors of Education (CODE), with the financial assistance of the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education, supported regional studies of the development and implementation of effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for all students in Junior Kindergarten through Grade 1.

This JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies project built on the lessons learned from the previous CODE Special Education Project 2005–2009. It provided support to ensure that the knowledge gained during the past four school years continues to generate improved learning for both students and staff in Ontario schools.

The project was designed to identify existing effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies; share these through leadership networks; build teacher/school board capacity to implement them; and develop a monitoring tool to support school boards in the implementation process.

The Ministry/CODE Liaison Committee identified the following student, parent, and system outcomes for the CODE JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Project.

#### Outcomes for students:

- improved student achievement
- increased student engagement
- early identification and intervention for students that need additional time and support

#### Outcomes for parents:

- increased opportunity for parent engagement
- increased parent confidence in public education

#### Outcomes for the system:

- increased capacity to implement effective classroom/school evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1
- improved board capacity to self-assess the implementation of evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1
- enhanced knowledge sharing among boards on effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1

With the assistance of a steering team, a process was designed to support the development of a provincial overview of assessment and intervention strategies which reflects the experience and expertise of Ontario educators.

A lead board for each of the seven regions was chosen in October 2009. The following lead boards were selected: York Region District School Board – Barrie Region; Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board – London Region; Sudbury Catholic District School Board – North Bay/Sudbury Region; Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board – Ottawa Region; Lakehead District School Board – Thunder Bay Region; Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board – Toronto and Area Region; and CSDC des Grandes Rivières, representing Ontario's French Language School Boards. The lead boards were responsible for assembling a working group from all boards in the same region of the province and scheduling regional team meetings.

To initiate the CODE Special Education Project: JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies, CODE team leaders and lead superintendents for each region made presentations at Regional Special Education Council meetings. Every region in the province then made plans to support the project focus on joint work at the regional level by finding ways to engage all boards in dialogue and reflection on current practice.

These regional professional learning communities reflected upon two key questions:

1. What is important to all of us in this region in relation to JK–Grade 1 assessment and intervention?
2. What will we focus on in developing our suggestions for the JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Framework for the Province?

Boards collected data in response to reflective questions about the five elements in the "Collection of Evidence Template for Lead Boards." These five elements can be found in Appendix A of our report located on the CODE website. This framework was aligned with Ministry goals and with "lessons learned" at the district and school levels during the CODE Special Education Project (2005–2009). The template was intended to support the development of a provincial framework.

Over the course of the school year, the three CODE team leaders participated in regional meetings and/or teleconferences and provided lead superintendents with ongoing support and monitoring for the project. Each region was required to prepare a final submission for the project team of CODE/lead board members focused on effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1. These reports were presented at a provincial meeting attended by lead board superintendents, two additional staff members from each region, and staff from the Ministry's Special Education Policy and Programs Branch. The CODE team then developed an assessment and

intervention framework for use across the province by synthesizing effective strategies and practices identified in the regional reports. This was all drawn together to make up the elements of the CODE Final Report.

The Final Report, the Evaluation Report and an interactive Framework document will be available on the Code website in mid-October. You are encouraged to visit the CODE website, [www.ontariodirectors.org](http://www.ontariodirectors.org), to view and participate in this exciting initiative.

In closing, we would like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Education Special Education Policy and Programs Branch and the school board staff from across the province that participated and informed us of the creative and effective strategies as reported in the CODE JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Framework. We acknowledge that this project would not have been possible without the leadership of our lead boards along with the skill and talent of the many people who have contributed their expertise. CODE is acutely aware that the work is not finished, but that through the concerted efforts of board staff, the conversation and knowledge mobilization under way will enhance our understanding of this very important endeavour. We thank all of those involved for allowing us the opportunity to work together. ●

✉ Comments about this article? Email [John Fauteux](mailto:John.Fauteux@ed.gov.on.ca) or [Michelle Forge](mailto:Michelle.Forge@ed.gov.on.ca)

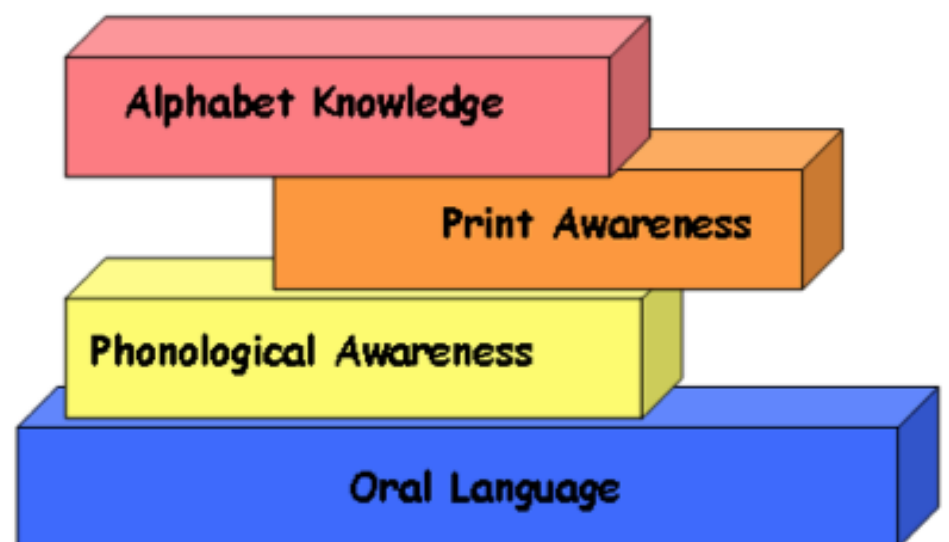
## Barrie Region Tackles the Assessment of the Four Cornerstones of Early Literacy Development

Louise Moreau, Superintendent, York Region District School Board

For the CODE JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Project (2009–2010), the Barrie Region boards agreed to work collaboratively to:

- provide leadership and coordination to identify existing effective, evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1 across the Barrie boards;
- determine the area(s) for collective focus;
- investigate extending the work of ACE-ACT group who are currently working collectively (11 Barrie Region boards) on areas of language development with evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students not yet working on JK–Grade 1 curriculum; and
- coordinate and provide to CODE a Barrie Region synopsis of evidence-informed practices to inform a provincial synthesis.

A committee of people representing school boards across the Barrie Region reviewed and gave collective thought to the evidence-informed assessment and intervention practices used within their respective boards. Amongst the committee members, it was agreed that literacy would be the collective focus for the 2009–2010 project.



Reviews of current research indicated that four essential evidence based predictors of success in early literacy development include alphabet knowledge, print awareness, phonological awareness, and oral language (Trehearne 2005). For the purposes of this project, the Barrie board committee reached consensus that these four cornerstones would frame their work together.

#### Four Cornerstones of Literacy Success

The work of the Barrie Region was based on the understanding that reading and writing are complex processes that require the student to take advantage of a variety of language cues to make sense of the printed word. Therefore, it is important that classrooms provide multiple assessment and instructional opportunities to support the development of alphabet knowledge, print awareness, phonological awareness, and oral language. Classroom activities that intentionally promote a balance of these four cornerstones are needed to support the literacy success of all learners.

#### Assessment and the Tiered Approach to Intervention

Using a tiered approach (Learning for All, 2009, pp. 23–24; Education For All, 2005, p. 120) to literacy instruction across the four cornerstones provides a mechanism for the infusion of practices that are responsive to the strengths and needs of all learners. Integral to this process is the building of teacher capacity to think about and embed sound assessment and instructional practices to address the personal learning strengths and needs

## « Barrie Region, continued

of each student, including those who are most vulnerable. The ability to mindfully plan for instructional practices that are matched to the individual learning styles of children requires us to reflect on the instructional starting points for all learners. "Frequent and accurate assessment, evaluation, and progress monitoring by the classroom teacher comprise the engine that drives change in instruction to meet the needs of all students" (Lyon, Fletcher, Fuchs, & Chhabra, in *Education for All*, 2005, p. 60). Although necessary, assessment is not sufficient on its own. By aligning and adjusting strategies and resources according to assessment results, instructional approaches become sustainable, effective, and differentiated (Learning for All, 2009, p. 19).

Armed with these shared beliefs and understandings, the Barrie Region CODE group compiled a range of assessment tools that support the four cornerstones of early literacy and guide our instruction to meet the needs of each learner. Tools were captured to reflect emergent literacy skills for both commercially developed and locally developed assessments, including many locally developed or adapted assessment tools. Through facilitated discussions, it was determined that school boards use a "tiered approach" to make sure that appropriate strategies, supports, and interventions are identified and implemented to ensure student success. Within the tiered approach, the importance of a multidisciplinary team was considered vital to providing collaborative opportunities around student observation, data collection, strategies, and interventions.

In all school boards and within the collaborative group, it was decided that when staff engaged in professional learning opportunities in the area of assessment, conversations about the assessment process and capacity building among staff were considered most valuable. Effective program delivery occurred when diagnostic and formative assessment data were correctly interpreted, shared, and used to make decisions about instructional starting points and intervention. Results from assessment tools provided information for the student and teacher to inform and modify the teaching and learning critical pathway.

The compilation of assessment tools along with the strategies and interventions that were discussed was shared among all of the boards. Given the limited amount of time allocated for the project, it was agreed that the discussion has only just begun and that there continues to be a considerable amount of sharing of best practices to be done. To quote one participant, "I'm trying to figure out how we can continue to support this kind of work. This collaboration is so important. Historically, the CODE projects have only been about the work in one district. This year, we had the opportunity to collaborate and think at a regional level and that has allowed so much growth." Another participant stated that, "We need to create sustainability of the collaboration and communication between boards. The richness of conversation is invaluable and the connections that we have made outside of the project work need to continue." ●



### References

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2005). *Education for all: The report of the expert panel on literacy and numeracy instruction for students with special education needs, kindergarten to grade 6*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009). *Learning for all K-12: Draft*. Retrieved from <http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/>

Trehearne, M. P., Hemming Healy, L., & Cantalini-Williams, M. (2005). *Comprehensive literacy resource for preschool teachers*. Vernon Hills, IL: ETA Cuisenaire.

Comments about this article? Email [Louise Moreau](mailto:Louise.Moreau)

## Une approche gagnante: la concertation des conseils scolaires dans un projet!

Liliane Laforest, CODE Team Member

Comment décrire le succès du projet des pratiques d'évaluation et d'intervention maternelle-1re année si ce n'est de reconnaître la grande valeur et les résultats tangibles des échanges professionnels entretenus par le personnel des conseils scolaires francophones. Le processus établi, par les sept surintendants de conseils scolaires, les représentants du Ministère et l'équipe de leadership du CODE, a privilégié une démarche réflexive parmi des surintendants, des directions de services et d'école, des conseillers pédagogiques et des enseignants tant aux niveaux provincial, qu'au régional et au local. Ils ont mobilisé leurs connaissances en portant un regard critique sur leurs pratiques d'évaluation et d'intervention et sur la mise en œuvre au niveau du conseil, de l'école et de la salle de classe.

CODE a privilégié un processus qui a suscité l'engagement des conseils en reconnaissant le leadership du surintendant, comme personne-clé, pour mener les discussions à tous les niveaux de son conseil, mais aussi pour profiter d'un échange professionnel avec ses pairs des autres conseils. C'est ainsi qu'ils ont pu entretenir un dialogue efficace entre plusieurs groupes de personnes pour recueillir de multiples informations sur les approches, les pratiques et les ressources dans la majorité des conseils en province.

Les résultats, de cette cueillette d'information et des discussions, se traduisent en un cadre conceptuel provincial de monitoring qui permet d'évaluer les stratégies d'évaluation et d'intervention ainsi que le processus de mise en œuvre au niveau du conseil. Le personnel des conseils a partagé de nombreuses pratiques efficaces, avec preuves à l'appui qui démontrent comment les pratiques d'enseignement contribuent à améliorer le rendement des élèves.

Depuis plus de vingt ans, les conseils de langue française ont mis en place des programmes de maternelle et de jardin d'enfants. Chaque conseil établit ses politiques, sa gestion et ses programmes développés par des équipes d'enseignants ayant une vaste expérience. Afin d'assurer une haute qualité de programmes et de services dans le conseil, une évaluation continue permet de connaître les points forts ainsi que les améliorations à apporter. Peu d'outils sont disponibles pour faire une évaluation aussi complète selon le processus d'une communauté d'apprentissage professionnelle. Les rencontres professionnelles ont suscité des discussions ouvertes sur la valeur et l'efficacité des outils, des stratégies et des pratiques utilisés. Plusieurs éléments et indicateurs qui peuvent servir à l'élaboration d'un plan d'amélioration de l'école et du conseil, ont été retenus comme étant pertinents. Tous les renseignements compilés par les conseils francophones participants ont servi à l'élaboration de cet outil. Les conseils pourront s'en servir pour réfléchir à leurs pratiques et les évaluer en plus d'acquérir des informations sur diverses approches et des ressources.



De nombreuses réalisations clés sont partagées dans un rapport provincial, accessible au site web du CODE. Il rapporte les retombées favorables sur plusieurs aspects tels la croissance professionnelle des participants, le rapprochement des responsables des secteurs de la programmation et de l'enfance en difficulté pour travailler vers un même objectif tant au niveau du conseil qu'au niveau régional et provincial. Une banque de ressources permet aussi aux conseils d'aller puiser des outils et des programmes qui peuvent les aider. Lors de la rencontre provinciale, des constats importants furent relevés selon les cinq éléments étudiés et un besoin de poursuivre ce dialogue dans un forum de communauté d'apprentissage provincial est proposé. Parmi les leçons apprises, nous reconnaissons l'importance d'utiliser un processus et un outil qui permettent tant de reconnaître les points forts de nos pratiques en identifiant ce qui nécessite des améliorations. L'engagement de toutes les personnes qui cherchent à rehausser l'enseignement est primordial dans une telle approche.

Le travail, réalisé grâce à l'implication d'un très grand nombre de personnes dans plusieurs conseils, a eu des retombées dans chacun des conseils, mais aussi tous les conseils francophones de la province peuvent en bénéficier. Mettre les connaissances de chacun à profit de tous est une formule gagnante! ●

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Comments about this article? Email [Liliane Laforest](mailto:Liliane.Laforest) or [Nicole Gaudet](mailto:Nicole.Gaudet)

## Regional Special Education Council (RSEC)–London Regional Office JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Project

Vicki Corcoran, Superintendent, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

### Overview/Context:

The Regional Special Education Council from the school boards and school authorities in the London region has a history of working collaboratively to share resources, expertise, and data. Through a logic model exercise conducted in 2007 with facilitation from Ministry of Education personnel, the London Regional Special Education Council

To enable students with special needs to achieve their full potential through the provision of special education programs and services.

established the following goal:

The participating boards and school authorities have shared resources, information, and expertise as part of that professional learning opportunity, and have developed tools for the sharing of information and the gathering of regional data as we work towards this regional goal. As one aspect of this, the region has for the past several years used a web-based survey tool to gather regional data on assessments and Individual Education Plan processes. The various participants have used the information to inform their own practice in their individual boards.

### What We Did:

In 2009–10, several of the boards in the region took on Lead Board responsibilities for various projects, such as: JK–1 CODE Project; ASD – Phase 2 Connection Project; A4 – Assessing Achievement in Alternative Areas; and Learning for All K–12. At the November 2009 RSEC meeting, it was agreed that data would be collected and shared among all parties with regard to all of these projects, and that the data and information would be gathered using a similar format and with similar mechanisms. Each participant completed an agreed-upon set of questions specific to the particular project. In a follow-up to the collected data, a meeting with each of the boards was held to verify the information and to identify resources being developed that would be shared regionally.

In order to facilitate the collection of the data, a recently retired RSEC member was employed to collect and collate the data and to present updates and findings at the regional RSEC meetings.

## « London Regional Office, continued

### What We Learned:

In the initial data gathering process, boards were asked to comment on specific areas of each project with regard to their stage of implementation. In relation to the JK-1 CODE project specifically, boards responded to the categories of capacity building, collaboration, measuring progress, informing parents, and the collection and use of data to inform practice.



Overall, boards reported being in the implementation stage with regard to the specific areas delineated in the survey. Boards were implementing job-embedded learning opportunities for staff and focusing on the use of evidence-informed assessments to improve student learning. All boards reported to be at the sustaining stage for clear and collaborative process for entry into school and collaboration with

community partners. In the area of student and class profiles, however, boards generally reported that they were at the preparation and initiation stages, although the majority indicated that there were planned, precise, and intensive assessments and interventions for some students, along with parent and family involvement. Data from regulated health professions and/or external agencies was being used to inform programming for students entering the school system.

During the second phase of the project, face-to-face meetings were held at each board. The key components of effective practices were identified in several areas:

**Assessment Methods:** Boards identified the connection to the School Effectiveness Framework process as a key component to successful practices in the JK-1 area. The collaborative involvement of other professionals, such as speech/language pathologists, psychologists, special education consultants/coordinators, and community professionals during the entry-to-school process was deemed to be essential.

**Standards:** The need for standards and consistency in the delivery of services across all schools in a district allowed for consistent monitoring and the more effective use of data, with guidelines being provided by the board, at the JK-1 and primary levels. The assessment of foundational skills helped staff to know their students and to inform and direct instruction. The results obtained through the gathering and analysis of data enable teachers to provide a profile of student growth and development and to develop responsive programs to meet the needs of all learners.

**Training:** Training for staff was seen as most successful when it involved doable tasks—tasks that were manageable and meaningful. Embedded professional development with time to practice was seen as most effective. Early Years staff benefited from training on how data informs teaching, with an emphasis on next steps.

**Communication and Collaboration:** The boards identified the key components of effective communication with families as being open and honest communication, the minutes of meetings being shared/communicated with next steps identified, the modelling of techniques for parents, the sharing of information in a variety of formats, and explanations of terms/programs/procedures. The need for an open and inviting atmosphere was also highlighted.

Partnership agreements and established protocols were seen as effective strategies for working collaboratively with community partners. Open and clear communication processes, and the timely sharing of reports and information, were seen as key components to good working relationships. Some boards identified the use of problem-solving community planning tables as an effective process.

**Support:** In order to establish effective intervention strategies for Early Years students, several key areas of support were identified. System support mechanisms, such as professional learning communities and system in-service on intervention strategies, were valued. Having the JK-1 area identified as an area of focus in school and board improvement plans was also seen as important for highlighting early intervention.



School-based supports mentioned by boards frequently included the need for school-embedded professional development and the support of system resource personnel at the school level. The use of assessment results in a systematic way to inform teacher instruction in order to meet students' needs was again highlighted, along with the need to have an understanding of intervention strategies appropriate to the identified needs.

Classroom supports identified by boards to support the learning of young students included the use of learning profiles, differentiated instruction, the use of high-yield strategies for instruction, and the use of interventions and remediation strategies in the areas of fine motor skills and oral language development.

Boards appreciated the support of funding made available through CODE to help with the costs related to implementation and the duplication of materials.

### Next Steps:

In order to help expedite the sharing of information gathered as a result of the four regional initiatives, a decision was made by the RSEC members to embark on a regional document-sharing project through the development of a regional website.

The website also contains other materials in addition to the information gleaned from the four specific initiative areas. Topics include:

- Alternative program
- Assessment and evaluation
- Assistive technology

- Exceptionalities
- Early learning
- EQAO
- English as a second language
- Individual Education Plans
- Learning for All
- Policies and procedures
- Information shared at RSEC meetings
- Speech and language
- Transitions
- Inclusion
- Literacy
- Mental health and well-being
- Parent resources

Due to the close relationship and spirit of cooperation between the members of RSEC, the member boards and school authorities have generously agreed to share the resources contained within the website to assist each other in the work they do in the field of Special Education. The website will enable them to freely share the resources which until now were developed for internal use within each board. Further, through the sharing of these resources, the members of RSEC believe they will be able to improve the quality of service they provide in meeting the needs of all students. ♦

Comments about this article? Email [Vicki Corcoran](mailto:Vicki.Corcoran)

## CODE Ottawa Regional Junior Kindergarten to Grade One Assessment and Intervention Learning Team 2009–2010

Trish FitzGibbon, Superintendent, Hastings Prince Edward District School Board

Dalin and Rolff (1995) and Katz, Earl, and Jaafar (2009) argue “that the only way schools will survive the future is to have the capacity to deal with change because they have a collective understanding of where they are going, what is important, and how to get there. Sustainability of positive changes in education depends on attention to collective development. Individual learning is no longer sufficient. People at all levels of the system need to learn and different parts of the system must be aligned to provide a coherent and consistent picture and strategy for change.” (Stoll, in press.)



The Ottawa CODE project was all about collective understanding and collective development. We became “knowledge workers” and in the end, through uploading and downloading knowledge, built new knowledge that resulted in significant recommendations which we believe are the next steps in refining our practices to enhance the achievement of our early learners.

The Ottawa Regional Junior Kindergarten to Grade One Assessment and Intervention Learning Team was comprised of personnel from each of the region's school boards and was inclusive of a range of reflective practitioners from curriculum, special education, and specialized services.

The Learning Team met on five occasions for full-day sessions throughout the 2009–2010 school year, with each session hosted by a different school board. A professional learning team approach was implemented, with the group establishing norms and committing to a project plan.

Each session began with a focus on the goals of the project and a review of the previous work accomplished. This was followed by an activity that activated prior knowledge to prepare for the day's discussion and work on the identified assessment of intervention element (e.g., instructional strategies). Through discussion, team members in mixed school board groups brought forward knowledge and evidence-informed practices or resources that demonstrated results within their school system. Each session concluded with the sharing and critiquing of recommendations for consideration in our final report.

An exploration and recommendation template was provided for groups to stimulate discussion, share knowledge and resources, and synthesize their thinking into key recommendations for consideration in the development of a provincial Junior Kindergarten to Grade One Assessment and Intervention framework. This synthesis of thinking was achieved through a process of deliberate debate to reach consensus.

Team members maintained a project binder which successively built upon the work completed in the previous learning team sessions. In addition, an email network was established to inform members of meeting dates and preparation activities.

The professional learning team members agreed to design a report template similar to the Special Education Transformation Working Table Report, 2006, so that the synthesized learning could be captured in a series of next-step recommendations to support the development of the provincial framework. These recommendations would be grounded in current Ministry initiatives, evidence-informed research, and best practices, and would reflect the consensual thinking of the region.

The Ottawa Regional Reflections April 2010 Report was primarily a “process” oriented report. The recommendations for the five elements (system processes and organization; parent involvement and community communication; assessment and use of data; instructional leadership; and professional learning and capacity building) reflected the best practices and thinking of the regional learning team, with future-oriented next steps recommended, so that all boards across the province could consider their current practice

## « Ottawa Region, continued

and potentially scaffold refinements to their processes. Each recommendation clearly outlined a goal, priority focus, rationale grounded in research, and detailed recommendations.

Briefly, the following priority areas were identified for consideration in the provincial framework:

**System Processes:** renewed guidelines for entry-to-school practices that align with the early learning program and are inclusive of community partners and screening processes, and are easily accessible to parents.

**Parent/Community Involvement:** renewed guidelines for effective collaboration strategies amongst parents, teachers, early childhood educators, and community partners.

**Assessment and Data Use:** renewed guidelines for the development of an early learning assessment process and cycle for implementation that supports the transition/entry-to-school process and clearly profiles the learning needs of students.

**Instructional Leadership:** renewed guidelines for the development and implementation of a student learning profile and process so that it networks the school, parents, and community partners effectively in supporting the learning needs of each early learner.

**Professional Learning:** renewed guidelines for the implementation of early learning networks that demonstrate a commitment to focused, intentional, multidisciplinary team learning whereby participants are learning from, with, and on behalf of one another.



Participants in the CODE Ottawa Regional Learning Team expressed a significant sense of personal and regional accomplishment as part of our CODE project! Members repeatedly noted, with conviction, that a regional learning team approach permitted them to model collaborative inquiry and enhanced their collective responsibility through a professional learning community. Our sessions reflected research-informed and evidence-based practices, as well as shared philosophies, beliefs, and a consistency of approaches to early learning across the region. As next steps, participants were clear in identifying a need to include critical partners from other sectors to be part of the regional learning team and to enhance the work and learning of the team for the success of early learners. In addition, the team also recommended an opportunity to learn how to enhance their facilitation skills so that they in turn could model such practices within their board and their own learning teams.

As Lead Board for the Regional CODE Project, our team found it an absolute pleasure to facilitate an intentional and shared professional learning endeavor with such experienced and talented colleagues across the region! Without a doubt, the CODE project reaffirms, challenges, and supports the continual evolution of refined professional learning environments and practices, particularly norms related to minimizing the privacy of practice, vague goals, and vague language. It's about precision, personalization, and practice that makes a positive difference in the interaction between students and teachers at the classroom level! ●

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Comments about this article? Email [Trish FitzGibbon](mailto:Trish.FitzGibbon)

## JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Framework Evidence Collection Summary North East Ontario

Rossella Bagnoto, Superintendent, Sudbury Catholic District School Board

### Regional Process

Over the past several months, eight English school boards of the North East Ontario region assembled through a combination of teleconferences and face-to-face meetings to carry out the collaborative work required by this project.

The focus points of our dialogue included:

- identifying existing JK–1 assessment and intervention strategies presently used within each board
- sharing these board-specific tools through networking dialogue
- enhancing these assessment/intervention strategies with more specific criteria and in doing so improving student success
- supporting each other through discussion about the evidence gathered through the implementation of the tools used in each board

Board practices/tools related mostly to oral language development, followed closely by phonological awareness and finally social skill building. In some instances, the practices and tools were developed within the board, but in other cases practices were linked to research-based commercial assessment tools.

### Alignment with the Importance of Early Years Learning

From the information recently published by the Ministry in *The Role of Play in the Full-Day Early Learning–Kindergarten Program* (Principles 5 and 6), we see embedded opportunities for learning through play supported by the collaborative work of the members of the ELK team, including special education personnel. The students' need for the development of social self-regulation (focusing attention, following instructions, cooperation, remembering what to do), emotional self-regulation (controlling aggression, awareness of and response to the feelings of others), and cognitive self-regulation

(habits of mind, planning, problem solving) will require special education teachers to complement classroom teachers with additional assessment strategies and interventions to support instruction appropriate for each child's success, remembering that the purpose of assessment is improved student learning. It is the full team that monitors, documents, and assesses learning. In saying this, we believe the CODE project was timely and appropriate to our needs.

### Demonstrated Strengths Across the Region

- maximum alignment with the content of support resources and learning
- from initiatives provided by the Ministry of Education
- assessment tools and follow-up interventions collaboratively implemented
- and tracked by school teams
- assessment results inform next steps

### Recognized Gaps as a Result of Out Collaborative Dialogue

The identified gaps are twofold:

1. The first gap involved providing sufficient job-embedded training to teachers and ensuring that they would work collaboratively with special education personnel to provide a variety of levels of intervention. This is an area where we believe a model must be created.
2. The second gap related to presenting assessment findings to parents in a consistent way across each district and ensuring that parents were involved in understanding the goals of the intervention process. Our districts must continue to "energize" all of the education partners.

### Determined Next Steps and Required Support

As a regional team, we came to a collective understanding of what our next steps must be. To put the following next steps into practice will require additional time and financial support.

- Look at the work of CDA's and support personnel. Inequality among regional boards requires balancing. The impact will be felt by the Early Years learner who has no access to face-to-face speech and language intervention.
- Recent research findings maintain that the classroom teacher "makes the difference." Classroom teacher efficacy will depend on additional funding for continued training to ensure that these teachers implement interventions that are best suited to improve learning.
- Monitoring any initiative is key to its success. Is monitoring a single action, or is it a set of actions? We need to clearly define the term "monitor" at both the system and classroom level.
- Parent engagement is a must! A checklist of ideas for Early Years teachers on how to purposefully engage parents in the early years would be beneficial.
- Curriculum and Special Education departments must be integrated. We need to find and share models that would demonstrate this collaboration.
- What will the expectations look like for the EL–K program? Once we know this, we will require further funding to refine the assessment and intervention process that will be required and to apply the recommendations forthcoming to the classroom setting.

### Elements – Best Practices Across the Eight North East Boards

#### System Process/Organization:

- consistent use of support resources to inform professional learning
- collaborative team work in place—both in-school and out-of-school
- assessment process begins with all students, then focuses on students demonstrating struggles
- increased focus on classroom assessment before intellectual assessment

#### Instructional Leadership:

- assessment reflects awareness of current research affecting early childhood learning
- increased communication among education partners
- assessment data is collected electronically and is readily available to school- and district-level leaders
- school principals lead in-school teams, ensuring that all team members understand that closing the gap means moving a student to demonstrate actual achievement matching his or her potential for achievement
- clear alignment with goals of both the Board Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plan

#### Parental Involvement:

- across the region, schools invite parents to engage in activities such as Family Nights, Open Houses, Welcome to Kindergarten Days, Esso Math Sessions, and Student-Led Conferences to ensure the opportunity for all parents to help their children reach their full potential
- opportunities for parents to be informed of implemented assessment tools sometimes include face-to-face meetings with classroom and/or special education teachers, letters, pamphlets and/or school calendars
- most boards provide parents of students with special needs with guides (many of which are posted on board websites) which include information regarding the assessment cycle and links to community agencies

#### Professional Learning and Capacity Building:

- job-embedded learning opportunities are offered through online/after school book studies, school team release for teaching/learning critical pathway work, network sharing days, PD days
- videotaping combined with coaching feedback improve teacher efficacy
- increased collaboration between Curriculum and Special Education staff/departments

## « North East Ontario, continued

### Assessment and Use of Data:

- teachers view assessment data on class profiles, allowing information for precision teaching from students' achievement baseline
- mechanisms are in place to track ongoing student achievement
- students begin to learn to self-assess through teacher modelling using real classroom experiences

Through the rich dialogue that was prompted through this CODE Regional Project, a comfortable level of sharing grew, bringing the boards of the North East together. ●

✉ Comments about this article? Email [Rossella Bagnoto](mailto:rossella.bagnoto@ednet.on.ca)

## CODE Chronicles Thunder Bay Region CODE Special Education JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies Project

Colleen Kappel, Superintendent, Lakehead District School Board

### Background

The Special Education branch of the Ministry of Education provided funding for the 2009–2010 school year to support the development of a framework for implementation of effective evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for all students in JK–Grade 1. The Thunder Bay Region includes Keewatin Patricia DSB, Thunder Bay Catholic DSB, Kenora Catholic DSB, Superior North Catholic DSB, Rainy River DSB, Superior Greenstone DSB, Northwest Catholic DSB, and Lakehead DSB.

### The Project

Each school board formed a project team to investigate the strategies and interventions currently being implemented in the schools within their board. In the Thunder Bay Region, the CODE JK–Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention Strategies project began with two video/teleconferences. While our region had the advantage of having participants in the project who had already worked together on many occasions, we also faced the challenge of our vast geographic area. As a result, we were only able to meet face-to-face on one occasion. This February 24 meeting was a huge success marked by dynamic conversation and an abundant sharing of best practices and concerns.

As we conducted our investigation of best practices, we found that the boards in our region were using a variety of assessment tools to gather the same information about the students entering our schools. Different assessment tools had been chosen based on staffing and resources. For example, while some boards had access to speech and language pathologists, others were using school staff to carry out screenings/assessments.



At our face-to-face meeting, our region was able to identify several key areas of concern that we felt were paramount when conducting assessments and implementing interventions. Isolation came up time and time again. Students living in our northern communities often have limited or no experience with the

content in the different assessment tools, leading staff to question the validity of the tool for our population. Interventions also needed to be customized to match the needs and experiences of our students. Isolation also impacted staff in that they often had no other teachers with whom to have professional dialogue and discussions about strategies for students. When staff do have the opportunity to participate in professional development, they are often required to be absent from their classrooms for extended periods due to travel. Compounding this was the need to leave the students in the care of unqualified supply staff, as qualified professionals are not usually available in our smaller communities. The use of technology to address these concerns was a high priority.

Another common concern is the need for sensitivity to the First Nations culture in communicating with parents about the results of our screenings and assessments. The need to establish trusting relationships with the families and communities was felt to be essential to the success of any intervention. It was felt that building these relationships required specific education around the cultural traditions and protocols as well as consistency in staffing. This process takes time and is often in conflict with our traditional view of a timely intervention for children. The schools in our region have many strategies, including using community liaisons and participating in community events, to try to address these challenges and build relationships.

Educators in our region had key concerns about addressing social and emotional readiness for school. We felt that many of our students come to school without the typical self-regulation that is required for academic learning. We felt that we did not have a good screening tool or the knowledge and understanding that would support families and children in making the most of their school experience. This need is often compounded by the lack of social services in our northern communities.

### Conclusion

The opportunity to collaborate with our regional boards and to look within our schools for best practices was an empowering and educational experience. We found that while we face many challenges, we are also implementing many effective practices that help our students to have a strong start to their education. ●

✉ Comments about this article? Email [Colleen Kappel](mailto:colleen.kappel@ednet.on.ca)

## Share, Reflect, and Collaborate: Experiences of Project Leads in the Greater Toronto Region

Sheila McWatters, Superintendent, Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB), the lead board for the CODE JK–Grade 1 project, facilitated a consultation process with its participating boards. This process involved face-to-face meetings, teleconferences, and small group work among partnering boards. The key outcome of the regional project was to develop a self-reflective monitoring tool to capture effective evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies for students in JK–Grade 1. Both the processes and the resulting outcome of this project were successful in achieving these goals. The following is an overview of feedback from project leads, through key informant interviews in April 2010, relating to the processes and outcomes of the regional CODE JK–1 project.



### Processes

When participants were asked to reflect upon their discussions with other GTA boards, they suggested that there were more similarities than differences across boards in terms of JK–Grade 1 assessment and intervention practices. Participants agreed that there were common goals and a shared understanding of the framework at all boards. Moreover, the overall regional process was described as “validating,” a “confirming process,” and a “confirmation of similar challenges and situations.” One participant commented that the process “affirmed that we were on the right track,” while another participant stated that she felt “confident” when returning to her board following a regional team meeting. These comments suggest that boards were indeed working towards the provincial objectives together and that the CODE JK–Grade 1 project was providing a good mechanism for boards to share ideas and collaborate with other boards in relation to JK–Grade 1 assessment and intervention practices.

When participants reflected on what they had learned about their own board and other boards through the regional meetings and/or discussions with a partner board, some interesting observations were made. While the reflections were highly varied, it was clear that participants critically examined their own board's perspective on JK–Grade 1 assessment and intervention practices and also considered future directions for their board to address. For instance, one participant commented that she learned a lot about experiential learning and oral language development among English Language Learners (ELLs) and observed that ELLs should be considered in all future board projects/initiatives in the early years. Another participant noted that while her board values literacy assessments, there was a need to expand and examine the “whole child” through more diverse assessments.

The strengths and challenges of board size emerged through participants' comments on lessons learned through the collaborative process. At one small board, a participant stated that her board seemed “further ahead” than other boards, while a participant at another board of similar size commented that her board was unique in that system change was possible and that Curriculum and Special Education easily collaborated. Furthermore, the latter participant noted that “it's exciting when you can see change” because of the nature of being from a small board. In contrast, a participant from a large board stated that while her board implements a wide variety of projects, “it's difficult to get things going” in a larger board because of differing belief systems, more administrative layers, and fewer opportunities to collaborate effectively with colleagues. A participant from another large board stated that it was difficult to share with its co-terminal board and community partners; however, in terms of students with special needs, collaboration among all stakeholders was much stronger.

Overall, the responses from participants about the GTA regional collaboration processes indicated that the project was successful in sharing practices and building connections among boards. Participants were able not only to reflect on their own board's assessment and intervention practices for JK–Grade 1 students, but could also identify future directions.

### Outcomes

The development of a self-reflective monitoring tool to capture effective evidence-informed assessment and intervention strategies was the key outcome of the regional CODE JK–Grade 1 project. This process involved the examination of the original CODE JK–Grade 1 project documentation along with the incorporation of feedback from regional team members and board and school staff involved in local projects at DPCDSB. Through regional meetings, board representatives reflected upon the original CODE assessment template and engaged in discussions about the format and content of this template.



Participants were asked to provide some preliminary feedback on the utility and effectiveness of the self-reflection tool developed by GTA boards for their own board and for other boards. This tool was designed to assist boards in implementing the CODE JK–Grade 1 assessment and intervention framework. In addition, participants were asked to identify whether the five core elements of the template (i.e., system process/organization, instructional leadership, parental involvement/community communication, professional learning and capacity building, and assessment and use of data) were applicable to a board's context and could be sustained over time and across different populations.

## « Share, Reflect, and Collaborate, continued



Feedback from the majority of participants about the assessment and intervention framework indicated that while it “fit” within the context of the CODE JK–Grade 1 project, it was too early to predict whether it would apply in a different context. Furthermore, the consensus among participants was that the five elements within the framework could be sustained without funding. One participant noted that the five elements “reflect [a] good learning cycle” and that the guiding questions for each element “will

support the ongoing dialogue that needs to accomplish those goals.” Moreover, one participant commented that funding may not be an issue if these elements are incorporated within other initiatives.

While the self-reflection monitoring tool developed by GTA boards was viewed by participants as a useful tool for planning and evaluation purposes, some possible challenges were also identified. Two participants commented that this tool may not be “user friendly” and/or “manageable,” in that some may view the template as requiring full reporting requirements for each element. Moreover, some participants noted that the framework within the tool appeared to overlap with existing documentation (i.e., Board Improvement Plans) and may need to be updated to reflect changes based on the full-day early learning program.

Overall, the CODE JK–Grade 1 framework was well received by participants and there was general agreement that the elements within it were “sound” and thoroughly described. The regional project approach was successful in that it allowed for shared connections among boards and the development of a lens for critical self-examination. Also, the self-reflective tool developed by GTA boards was considered to be a valuable tool in the planning and evaluation of all projects and initiatives that focus on JK–Grade 1 students. The CODE JK–Grade 1 project made possible both the development of a self-reflective tool and the opportunity to form regional collaborations. ●

✉ Comments about this article? Email [Sheila McWatters](mailto:Sheila.McWatters)

**Watch for the next issue of CODE Chronicles coming Winter 2010-2011.**



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