

Supporting English Language Learners Policy and Program Implementation

CODE Knowledge Mobilization and Capacity
Building Project

Final Report

August 2024

This document is the final report that is part of the requirement set out in “Schedule D: Supporting Student Potential D1 Project Plan – Supporting English Language Learners” of the Ontario Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) between Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) and the Ontario Ministry of Education. It covers the period from September 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024 and describes the details of the project work in relation to the detailed work plan and in accordance with the budget outlined in the TPA.

Introduction

Context for the Project

The project supports the needs of English language learners/Multilingual Language Learners through the provision of professional development and resources to educators so that students are able to achieve academically at the level expected of all learners in Ontario while learning the language of instruction, at the same time as they are learning the curriculum and developing a range of literacy skills.

English language learners/Multilingual Language Learners are students in provincially funded English-language schools whose first language is a language other than English or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario's schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English ([*English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, Ministry of Education, 2007*](#)).

The overarching objective of the project aligns with [*Ontario's Investing in Students*](#) and aims to strengthen numeracy and literacy skills, support students' mental well-being, and preparing students to acquire the skills they need to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow. The project also seeks to address inequities that Multilingual Language Learners may experience.

The project provides flexible and responsive support for school boards to transform learning and teaching of Multilingual Language Learners in classrooms of Ontario through innovative opportunities that expand what, how, when and where they learn.

The approved detailed work plan for the 'Supporting English Language Learners Policy and Program Implementation CODE Knowledge Mobilization and Capacity Building Project 2023-2024' outlined four areas of focus:

- the implementation of the English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services Policies and Procedures for Elementary and Secondary Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12 using an anti-oppressive lens;
- educators in engaging in professional learning related to anti-oppressive, culturally relevant and responsive instruction and assessment practices to improve the progress and achievement of Multilingual/English language learners (MLLs/ELLs);
- the use of Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) resource to inform responsive teacher practice and assessment of MLLs/ELLs; and
- multi-level leadership capacity building in order to strengthen implementation of project work and board improvement planning in relation to supporting MLLs/ELLs.

The project worked to support these areas through

- Supporting School District Projects
- Supporting On-Going Professional Learning – Strengthening Policy Implementation and Pedagogical Approaches
- Expanding and Maintaining VLE Professional Learning Modules
- Providing Targeted/As-Needed Supports

Structure of the Report

This report will

- in Section A
 - describe the background, timelines and activities related to each of these areas of support;
 - provide data and evidence, and observations based on this data and evidence;
- in Section B
 - based on the observations across the areas of support, provide conclusions and recommendations related to the project moving forward.

Use of Evidence and Data

A number of key sources of data and evidence were gathered and analysed. These sources include:

- school board project reports that are submitted at the conclusion of the project. Each report asks project leads to identify professional learning actions, key learnings, successes and challenges, number of educators directly and indirectly involved, number of students directly and indirectly impacted
- responses from online and virtual discussions during professional learning sessions, including discussions related to identifying needs (e.g., related to policy and practice)
- responses from participants (e.g., captured from collaborative discussions, participant responses and collaboratively created documents) during professional learning activities
- requests (e.g., for support) that are made from board leads/participants to the Project Lead
- number of participants attending sessions
- number of sessions offered
- number of access points to the VLE

Section A: Areas of Support within the CODE Project

1. Supporting School District Projects

Background

At the beginning of the project, school districts were invited to assess the needs related to supporting Multilingual Language Learners (MLLs), and determine areas of work that best fit their locally identified needs. The focus of all projects was to continue to build multi-level leadership in relation to serving MLLs and their families. In addition, school districts delved into one or more of the following areas to continue to build capacity, mobilize knowledge and deliver supports while also taking a culturally responsive and relevant approach for MLLs in classrooms capacity building and mobilization, , related to

- **Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) Knowledge Mobilization:** supporting and maximizing the use of STEP resources to inform responsive instruction and assessment practices
- **Foundational Literacy:** exploring effective instructional and assessment practices to support the growth of foundational reading and numeracy skills of MLLs/ELLs
- **Supporting Cross-curricular Success of MLLs:** responding to the emerging and ongoing learning needs and success of MLLs across the curriculum, including destreamed learning contexts
- **Identifying/Supporting MLLs/ ELLs with Possible Special Education Needs:** building capacity around effective protocols and processes to identify and support MLLs/ELLs with possible special education needs

Board leads attended four virtual networking sessions, each of which provided targeted professional learning on a range of topics, including multi-level leadership capacity building, evidence collection, evidence analysis and on pedagogy and research. The sessions also provided board lead with time to network, share plans and actions from their projects (e.g., within common areas of identified needs) and to gain input and feedback related to ongoing work.

Observations from School District Projects

Based on a number of sources of evidence, including board project reports and participant comments and feedback during sessions, these are observations taken from the project work:

- 47 school districts applied for funding and 61 project proposals were approved (this is an increase from the previous year where 45 school districts participated and 53 projects were approved)
- 60 projects completed project work and submitted all required documentation; 1 school district project withdrew in May

- some boards needed to adjust or revise their project plans based on circumstances (see **Challenges** below). Some of these shifts meant focusing on capacity building at the system/central level rather than more directly in schools.
- All of the funds designated under the TPA were assigned to approved school district projects. Most school district projects spent the funds that were individually allotted to their project. Overall 85% of the total funds allocated for board projects was spent. (This is a similar percentage from the previous year, and an increase from two years ago when 72% of the total funds allocated for board projects was spent.)
- In terms of the targeted area of focus, building multi-level leadership capacity was embedded across all projects, along with at least one other goal that targeted student outcomes. The following indicates the areas of focus and the number of projects that had this areas as the primary target area:
 - STEP Mobilization (21 projects)
 - Foundational Literacy (19 projects)
 - Supporting Cross-curricular Success of MLLs/ELLs, including in De-streamed Courses (5 projects)
 - Supporting ELLs with possible or with special education needs (19 projects)
 - Identifying/Supporting MLLs/ ELLs with Possible Special Education Needs (2 projects)

Note: Although boards may have indicated a primary area of focus in terms of student outcomes, the scope of their work overlapped into some of the other areas. For example, a school district may have focused on cross-curricular success, but there may have been elements of the project that also addressed STEP mobilization.

- Based on the targeted areas of focus identified, 12 networks were configured to support the ongoing work. These networks were engaged in supporting each other during virtual sessions, and in some cases, board leads shared contact information with each other so that they could continue dialogue beyond the scheduled network sessions.
- Several boards were able to extend and expand on work from the previous year (or prior). This is a continuing trend from the previous year's projects.
- Impact of projects on educator mindsets, one of the sources of evidence that was gathered to show impact, was widely captured across many boards through surveys, educator reflections, participation in professional learning sessions.
- Within board projects, a number of professional learning models were used, including one or a combination of the following:
 - small educator working teams
 - focus groups
 - resource development teams
 - initial assessments
 - instructional toolkits
 - courses to support MLLs in destreamed context

- student development of resources (e.g., identity texts)
- creation of online, self-directed learning modules
- targeted professional learning (eg. various multilevel leadership PLCs)
- case study and/or development of learning profile approach
- collaborative inquiry
- leveraging systems support positions (School Based Literacy Facilitator, Learning Partners, MLL Monitors)

Voice from the Field

“Our planned training on these materials also allowed us to spend some time engaging in moderated marking with elementary assessors which helped to anchor in best practices the team’s approach to the material.”

In districts where teachers were released to engage in job-embedded learning, board leads expressed a positive impact it had on developing a common vision and sense of collective efficacy.

- School district project reported on a number of approaches and resources that were developed as a result of their work. These included
 - Carousel learning to introduce classroom strategies to school staff (e.g., in school staff meetings)
 - Resource creation
 - for classroom teachers (eg.,
 - instructional strategy toolkits for classroom teachers
 - self-directed professional learning modules with certification
 - video learning
 - revised initial assessments
 - frameworks to bridge knowledge, programming and practice
 - course program guide for Literacy Skills-Reading and Writing (ELS2O) to support MLLs
 - public facing resources created for families
 - systematization of the Initial Assessment process
 - materials and opportunities to engage families
- A number of school districts accessed the expertise of field/outside experts (including Justine Yu, Cathy Marks Krpan, Tan Huynh, Andrea Honigsfeld, Ore Apampa-Araba, Kimiko Shibata. **Note:** many of these outside experts were also educators/experts who were part of the CODE’s project Speaker Series (see more about the Speaker Series below). This

suggests that the Speaker Series aligned with the needs boards were identified, and that the Speaker Series provided a way for knowledge building and knowledge mobilization.

Many school district projects also used a number of other resources to support their work.

Board leads reported on the number of staff who were involved, both directly and indirectly, in the school district projects. In total across all projects, 2200 educators were directly involved and an additional 5525 were indirectly involved (based on Board Project Summary Reports).

In addition, school district projects indicated that, collectively, there were 6614 students directly impacted as a result of the project work.

Emergent Trends and Key Learning from School District Projects

The following trends and key learning emerged across school district projects related to the targeted areas of focus:

a. Building multi-level leadership capacity

In addition to identifying a targeted area of focus (e.g., STEP mobilization), all school district projects focused on building multi-level leadership capacity.

There is consensus that building multi-level leadership is essential in order for the English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services Policies and Procedures to be implemented consistently and equitably. Capacity building of multilevel educator leadership is an integral part of most projects, and especially important amongst the smaller and more rural boards where demographic shifts that include an increased number of newcomers have occurred. This included building understanding about how to support MLLs and the implementation of key policy items. As one board lead indicated, “Schools are unaware of how many nor who actually are the MLL students in their school, specifically at the secondary level. Teachers have been working with a very limited definition or understanding of who an MLL student is.”

Voices from the Field

“In my struggle to disseminate information regarding meeting the needs of our growing population of ELLs in my part-time capacity, the CODE project was a helpful vehicle. This CODE project was the catalyst for many important conversations that I was privileged to participate in within our school board, and I believe that some of those conversations lead to the following important “firsts” for the ESL consultant at YCDSB this year.”

One particular area related to multi-level leadership was building capacity in using data informed decision making, specifically within at least five of the project, there was targeted work to

- develop understanding on the use of data points to inform the direction and evolution of work, and to increase the amount of evidence from educator and student voices, moderation of student work, and pedagogical documentation
- implement a “street data” paradigm that includes educator, community and student perspectives and that helps to determine the impact closer to the student outcomes
- create and identify tools to collect data and then implementation of best practices

This translated into stronger bodies of evidence that came from approaches such as using pedagogical documentation to support PL. There was also an increased presence of student and educator voices and testimonials in many project summary reports. Similarly, there were more targeted quantifiable sources of data included in most summary reports, suggesting an increased awareness of how to gather evidence that is more directly related to assessing impact.

Voice from the Field

Our first priority was to ensure that we had the tools in place to assess the impact of our work. The ESL team worked collaboratively to identify and help implement these tools, and then collect student data relating to STEP levels, WIDA proficiency bands, reading Screening data, ability to access the curriculum, and overall student well-being.

The collection of street data was a pivotal moment, a time of reflection, and a moment of celebration for our team. Hearing from and having conversations with this group of students provided us inspiration—both, to uphold our responsibility to support them, as well as to give us some comfort by providing an assurance that we have the supports in place for these students to be successful.

A second area related to multi-level leadership were efforts to build collaborative practices. A number of project reported strengthened partnerships between diverse partners including collaboration among ESL itinerants, literacy coaches, ESL teachers, classroom teachers, welcome centre assessors, cross-panel educators, curriculum consultants, settlement workers, research department, school administrators, SERT, board IT specialists, continuing education, students and families. There is a clear indication in project reports that planned professional learning opportunities that built collaborative practices resulted in positive impacts for student outcomes. For example, one board lead highlighted the importance of multi-level leadership in building capacity, “This project has strengthened the relationships between the ESL coaches, itinerant teachers, and focused literacy teachers. This was the first time the team worked together on a project like this this year. This was a great opportunity for each person to learn from one another and bring back ideas to their own groups. This has also

strengthened the relationships between the ESL team, the ESL Teacher Consultant and the ESL/ELD classroom teachers. Afterwards, it was noted that teachers were reaching out by email asking for resources and support more frequently compared to before the PD... this work included our ESL Consultant; Math Consultant; 23 elementary ESL teachers; 5 elementary Welcome Centre Assessors; 3 secondary Welcome Centre Math Assessors; our Youth Settlement team; and members of our Research Department.”

Voices from the Field

“This small but mighty leadership team is leading the way for our board in terms of how to fully support students by having educators supporting each other. They are working to change misconceptions about co-planning and co-teaching as an “add-on” or “more work.” They are showing by example that when educators plan together with intent, the precise program that is created benefits students in so many ways. By advocating for common planning time and then designing lessons and assessment that targets multilingual language learners’ specific needs and strengths as defined by the STEP documents, teachers are seeing improved student performance and confidence.”

A third area of importance related to building capacity through multi-level leadership is implementing culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP), and through this work, boards reported

- a focus on adopting asset-based multi-dimensional approaches in a holistic sense
- a deepened understanding of the value of integration of CRRP approaches to supporting MLLs and families, for example translanguageing was explicitly referenced and intentionally interwoven into many projects
- explicit work on identity affirmation and the creation of identity texts

In addition, 88% of Project Leads identified CRRP as being relevant to their project work to a large or considerable degree (participant response data).

a. STEP Mobilization

The use of STEP continues to be a critical component of supporting MLLs when there is a explicit connection between the assessment information and classroom practice. As one board lead indicates, “One of the most significant benefits is that classroom teachers have immediate and accurate, up-to-date access to important information about their students. Having all of our information in one spot is time-saving. It makes communicating with teachers easier; classroom teachers can see student growth (or challenges), and classroom teachers can reference the next steps students are working on, as well as accommodations available to students and used by students.”

However, the implementation of STEP continues to be at various stages of implementation across the province. Based on project work and input from board leads, the implementation of STEP as an

integrated practice appears to be less solid in smaller boards and at the secondary level. There is a strong need to ensure that there is an integrated approach between the assessment and responsive instruction and there have been some gains made in this area.

In terms of mobilizing STEP, there is continued interest on the part of boards to use a digitized version of STEP to facilitate the flow of assessment information from the assessment to classroom teachers (as evidenced through the boards who dedicated efforts to creating digitized formats as well as interest from other boards when this work was shared within professional learning networks).

There is also exploration of how STEP resources can be used to better partner with parents and families (e.g., through parent facing STEP resources). There is also a continued need to better understand and build capacity around ELD STEP and programming implications.

An emerging area of exploration regarding STEP is the need to understand how the STEP continuum aligns with the new Language and English Grade 9 curriculum (released in June 2023), particularly to reflect translinguaging (which is referenced in the new Language and English Grade 9 curriculum) and anti-colonial stances related to language learning. In addition, adoption of K-STEP is seen as a key tool to support oral language development using a translinguaging approach.

b. Foundational Literacy

Board leads, who worked on this targeted area of focus, note an interest on behalf of educators to learn more about how to support MLs attain foundational literacy skills in a culturally relevant and responsive manner. There was an increased level of interest in this focus area as evidenced by the number of projects that chose this as the area of focus.

Conclusion from projects with this area of focus maintain that MLLs benefit from the implementation of instructional and assessment practices that support foundational literacy skill building when combined with targeted instruction that includes providing visual support, explicit vocabulary teaching and providing opportunities for learners to draw on background knowledge.

Although foundational literacy skills support the acquisition of content across subjects, the release of the new Language and English Grade 9 curriculum caused educators to see a need for aligning new curricula (that references culturally relevant and responsive practices and approaches) with the STEP continuum framework and its implementation.

Further work and exploration of how emerging practices related to foundational literacy, including how explicit instruction on word and sentence level meaning (e.g., morphology, syntax) can be further refined to support MLLs while at the same time maintaining meaning making and engagement with texts as ultimate goals. In addition, there is a need to continue to engage in inquiry to better

understand foundational literacy (as part of the new Language Grades 1-8 and English Grade 9 curriculum) as it pertains to MLLs, including how to deliver structured literacy in secondary context. It is recognized that educators are at different points of understanding and implementation in terms of using structured literacy for all students, not just MLLs.

Another consideration is how K-STEP is used as a tool (related to foundational literacy skills) in conjunction with other screening assessments in kindergarten. For example, as one board lead noted, “There is a connection between KSTEP and Acadience (literacy assessment tool). When the students are showing growth on KSTEP then usually it shows a growth on Acadience as well. However, it is important to remember that Acadience is a snapshot of the child. Where KSTEP is oral and can be showed in many different ways.”

Voices from the Field

“One of the most pivotal moments for us was reconciling why structured literacy, and direct, explicit, instruction works on MLL students who need to rely on contextual clues to make meaning of what they are reading. What we learned was that students are engaging in Language Comprehension development at the same time that they are focussing on developing their word-level reading skills. For example, we know from our teachers that the use of culturally responsive sound walls with visuals helps students to gain essential vocabulary skills, at the same time as learning word level reading skills.”

c. Supporting Cross-curricular Success of MLLs/ELLs

There is wide-spread recognition about the importance of educators, specifically classroom teachers, to be able to support the cross-curricular needs of MLLs and to adapt programming to improve student outcomes. In particular, there seemed to be an increasing need for classroom teachers to do this within the context of de-streamed classrooms. There were a variety of approaches within school district projects to build capacity in this area, including engaging in professional learning related to learner needs and collaboratively developing a bank of lesson plans that were specifically designed to support multilingual learners in content areas classrooms.

From the project work, board leads report on the strides being made by educators in adapting instruction and assessment, implementing UDL and using differentiation to centre MLLs in all curricular areas. Also key is the focus on using STEP to make effective program adaptations.

Within this area of focus, there were particular projects focused on MLLs in secondary schools and specifically in destreamed classrooms. Some of these were focused on supporting MLLs in mathematics classrooms. Projects endeavoured to further utilize STEP at the secondary level, make appropriate program adaptations to support MLLs (while disrupting lingering practices that continue informal streaming processes), and support overall credit accumulation. Board leads reported that teachers were finding new ways for students to communicate their thinking as a way to make content more accessible and of educators adapting their lessons so that they are geared towards MLL success. For example, as one board lead reported, “Educators gained a variety of pedagogical tools they can apply to improve their instructional program. (e.g., translanguaging, learning tasks designed based on UDL principles, and a variety of ways to support ELLs in math).”

Voices from the Field

“In the Post-Survey [data], we see how the Educators are now actively using STEP to plan for their classroom. One educator is using STEP to plan their small groups, two are using it to plan adaptations and adjust lessons accordingly, and another educator is already looking at how they can plan with STEP next year.”

d. Supporting MLs with Special Education Needs

Supporting multilingual learners who may also have special education needs is a continued area of priority in terms of building capacity and in being responsive to the needs of students. There is consensus that there is a need to apply an asset-based approach to identifying and supporting MLs with special education needs, and that includes recognizing their first language as one of those assets. Pathway planning for MLs who may have special education needs is complex, and there is a need to build greater collaboration between special education and ESL educators to streamline the processes and supports for students.

Project Challenges

A number of common challenges existed across school district projects, and although it did not prevent almost all the projects (only one school district had to withdraw from the opportunity) from proceeding in some fashion, it meant that some projects needed to be revised to adapt to the changing educational landscape. (It may also be noted that these challenges might have prevented some school districts from applying to be involved in project work from the outset.)

Some of the challenges were directly related to providing adequate teacher release and scheduling. These challenges include

- The ongoing shortage of occasional teachers across the province prevented some districts from executing the planned job-embedded professional learning for classroom teachers. These limitations ranged from a complete professional learning moratorium to there being a limitation in the number of teachers that could be released at any one time.
- Some board leads were redeployed at various times throughout the year to support schools experiencing OT shortages. This redeployment limited their ability to perform their regular central board responsibilities, including managing the CODE MLL project such as attending all networking sessions.
- There is a deficit perception that exists related to ESL programming in secondary. In some boards, this is further complicated by a high number of staff turn over in ESL that negatively impacts building and maintaining teacher capacity. The perception by some that STEP monitoring and tracking creates “additional workload” for teachers also negatively impacts implementation.
- There continues to be a capacity and implementation gap at the secondary level, including in using STEP, in coordinating and sharing assessment information and in implementing instructional approaches that best serve MLLs, and the lack of resources to close this gap. As one board lead notes, *“One of the challenges we are facing is that there is a tremendous need for this intervention (foundational literacy skills) in all our secondary schools, but we don’t have enough human resources to effectively implement this practice.”*
- In addition,
 - teacher engagement in professional learning seemed contingent on having an MLL on their class roster
 - there is a perceived lack of sufficient funding and resources available to achieve the desired scope of the work
 - there is a high expense of acquiring resources (eg. Lexia licences) and a lack of availability and access to technology to support student learning (e.g., headsets with microphones).

Voices from the Field

“The granting of ESL sections is based on funding and are often added near the beginning of each semester. So, in some of our higher needs schools, they only know that they need an ESL teacher the week before classes begin. They staff it with whoever they have available.

-Typically, ESL sections (secondary) are staffed with whoever may have a “spot” on their schedule or with newly hired teachers.”

Finally, there are particular challenges that stem from policy and curriculum. These challenges include

- Disconnect between KSTEP and STEP, and the challenge that KSTEP is in draft presents to implementation

- Disconnect between outdated Policy/ESL Curriculum and culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (e.g., some language in the policy is not as anti-oppressive as it should be)
- There is a need to develop resources which specifically supports MLs in de-streamed classrooms at secondary
- ELD courses need rethinking in light of de-streaming – resources need to be developed to provide teachers with practical support and examples on how to address learning gaps due to lack of schooling
- Pathway planning for MLs with complex learning profiles (e.g., special education needs) in secondary schools.

2. Supporting On-Going Professional Learning – Strengthening Policy Implementation and Pedagogical Approaches

Background

A number of professional learning opportunities are provided through the MLL CODE Project, including study/discussion groups and the speaker series. Invitations to these opportunities are shared widely with school board contacts, and in many cases, board leads bring other board educators to participate in these sessions. The professional learning opportunities cover a wide range of topics and are scheduled throughout the school year. The goals of these sessions are targeted to support multi-level capacity building in order to strengthen policy implementation and pedagogical approaches and supports for MLLs.

Actions

- Study/Discussion Groups
 - Two multi-session Study/Discussion Groups have been delivered to date
 - Discussion Group: ***What do MLL Leaders do to support MLLs and their families?*** involving 69 educators from 29 school districts in a six part series intended to support School District MLL Leads in their roles. Roles of participants include: Assistant Superintendent, Superintendents, MLL Leads, ELD Lead, MLL Coordinators, Early Literacy Lead, ELL Support Teachers, MLL Resource Teachers/Coaches, Classroom Teachers, Principals. These sessions provided opportunities for leads to discuss and network related to needs and issues of building capacity. The sessions also highlighted a range of resources to support the role. In addition, materials and resources are co-constructed with participants (e.g., resources to support hot topics, year-at-a-glance, reflecting, sharing & planning actions).
 - Study Group: ***Cross-Curricular Success for MLLs*** involving 71 educators from 29 school districts in a three-part series focussing on teaching practices and approaches to support MLLs in content areas. Roles represented include: Math Teacher, Math Assessors, Math Instruction Coaches, Math Lead, MLL Coach, Guidance, MLL Lead/Consultant/Coordinator, ESL/ELD Resource Teachers, Destreaming Coaches, Principals, Focused Literacy Teacher, FSL/MLL Lead, Classroom Teachers, STEM Consultant. The sessions (Overview-General Principles, Focus on Mathematics, Focus on Science) provided resources, approaches and strategies to support educators in meeting the needs of MLLs. Some of the resources provide frameworks to implement processes and monitor progress of MLLs' learning.

Emerging Trends

- There is a perceived gap in professional learning opportunities because boards are needing to limit the professional learning opportunities (e.g., due to the challenge of securing occasional teachers).
- Participants express the continued need to come together and to share ideas across boards. Board leads, in particular, share that they value opportunities to talk to educators in other boards to understand similarities and differences in their work and to build collective efficacy..
- Resources that have been shared from the Speaker Series are being used in local contexts. Currently, the Speaker Series module in the virtual learning environment is the third most viewed content in the VLE. This level of traffic to this module has grown from previous years.
- Based on evidence collected to date, participants are finding the topics and speakers relevant and useful to their work. The Speaker Series sessions have become reference points for further work in boards, and there is evidence that board leads are using the resources to support their board needs, areas of focus, and project work.
- Speakers Cathy Marks Krpan (HWDSB), Tan Huynh (SMCDSB, LKDSB, SCDSB) invited subsequently by districts to support project work.
- The content of the Speaker Series and Study/Discussion Groups is seen as new, current and relevant as boards deepen their work to support MLLs.
- Based on participant responses (representing 8 district school boards including large, medium and small school districts), the following areas were ranked as high, medium and low priority in terms of developing capacity and mobilizing knowledge:

High	Medium	Lower
Program Adaptations & Reporting (12) MLLs in secondary (9) STEP implementation (8) Welcome & Reception Procedures and Processes (7) MLLs with complex needs (7) Kinder MLLs (3)	Program Adaptations & Reporting (3) MLLs in secondary (3) STEP implementation (6) Welcome & Reception (7) Procedures and Processes (6) MLLs with complex needs(5) Kinder MLLs (4)	Kinder MLLs (6)

- Participants within the study groups self-selected goals for exploration. These included:
 - mobilizing the VLE resources with educators within their contexts
 - building their personal multi-level leadership capacity in supporting MLLs in Math and Science

- supporting the implementation of asset-based approaches, such as CRRP and UDL frameworks
- to build and retain talent
- to learn practical strategies, tools
- to address the sense of urgency around supporting secondary MLLs
- to build collaborative practices and strengthen collective teacher efficacy.

Participant Takeaways from MLL Leader Discussion Group & Cross-curricular Success for MLLs Study Group:

General

Participants indicated they

- were excited about the specific resources to support multilingualism in the classroom to create culturally responsive spaces
- were ready to try new tools and strategies
- valued, and would welcome, opportunities to collaborate and connect with colleagues within and across boards
- expressed increased comfort in accessing and sharing materials
- identified a next step: develop professional learning for content teachers in their context.

Topic Specific:

Program Adaptations & STEP

- Many common issues across boards especially with regard to program implementation and STEP updates. It sounds like classroom teachers need support adapting programs and having the time to update STEP (participant response, Mar. 19)
- MLL Leads indicated there are challenges accessing STEP content, including resources formerly available on ELL Gains. Some also had challenges accessing initial assessment materials.

MLLs in Secondary

- There are ongoing challenges regarding in-school support with growing numbers of MLLs in Secondary.
- Many boards are trying to be responsive to support older MLLs in secondary schools in regards to SEL and credit accumulation.

Capacity Building

- There is a need for qualified Teachers
- Building and maintaining capacity needs to be addressed

Effective Support Models

- There is a variety of support models between different boards, and this is dependent on organization and allocation of resources, including staff, within school districts.
- There is an interest in understanding and sharing information about effective support models given the scarcity of resources.

Speaker Series

- Several webinars featuring the expertise of various leaders in supporting Multilingual Language Learners are scheduled throughout the year. Topics targeted current areas of interest and need, areas of board project focus, and emerging research related to pedagogy and MLLs. For example, a number of sessions focused on supporting the foundations of literacy to respond to needs arising from supporting MLLs within the new Language, Grades 1-8 and English De-streamed Grade 9.
- The sessions were open to all educators, and participants came from a wide range of roles, including classroom teachers, board leads and administrators.

3. Expanding and Maintaining VLE Professional Learning Modules

Background

The Supporting English Language Learners virtual learning environment (VLE) continued to expand and be updated. There are now fourteen modules in the e-course, each focused on various topics related to supporting Multilingual Language Learners.

Key Information

The VLE currently houses modules designed to address a number of topics related to supporting MLLs, including:

1. Getting Started for School Leaders
2. Assessment & Reporting
3. Supporting Kindergarten ELLs
4. Integrated Models of Support for ELLs
5. Trauma-Informed Leadership
6. MLLs with Spec. Ed. Needs, Part I
7. MLLs with Spec. Ed. Needs Part II
8. Cross-curricular Success for MLLs Supporting MLLs
9. Supporting MLLs with Remote Learning
10. Supporting MLLs with Limited Prior Schooling
11. Research Findings Implementation of ELL Policy
12. Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Practices for MLLs
13. Speaker Series: Voices from the Field

The VLE is referred to in all professional learning sessions, including to highlight how materials can help support school board project work.

Actions

- Facilitated sessions, including orientations for new modules, were provided for educators to support the mobilization of the resources at the district and school levels. This is an intentional step taken to support the mobilization of knowledge.
- Two new modules were added this year: *MLLs with Special Education Needs Part 2* and *Cross-Curricular Success for MLLs* (which includes a unit on general principles, a unit for Mathematics, and one for Science).
- New Speaker Series videos were added (as they were available).
- Modules continue to be maintained and problems resolved (e.g., if links are broken) and updated to ensure that the language reflects accurate and consistent information.
- The CODE Project Lead has curated lists of resources that specifically targeted areas of interest related to professional learning. This facilitated easier access to the resources that target specific areas.

Emerging Trends

- All modules have been accessed.
- Between September 1, 2023 and March 8, 2024, there are, on average, 50 unique users per week. This includes 44 unique users for Cross-curricular Success to 391 unique users for the Getting Started Module.
- Most visited modules: Getting Started, Assessment and Reporting, Speakers Series, Integrated Models of Support, Supporting MLLs in Spec. Ed, Kindergarten, CRRT for MLLs
- There are a total of 1601 registered users.
- Some instructors of AQ courses are accessing the modules to support professional learning in their courses. Content is also being used to support the development of new AQ content courses (e.g., ESL Part 2 and Part 3)
- Specific modules are being used by some MLL Leads as a reference/resource to build the capacity of classroom teachers and MLL coaches.
- Specific modules are being used by some MLL Leads as a reference/resource to support Project Work (e.g. Integrated Models of Support Module to support the promotion of a collaborative teaching model, Supporting MLLs with Special Education Need Parts 1 and 2).
- ESL Teachers are using select content to share at staff meetings.

Voices from the Field

We met in small groups and completed the ELL course together in the VLE. We provided time to debrief and for the group members to ask questions. The Principal of MSB and her two Classroom Resource teachers as well as one teacher from another school, partook in the completion of the ELL course in the VLE. We also watched Tan Huynh's webinars.

4. Providing Targeted/As-Needed Support

Background

In addition to the Project Lead designing and implementing collaborative professional learning opportunities to support school district projects and other professional learning opportunities, such as Study Groups, the Project Lead is often called on to provide direct and one-to-one support. The Project Lead responds to requests that help board leads refine project plans, build capacity related to leadership and facilitation practices, and locate relevant resources and problem-solving next steps.

The Project Lead brings a high level of understanding related to policy and policy implementation, use of assessment and responsive instruction, and access to expertise on emerging research and approaches that support MLs at all grade levels.

Observations on the Role of the Project Lead

Based on evidence collected, such as anecdotal comments and requests, the Project Lead

- is recognized as a highly knowledgeable educator advocating for the needs of MLs
- is open and interested in learning about and through board projects, and she has a close knowledge of school district projects
- is critical in shaping deep work within school district projects by designing and implementing professional learning that continually builds knowledge and capacity
- helps to build confidence in the capacity of board leads who work with and learn from her.

Section B: Recommendations

This report recommends that the Ontario Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) between Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) and the Ontario Ministry of Education continues to fund the CODE Knowledge Mobilization and Capacity Building Project for the 2023-2024 school year in order to:

1. Support Equitable Outcomes for Multilingual Learners

1.1. Continue to support equitable outcomes for multilingual learners by building educator knowledge and capacity through professional learning, including through the funding school district projects, that explicitly links the Ministry's 2023-2024 priorities to school district project areas of focus, including

- providing equity supports
- supporting foundational literacy
- supporting effective reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, including the knowledge and skills outlined in *Ontario Curriculum, [Grades 1 to 8: Language, 2023](#)* and *[Grade 9 English Destreamed, 2023](#)*, which has been informed, in part, by the recommendations outlined in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Right to Read* public inquiry report, and which will be implemented beginning September 2023
- supporting mental health and well-being of multilingual learners
- ensuring continued engagement of multilingual learners, their families and community partners
- applying culturally relevant and responsive procedures to identify and support multilingual learners with special education needs
- exploring support for multilingual learners in de-streamed courses (e.g., English, Science, and Mathematics)

1.2. Support a more comprehensive mobilization of Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) within and across school districts, both in terms of using it as an assessment tool and in terms of using assessment information to inform programming, especially at the secondary level.

2. Build Multi-Level Leadership

2.1. Continue, through the project, to enhance school and system leaders' capacity to support multilingual learners by providing professional learning and networking opportunities for school and system leaders, including through job-embedded learning and collaborative inquiry. In an effort to assist board leads in integrating their work and engaging in meaningful partnerships within boards and across boards, a whole systems approach should be encouraged.

2.2. Continue to build knowledge and capacity related to using data and evidence of impact, including the capacities to determine and use data that informs next steps (at the classroom, school and system level) to support multilingual learners and that enhances how educators can disseminate findings related to what makes a difference for learners.

2.3. Continue to build awareness of current research and resources that support professional learning (both collaborative and individual), including through the content that is housed within the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Continue to refine and build resources for educators to access on an ongoing basis, and continue to mobilize the use of the content in the VLE, such as the study groups did in this past year. Determine opportunities and feasibility of offering additional moderated courses throughout the next school year.

2.4 Explore opportunities for knowledge mobilization, for example through a virtual summer conference that invites educators from across the province to share and learn from one another, and in particular related to the work that comes out of board projects. This opportunity may require modifications to the current project timelines (e.g., for submitting final expenses).

3. Strengthen Policy Implementation

3.1. Continue to support the implementation of the [English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12](#) (and other ministry supporting documents) in ways that helps to resolve the tension that exists due to the perceived misalignment between the policy and anti-oppression approaches that serve to bring equitable outcomes for multilingual learners.

3.2. Advocate for anti-oppressive, anti-racist practices related to the current policy, and promote an interpretation and implementation of the policy through a culturally responsive and relevant pedagogical lens (and identify and disrupt colonial language that is currently embedded in the wording of the policy) and that supports practices, such as translanguaging, that fosters and sustains students' identities, including their multilingual identities.

3.3. Update the current policy so that it more fully embraces equity and inclusion and incorporates the role of multilingualism, thereby affirming the assets and identities of multilingual learners. In addition, align procedures and practices with a revised policy, including

- practices related to identifying and supporting multilingual learners who may also have special education needs, and developing further supports for educators, especially at the secondary level, to meet those needs;

- practices related to STEP by revising STEP Grades 1-12 so that it honours the multilingual repertoire of students, and revisit and formally release KSTEP (currently in draft) so that educators can use it with greater confidence.