

CODE Consortium

Leadership and Innovation

Executive Summary

Leading from the Middle:

Spreading Learning, Well-being, and Identity Across Ontario

Council of Ontario Directors of Education Report

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Introduction

This research report documents the nature and impact of a Consortium of 10 school boards affiliated with the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) in leading bold and sophisticated change for today's students, in one of the highest performing and most culturally diverse educational systems in the world – the province of Ontario in Canada. Over more than a decade, these boards built on an earlier approach by all of the province's 72 boards to advance deep learning not by imposing reform from the top, or by supporting a multitude of initiatives among teachers and schools at the bottom of the system, by what educators themselves describe as "Leading from the Middle" (LfM).

LfM is a new strategy of leadership to produce the kind of bold outcomes in young people's learning and well-being that are needed for today's complex, dynamic, fast-paced and sometimes volatile world. LfM has been invented by Ontario educators and has spread to influence other systems, including those of Singapore, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales. With LfM, schools and school districts do not simply lead "in" the middle by joining up the dots between policies at the top and practice at the bottom. Instead, they lead "from" the middle with shared, professional judgment, collective responsibility for initiating and implementing change, and systemic impact that benefits all students.

This Executive Summary describes the social and policy context in which seven principles of LfM have been developed. It explains how Ontario is moving from an *Age of Achievement and Effort* to an *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity*. It summarizes the research design in which a Boston College research team interviewed 222 educators across the boards and in the Ontario Ministry of Education about the implementation and impact of their initiatives. Our summary then describes the nature and impact of changes undertaken by the boards in three areas:

1. improving student learning;
2. developing child well-being; and
3. building student identities.

After examining the substance of educational change in terms of learning, well-being and identity, this Executive Summary then identifies the strategies that are bringing those changes into being. It concludes with a review of major findings and their implications, and associated recommendations for educational leadership and change, within and beyond Ontario.

The report contributes to global debates about the meaning of educational change today. Because this study builds on an earlier report entitled *Leading for All*, which studied a reform that went under the name of "Essential for Some, Good for All" (ESGA),

it offers an overview of change over time as experienced by teachers, principals, school board, and provincial system leaders. This longitudinal perspective captures the development of a system in the dozen years up to 2018. In doing so, it presents new findings about how Ontario has developed its approach to achieving equity and excellence at a time when the province, the nation and the world are in the midst of a profound shift from one age to another.



Two Ages of Change: The New Context of Ontario Education

The Age of Achievement and Effort

In the last dozen years, Ontario has started to move between two ages. Until 2014, its policy priority was improving student achievement. Ontario proclaimed that it would "reach every student" through "three core priorities" of "going deeper on literacy and numeracy," "reducing the gap in achievement for those groups of students who, for whatever reason, need extra help," and increasing "public confidence in publicly funded education."[1]

Large-scale educational reform at this time was driven by four compelling questions.

1. How are we doing?
2. How do we know?
3. How can we improve?
4. How can this benefit everyone?

We call this period the *Age of Achievement and Effort*. It raised expectations and improved results, especially for some students whose challenges were not well captured by aggregated data. But the focus in the *Age of Achievement and Effort* also incurred problems. It led some educators to concentrate more on students' deficits than their assets. Teachers complained of a narrowed curriculum. They reported that the system's push to get students to reach proficiency created pressure on teachers to give most attention to students who were just short of the point of proficiency, at the expense of helping other struggling students who could not yield such immediate gains in terms of proficiency scores.

The Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity

In Ontario and elsewhere, growing awareness of the limitations of the *Age of Achievement and Effort* led new questions to be asked of educational systems and entire societies.

1. Who are we?
2. What will become of us?
3. Who will decide?

These questions emerge from a number of quarters. They address a global epidemic of mental health problems among young people, harmful effects of digital technologies and especially smartphones on children's learning and well-being, the greatest surge in refugee populations since World War II, and overdue attention to many groups, such as Indigenous communities, that have been seeking greater recognition and inclusion in the public sphere.

These kinds of concerns have led to what we call a new *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity*. Today educators are asking: How can we promote student learning and attend to their well-being at the same time? How can students succeed academically and also thrive as human beings? How can our schools recognize, include, bring together and build young people's identities in a world where acknowledgement and inclusion of people's identities is now seen as indispensable to equity?

Achieving Excellence

In the autumn of 2013, the Ministry of Education convened meetings with "representatives within the education system, including parents and students, teachers, support staff and school and system leaders" in order to "consider and discuss the skills and knowledge Ontario learners will need in the future."[2] The "result of their feedback" was a "renewed vision" for the province that was published in a report entitled *Achieving Excellence*.[3] This major document moved Ontario educational policy from an *Age of Achievement and Effort* to an *Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity. Achieving Excellence* had "four goals":

1. "*Achieving Excellence*" in academics for "students of all ages";
2. "*Ensuring equity,*" so that all students "will be inspired to reach their full potential";
3. "*Promoting well-being,*" in order that all "students will develop enhanced mental and physical health"; and
4. "*Enhancing public confidence*" in Ontario's "publicly funded education system."[4]

Research Design and Methodology

This research was developed in collaboration with the 10 Consortium boards. It was guided by a set of agreed research goals and influenced by how the boards were interpreting and implementing aspects of learning, well-being and identity that were advanced in *Achieving Excellence*. The study was guided by the following goals:

1. To explain the theory of action informing the Consortium's LfM projects.

2. To gather perceptions of the projects' strengths, limitations, and effectiveness from those who participated in the LfM projects.

3. To connect these findings to the evidence–base of leadership models, in order to determine associations between the conditions of leadership and implementation on the one hand, and student and staff learning on the other.

4. To share the interim and final results with participating boards in a manner that supports board improvement planning.

Our research team conducted visits to CODE Consortium meetings in 2015 to begin collaborations and develop our research design. In May 2016, our team conducted site visits to all 10 of the boards. We undertook 222 interviews with educators, project leaders, and project coordinators at the board and Ministry level. Separate interviews were conducted with CODE Consortium leaders and a group of senior Ministry of Education staff. Details of the methodology, including its strengths and limitations, are provided in the full report.

Learning

In *Achieving Excellence*, the Ministry emphasized that learning is not completely separate from equity or well-being. "Success in one contributes to success in the others," it said.[5] In addition, the report continued, learning "also means raising expectations for valuable, higher-order skills like critical thinking, communication, innovation, creativity, collaboration and entrepreneurship."[6] To improve student learning with LfM, the boards responded in different ways. These included improving teaching and learning in mathematics.

Achieving Excellence expressed particular concern about mathematics because "like many other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world, Ontario has also seen a decline in student performance in mathematics."[7] In response, the province invested $60 million in new strategies.[8]

All 10 boards were engaged in major reforms to improve mathematics learning. Of these, two boards made mathematics the major focus of their LfM projects. The first of these made improved instruction of students with special needs its priority. It solicited student perspectives through surveys and focus groups and involved students directly in developing their own Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). The second board sought to build upon its prior strategies in improving literacy by using similar approaches in mathematics. In this board, a system of consultants and coaches engaged teachers in inquiry and reflection about mathematics teaching in the early years.

One thing that distinguished math improvement from literacy improvement was, as educators openly acknowledged, that elementary teachers often lacked confidence in their own teaching and understanding of mathematics. In that respect, they required additional support strategies that had not been as necessary in relation to improving literacy. One teacher bluntly declared "I am not a math person," and in similar words, many of her colleagues agreed with her. Collaborative inquiry into and consultancy support for mathematics teaching and learning helped teachers to develop and deepen their own understanding of mathematics as well as introducing them to particular classroom strategies. However, the available expertise in collaborative inquiry groups often did not include educators with strong backgrounds in mathematics.

In general, the evidence of this study and the previous one completed in 2011 is that teachers will welcome classroom assessment in mathematics and literacy that enables them to know their students and their students' learning better, so they can support their students more effectively. In this

sense, educators in the boards that selected mathematics initiatives as their LfM projects built on their prior experience of using diagnostic assessments in literacy to identify struggling learners and to screen young children for difficulties with number sense. The availability and use of these assessments for helping teachers pinpoint learning issues with their students was well received by these educators, as by many of their colleagues in other boards.

Teachers in one board were exploring a new form of assessment known as "pedagogical documentation," that was also being adopted elsewhere in the province. These teachers used iPads to make and observe film clips of students working with math manipulatives, organizing letters on magnetic boards, and building with blocks. They then placed these notes, photographs, and films of classroom interactions with their students on Google docs. They did this in a non-intrusive way, so they could share evidence of students' learning with colleagues, or use it as a basis for discussion with the students themselves. These digitally supported assessments created substantial on-line documentations of student learning that could be referred to and built upon throughout the school year with parents, colleagues and students themselves.

While teachers are highly supportive of and indeed enthusiastic about increasingly sophisticated tools of and approaches towards formative assessment in their classrooms, they expressed considerably less support and indeed were actively critical about the negative impact on students' learning of the large-scale assessments of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). As in our 2011 report, the strongest support for EQAO came from senior system administrators who felt it had "helped with accountability" and "helped drive standards." They felt that the test results provided them with a way to know their students better and to inform conversations with teachers and parents.

Among the teachers who raised EQAO as a topic for discussion, however, numerous concerns were raised. These ranged from culturally inappropriate items for Indigenous and newcomer children as well as children in poverty, to complications for students with severe disabilities whose results still counted on the overall score, to the learning and preparation time that is dedicated to raising performance on the test, to the constraining impact of the assessment on innovation in the grades that are tested. In many ways, within a province of manifest diversity, Ontario's large-scale assessment system in the form of the EQAO has not kept pace with its other developments in inquiry-based learning, new pedagogies for deep learning, technology assisted instruction, and attention to children's overall well-being.

Well-being

In recent years, concern about students' well-being in Canada and elsewhere has grown dramatically. This is because of the evidence that anxiety, eating disorders, and depression among young people are on the increase.[9] Digital technology can distract parents from engagements with their children, excessive screen time diminishes children's attention spans, and while time spent on smart phone interactions may be shielding adolescents from physical risks such as early pregnancy, excess alcohol consumption and drug abuse, it is also making young people more anxious and depressed psychologically.[10] But technology is not the only source of ill-being. Newcomer children may bring post-traumatic stresses from their war-torn countries of origin. Recognition of the historic injustices inflicted on Indigenous populations and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersexed, and Queer (LGBTTIQ) community, for example, places heightened demands on school boards and their teachers to be responsible for and responsive to everyone they teach.

Well-being Policies and Research

In the past decade, governments and policy groups in many countries have advanced a well-being agenda for their schools. But they do not define well-being identically. The Consortium boards examined several different policies to reflect on the well-being policy directions in Ontario. A report from England came in for the sharpest criticism because it placed school management in the centre of well-being concerns. By contrast, Consortium members concluded, New South Wales in Australia and Ontario made much more connection to the physical and spiritual aspects of human development.

Understandings of well-being also vary in research. Wellness, for some, means mindfulness, and entails strategies for calming the mind.[11] For others, it is about outdoor adventure and other engagements with nature.[12] In some cultures, wellness is defined by making sacrifices today for well-being in the future – what psychologists call deferred gratification.[13] There is more than one way for people to be well.

Well-being and Achievement

One of the key issues for well-being is how educators understand and express its relationship to achievement. In the 10 boards, four interpretations of the relationship between well-being and achievement were evident. The four positions on the relationship between achievement and well-being are analytically distinct, but in practice, they often overlap. They are:

1. ***Improved well-being increases achievement.*** Many children cannot achieve if they are mentally or emotionally unwell, bullied, anxious, enraged, hungry, or depressed.

2. ***Academic achievement is crucial for well-being.*** Focus and accomplishment provide a sense of purpose and direction that allays anxiety in children and adults alike.

3. ***Well-being is a complement to academic achievement.*** It helps develop well-rounded, academically successful people who are also happy and fulfilled.

4. ***Well-being constitutes a major achievement.*** This happens when young people experience learning that enables them to lead lives with meaning and purpose.

In the literature, and in the interviews with educators in Ontario, there is evidence to support each of these points of view. Enthusiasm about and engagement in well-being initiatives has become widespread across all 10 boards. Teachers, leaders, schools and systems are compassionate about the struggles their students face and committed to helping all their students succeed and be well. They respond to the most basic needs of students and their families, initiate programs in emotional self-regulation and mindfulness that help calm their agitated minds, establish a range of wraparound supports including ones that are led by students, and engage each other and a range of partners to build the capacity for success.

Alongside the impressive speed and scope of initiation and implementation of well-being strategies across the province, this research also raises three questions about the way in which the well-being agenda is sometimes approached, and about the relationship of well-being to academic achievement.

First, the tendency to associate well-being with calmness can prioritize some emotional and cultural ways of well-being over others. These include the animated expression within some cultures, being physically engaged with wilderness and nature in Indigenous communities; indulging in the raucous expression that befits some newcomer children, and the emotions of excitement and exuberance in the moments of creativity that characterize invention and entrepreneurialism. Despite the benefits of calmness in general for children whose minds are racing or emotions feel out of control, calmness can also be used to fit diverse children emotionally into conventional learning environments, instead of creating learning environments, such as outdoor learning spaces and activities, that are more suited to and inclusive of different ways of being.

Second, tendencies to treat well-being separately from achievement, or even, exclusively as a pre-condition for it, can make the well-being agenda vulnerable to the fate that befell earlier reform movements to address the whole child, such as "self-esteem" or "emotional intelligence." These mainly showed no impact, or negative impact, on student learning. If well-being is perceived as not connected to learning or achievement, this will undermine public confidence in Ontario. Braiding together the well-being agenda with the learning agenda is therefore a high priority – practically, strategically and publicly.

Third, there was evidence in some of our interviews with educators that excessive attention to the large-scale assessment of EQAO can lead to student anxiety and ill-being.

Educator Well-being

There is little or no student well-being without educator well-being. The more challenging the circumstances in which educators are working, the more at risk they are for their own well-being. As one educator in a high-poverty board put it, "every story is heartbreaking." Teacher well-being can also be stretched to the limit when outside and additional supports for young people in areas like mental health are insufficient, or when the change agenda is overloaded with initiatives that come at teachers from somewhere else. Some boards responded to these difficulties by providing teachers with facilities for physical exercise and offering online courses in mindfulness. These proved very popular among the teachers who took them. At the same time, wellness also depends on being in a work environment characterized by positive and empowering collegial relationships in which teachers feel in control of their own improvement agendas.

Integrating Achievement with Well-being

The spread and reach of well-being initiatives across Ontario has been impressive – engaging the commitments of teachers, providing the support of thought leaders and trainers, and using networks to circulate some of the key ideas and programs around the system. But two sets of risks also face the well-being agenda. First, many well-being programs are currently in use across the province and we do not yet know about their relative impact and effectiveness. It is unclear whether resources should therefore be concentrated more prudently on a few rather than all of them.

Second, there are risks that well-being and achievement can each be pursued excessively or exclusively at a cost to the other in ways that might negatively affect students and also reduce public confidence in education. How can we minimize these risks? In practical terms, we might:

- Make sure that young people do not only turn inwards to focus on themselves and their relationships with each other, but also look outward to their world in learning that has meaning and purpose;

- Acknowledge the value of genuine and hard-earned accomplishment as part of and sometimes as a precursor to well-being;

- Be responsive to cultural differences in emotionality;
- Ensure that programs of emotional self-regulation address a wide span of emotions;
- Improve support for vulnerable populations outside schools as well as within them;
- Avoid unnecessary anxieties caused by large-scale standardized testing;
- Attend to the quality, collegiality and everyday work-life for teachers, school leaders, and their well-being;
- Create a clear public, policy and professional narrative that integrates achievement and well-being; and
- Establish structures in schools, school boards and the Ministry that unite those who have portfolios and responsibilities in curriculum and learning, with those who have expertise in well-being and mental health.



Identity

Schools do not only educate young minds. They also develop whole persons, including their identities. This means that educators have a powerful and privileged platform to create the generations of the future. They teach their students what to know and what to do. Deliberately or inadvertently, they also teach young people how to be, and how to live together.[14] One of the prime responsibilities of all teachers and other educators today, then, is to support young people in developing and building their identities, individually and together.

As long as there has been adolescence, young people have been preoccupied with who they are and who they will become. Insecurities about how they look or feel, whether others like them, how they will separate their own individual sense of who they are from their parents, and if there is a group to which they truly belong, have been the abiding issues of adolescence for decades.[15] In middle school and high school, teachers and counselors have supported adolescents as they have pursued this quest for identity alongside the push for accomplishment and success.

Identity issues have become more insistent in recent times due to factors such as immigration and the global refugee crisis, the overdue attention now being paid to the identities of founding Indigenous peoples, Ontario's inclusive approach to young people with disabilities, concerns about bullying and marginalization of LGBTTIQ students, and the emerging concerns about on-line identities and the insecurities about themselves that young people can develop because of them.

Who are we? What will become of us? Who will decide? These questions now put identity at the forefront of educational change in Ontario and elsewhere. Identity is seen as integral to equity and excellence in Ontario policy and practice. If children cannot see themselves in the curriculum or the school, they will be unlikely to succeed in it. But identity issues are complex and comprise many interlocking aspects. Drawing on classical and contemporary research on identity theory, and also on the evidence of this study, we have found 15 different ways in which identity presents itself in the boards and schools of the CODE Consortium.

Identity....

Is an integral part of adolescence and growing up.
Is part of human & educational development.
Is a quest and a struggle.
Is something to be acknowledged, represented, celebrated.
Must sometimes be critiqued and challenged.
Is multiple, complicated, intersecting.
Is presented differently to different groups and audiences.
Is increasingly online, virtual, variable & vulnerable.
Is inseparable from who has the power to define it.
Can be ignored, attacked, stigmatized.
Can become hidden, disguised and divided.
Can be inverted, made proud, protective and emboldened.
Can become angry, frustrated and vengeful.
Is something that should interact as well as intersect with other identities.
Should be a process of creating individual uniqueness & collective belonging.

One of the prime responsibilities of all teachers and other educators today is to support young people in developing their identities, individually and together. This was difficult to do in an *Age of Achievement and Effort*. It tended to view identity as tangential to improving literacy and numeracy. Equity was about narrowing achievement gaps rather than also including and developing diverse identities so learning and achievement would become more available to all.

But the world is changing and with it the responsibilities of educators. Today, educators have a responsibility to acknowledge the diverse identities that students bring with them to school, and to offer curricula that will enable them to develop with their identities fully intact. If schools can do this, all of our young people will learn not only how to be the best version of themselves as individuals, but also to come together in the quest to build a strong and inclusive community, with a collective identity.[16]

Some aspects of young people's identity have received more emphasis than others in recent Ontario policy and they were discussed more explicitly than other identities in the data we collected in our research.

Indigenous Identities

Ontario's heightened concern with Indigenous students within and beyond *Achieving Excellence* was reflected in the 10 boards, including those with low populations of Indigenous students. Several boards have undertaken efforts to teach Indigenous languages and to transform their curricula, so that Indigenous students now see themselves and their cultures reflected in their schools. Some board offices and schools we visited were adorned with student-designed murals infused with aboriginal art, cultural expressions, and banners supporting Indigenous students and their communities. The curriculum in some cases was more organized around forms of learning incorporating traditional Indigenous outdoor, visual, artistic and tactile activities. In more and more schools, it now directly confronts the colonial culture of residential schools that set out to eradicate Indigenous identities and languages.

Recognition of Indigenous identities was most salient in one northern board. Indigenous art and architecture were infused into the design of school buildings. One elementary school built a culture room as a gathering space to host traditional feasts and pow-wows. Elders participate in the schools, frequently serve as guest speakers, and work cooperatively with leaders and teachers to inform them about new ways they can engage Indigenous youth in their schools.

In the *Age of Achievement and Effort*, inequities experienced by Indigenous students were addressed by identifying local achievement gaps, raising teachers' expectations, comparing examples of students' work, and improving literacy provision. With the shift to an *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity*, there has been a growing movement to engage with the whole of Indigenous students' lives in addition to, not instead of, their academic achievement. When student identities are built into a school's curriculum, then those students have a stronger chance of achieving fulfillment and success.

Francophone Identity

In 2005, *Ontario's Aménagement Linguistique Policy for French-Language Education* noted that the francophone population in Ontario had declined to a point where it was less than 5% of the population.[17] To respond to these challenges, the Ministry advocated for "identity-building" as a "key intervention area" for francophone boards.[18] Identity-building was to occur through a process of *animation culturelle*, which "promotes the students' academic achievement and cultural development by placing learning in a meaningful context where the French language and culture become relevant in the student's eyes."[19]

In many ways, Franco-Ontarian education was ahead of the rest of the province in asserting that identity was not a side issue, but central to any education for the whole child. But this group has experienced challenges of its own recently, as a growing multinational population of immigrants has brought different kinds of francophone culture and language to its schools.

In response, one Franco-Ontarian school has endorsed a global francophone identity that includes French speakers from all over the world, including Lebanon, Haiti, Algeria, and France. Its board is shifting to a new, globalized francophone identity. However, in 2014, public hearings

revealed a concern that "integrating newcomers without many roots in the community (more specifically without any roots in the local Franco-Ontarian community) may dilute feelings of belonging to the community."[20]

In Ontario, identities regarding language heritage, cultural heritage, race, and immigrant status intersect and interact with one another on a daily basis. This issue is not exclusive to francophone boards. It affects English-speaking boards too. The advantage that the francophone boards have is that they have been thinking about how to engage students with issues around their identity since their inception.

Catholic Identity

Thirty-seven of the 78 school boards in Ontario are Catholic. The existence of Catholic schools and school boards as publicly funded institutions goes back to the provisions of the British North America Act in 1867 (section 93) in which education rights held by religious minorities at the time of Confederation were legally secured.[21] Among Catholic boards, faith and spiritual identity are accorded considerable and continuing importance. Catholicism serves as a means of fostering students' faith formation through religious disciplines such as daily "walking with Jesus" and beginning and ending each day by attending Mass and celebrating communion.

For Catholic leaders, their belief system provides a moral foundation for education today. Catholic values sometimes extended beyond statements of belief, rituals and ceremonies to the content of the curriculum in terms of its conception of human beings, social justice and service to others. These were evident in the focus on contemporary issues such as homelessness, poverty, inequities of water quality, and on the implication of the Catholic church in the history of residential schools.

Catholic school boards in Ontario have distinctive roles to play in the emerging *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity*. They can be among the most explicit in anchoring issues of identity in spiritual values. They are also beginning to model the importance of being inclusive and self-critical in relation to their role in developing and not suppressing other kinds of identity too.

Emerging and Overlooked Identities

Engaging identities is increasingly central to Indigenous and francophone communities and the communities that are served by Catholic school boards. These issues also apply to identities that have received less recognition in Ontario policy or that emerged less strongly in our data.

Historically Black Canadians, for example, whose families are not refugee or highly skilled immigrants and who have lived in the country for generations, are highly prone to underachievement, inequity, and placement in lower streams in high school. Their overall racist mistreatment has, until now, been accorded less attention in official policy than most students with other identities.[22]

In common with other countries such as the US and UK at this time, there has also been a tendency to have no vocabulary for the White working class as a specific population group with its own particular culture, history and struggles with disadvantage in Ontario. This is leading

growing numbers of the White working class in many countries to abandon traditional party affiliations for exclusionary movements they believe will better represent their interests. The closest that Ontario school boards came to recognizing White working class identity was in discussions about child poverty in two urban boards with histories of manufacturing.

The LGBTTIQ community encompasses a range of identities that have been marginalized in the past but are now gaining increasing recognition in Ontario policy. In one survey, 70% of Canadian students reported hearing "That's so gay" in school every day and 64% of LGBTTIQ students indicated that they "felt unsafe in school."[23] Bullying has impacted heterosexual students also, with 58% reporting "that they find homophobic comments upsetting."[24] The *Safe and Accepting Schools Act* has become a key guide for a number of educational leaders in our data, and its provisions for establishing gay-straight alliances are being taken up, though sometimes with euphemistic titles like "diversity clubs" which suggests that more progress can still be made.

Ontario schools are concentrating on how to strengthen Indigenous, francophone and Catholic identities. They are also trying to protect young people against the stigmatization that accompanies negative imputed identities, as commonly occurs with racism or in response to LGBTTIQ youth.

The challenge beyond this is to ensure that identities don't become just an additive agenda of more boxes to be ticked. Many unique individual and cultural identities need to be acknowledged and come together not only in festivals but also in the pursuit of a parallel collective identity, anchored in curricular transformation, that is dedicated to a common good of all Ontarians as global citizens.



Collaborative Professionalism

Complex educational change in a diverse and rapidly changing society requires high level expertise from all professionals in relationships of effective collaboration. For over a quarter century, Ontario has been a global leader in *professional collaboration* among educators – collaboration of different kinds for different purposes. Ontario's development of the idea and strategy of *collaborative professionalism* – how to collaborate more professionally by using effective feedback, rigorous dialogue, employing appropriate processes and protocols, and involving students where possible in order to make changes in practice – is the most recent example of a powerful idea that can further transform teaching and learning that benefits all students.

As an idea and a strategy, collaborative professionalism came out of a difficult period of austerity in Ontario and was the result of a concerted effort to rebuild positive relationships among teachers, administrators, government and other partners.[25] Explicitly collaborative ways of working were also needed in order to realize the government's bold reform agenda in *Achieving Excellence*.

- Improving excellence and equity in mathematics, for example, would require elementary teachers to work with coaches and colleagues who had specialized expertise.

- Promoting all students' well-being meant that teachers would collaborate closely with mental health professionals.

- The pursuit of broader learning outcomes of global and transferable skills augmented by technology pointed to the emergence of interdisciplinary approaches to problem-based learning.

- Last, in the context of a complex reform agenda pursuing higher order goals of learning and well-being, collaborative professionalism would be a way to develop common understandings and overall coherence regarding how all of the parts of the agenda made sense and fit together.

In our interviews, educators reported an evolution from a previous model of *professional collaboration* to a new one of *collaborative professionalism*. Educators remarked that their conversations were more focused and action-oriented compared to the time of our last report in 2011. Collaborative inquiry is strongly supported by Ministry policy and documents that provide guidance for educators, and is continuously promoted by the thought leaders who are the province's ambassadors.

Professional Collaboration and Collaborative Professionalism

Professional collaboration is a descriptive term that points to all the different ways that educators can, do and might collaborate – long term and short term, formally in meetings and informally in social gatherings, and through many deliberately designed structures and practices such as professional learning communities or collaborative inquiry.

Collaborative professionalism, by contrast, is a prescriptive term. It promotes forms of collaboration among educators that are professional in the sense of being open, rigorous, challenging, and evidence-informed. It advocates for a kind of professionalism where teachers' judgments are not all individually autonomous but are rooted in collaborative inquiry, joint work and collective responsibility.

The differences between the two ideas and strategies and their applicability to the two ages of change, can be seen below:

From		To
Talk or Action	→	Talk and Action
Narrow Achievement Goals	→	Learning with Meaning & Purpose
Episodic Meetings	→	Embedded Cultures
Administratively Imposed	→	Teacher Led
Comfortable or Contrived	→	Genuine & Respectful
Conversation	→	Dialogue
For Students	→	With Students

There is a new kind of collaborative inquiry at work across almost all of the 10 CODE Consortium boards. It is addressed to developing the whole child and the meaning and purpose of his or her learning. This is exemplified in one board's gathering of large interdisciplinary teams to focus on a single "student of wonder" who is selected for sustained study of some aspects of their learning. Professional dialogue is more formally structured now than it was in 2011, with protocols and procedures. It is also deeper in how it builds strong relationships that go beyond the tasks to be performed in particular teams. There are more examples of professional learning communities being instigated and orchestrated by teachers, rather than being primarily run by school administrators. Dialogue is open, direct and humble as educators realize how it is important to understand students' strengths and not just rectify their deficits. Students are more and more likely to be part of educators' collaborative work; not just the target for it.

Collaborative professionalism is not just evident in surface *structures* of professional learning communities, interdisciplinary teams, collaborative inquiry processes, or educators focusing on students of wonder. More significantly, it can be seen in the *cultures* in which educators work together in relationships that are both trusting and candid.

Even in this area of exceptional professional growth, there is room for further progress. Within the boards, short term-cycles for improvement and intervention still persisted from the *Age of Achievement and Effort*. There was concern that these cycles of about six weeks, broken down into goals for progress every two weeks, were too short for meaningful reflection. As we saw in the discussion of mathematics achievement, teachers, coaches and consultants were sometimes too inclined to downplay their expertise for fear of offending their colleagues. It was at times difficult for educators to recognize that their collaborative inquiry needed to access additional expertise (for instance in content knowledge of mathematics), or to act on the fact that teachers sometimes just want clear, direct instruction on how to use a new app, for example, rather than being left to explore it among themselves.

Ontario's on-the-ground record in collaborative professionalism is actually ahead of the official policy on the topic in how it is often teacher-led and student-involved in compelling projects linked to challenging educational and professional goals. If anyone wants to see how collaborative professionalism can improve teaching and learning in a way that is embedded in practice, system-wide, Ontario is the place to come.

Leading from the Middle

Ontario's education has shifted in intent and direction. It has had to come to terms with Ontario's need to educate and develop young people as whole persons who can participate successfully in a rapidly changing economy and who can pursue responsible and fulfilling lives of meaning and purpose in a diverse and democratic society. Ontario's education system is also striving to retain public confidence in how it charts and demonstrates progress and in how effectively it implements its newly defined purposes.

In the *Age of Achievement and Effort*, policy implementation occurred mainly through top-down leadership supplemented by bottom-up support. Compared to other systems where top-down reform has been criticized for being too inflexible and demotivating, top-down changes in literacy reform in Ontario were largely successful. One reason was that the "top" was not just a bureaucracy, but an enabling "guiding coalition" that also included professional leaders and other partners. Another reason was that professional development and financial support for implementation were provided. Third, investment in coaches and consultants provided on-the-ground support that was tailored to the needs of schools.

With clarity from government, and support for and from the profession, top-down policies in Ontario succeeded—for a while.

However, when educational policies and goals become more complex, it is difficult to impose strategies from the top. Goals such as supporting students' well-being or enabling students to develop their identities in multicultural democracies are not as easy to direct from the top as making gains in literacy or numeracy. Different approaches to policy and leadership are needed in order to achieve these kinds of goals.

Leading in the Middle

Around the world, other systems have found there is too great a gap between the top and the bottom, between the bureaucracy and the front-line of practice. In response, they have started to introduce a strategy that we can call "Leading in the Middle" (LiM). Elsewhere, the idea of a middle level of networks of schools has become attractive amongst advocates for a streamlined role for locally elected school districts. Where there is strong direction from government, along with marketplace competition for schools, attention

to some kind of middle seeks to plug policy implementation gaps, enforce compliance, and head off resistance to change.

In addition, an increasing number of systems thinkers attracted to the idea of self-improving systems regard the middle tier as a connector. In this formulation, the middle improves efficiency and performance. It does so by breaking down the miscommunication that can plague large school systems. The middle moves things up, down and around. In this increasingly popular view, however, the "middle" does not have much driving force, momentum or identity of its own. It conveys others' messages rather than exercising leadership on its own.

Leading from the Middle – The Original Interpretation

How does Leading from the Middle differ from Leading in the Middle? What does and can LfM look like where school boards and local control are valued and strong rather than being seen as impediments to be weakened or eliminated by central authorities?

Our 2011 *Leading for All* report on the *Essential for Some, Good for All* (ESGA) project originally surfaced the idea and practice of Leading from the Middle. It stated that ESGA "only began and then built momentum because of pressure from system leadership, *in the middle*, that coincided with the high profile needs of securing measurable improvement in literacy and numeracy achievement at the top."[26]

CODE requested and was given the responsibility to distribute $25 million that had been allocated to it by the Ministry of Education to implement and provide professional development for special education reform. It decided to distribute the funds identically across all 72 of Ontario's boards, irrespective of their student enrolments. Most boards in Ontario are small, so identical funding per board meant "every superintendent and director became an advocate." Consequently, "district level leaders became the collective dynamos who gave the whole project its energy and momentum."

A "small steering or leadership team of retired directors and superintendents" "was appointed by the head of CODE to be responsible for designing and developing the ESGA initiative." This "group of respected leaders at the middle of the system had decisive influence" on the outcomes from ESGA.

ESGA's "emphasis on school board authority and flexibility" "enabled boards to employ *responsive diversity practices*" that sought to engage and increase the achievement of all learners. The boards sought to "understand and engage with the assets of different communities," and to employ strategies such as differentiated instruction and assistive technologies that helped them reach every learner. They also created cultures where educators exercised *collective responsibility* for all of their students' success. This meant "having a common professional and emotional investment in, and mutual professional accountability for, the success of all students across all grade levels, subject departments and the special educational divide."

Leading from the Middle – the Consortium's Interpretation

Over time, the concept of Leading from the Middle began to enter the vocabulary of Ministry policy makers and school board administrators. It also awakened the curiosity of the 10 boards who formed the CODE Consortium to continue learning from one another in conjunction with the Boston College research team. Together, the Consortium and the Boston College team refined the understanding of Leading from the Middle to encompass seven principles represented in the graphic below:



1. ***Responsiveness to diversity.*** Boards and their schools work with others to generate solutions that respond to distinctive local needs and diversities through practices like differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning. LfM projects engage with students' distinctive identities and develop cooperation to support students across special education support teachers, curriculum consultants, and regular classroom teachers.

2. ***Responsibility.*** Boards take collective responsibility for all of their students' success by working in professional learning communities. They examine student data and bring together teachers with special education consultants, speech pathologists, and mental health specialists. These professionals devise strategies to support all of the students in the boards who have struggled with their learning.

3. ***Initiative.*** Leading from the Middle is about fewer *initiatives* and more *initiative*. It is about educators themselves seizing the initiative together to acknowledge and respond to challenges in their schools and communities and to develop strategies to address them.

4. ***Integration.*** Boards seek to integrate their efforts with government priorities wherever possible, by linking to literacy reforms or efforts to close the achievement gap in the past, for example.

5. ***Transparency.*** Boards act together to establish transparency of participation and results regarding their progress in improving learning, establishing well-being, and building identity. They share their strategies and results with each other through the networks of their relationships and at public sessions that display their projects and their impact.

6. ***Humility.*** No board sees itself as superior to all the others. Each board demonstrates curiosity to learn from the rest. All boards commit to learning from other systems elsewhere.

7. ***Design.*** Boards work together to ensure that the six prior principles are put into place through deliberate designs, and then disseminated throughout their schools and systems.

At Consortium meetings, the boards used these seven principles to organize and deepen their reflections on their own projects.

Leading from the Middle – Participants' Interpretations

Once the research team commenced fieldwork and undertook site visits in May 2016, participants were asked directly what they understood by the idea of Leading from the Middle now that the term was being more widely used among school and school board leaders.

According to one superintendent, LfM had "kind of morphed into different things" over time. In the era of ESGA, LfM was relatively straightforward. It referred to a leadership committee of retired superintendents affiliated with CODE who provided oversight to a multi-million dollar provincial grant focused on creating collaboration within and among school boards to improve special education. Today, it has assumed greater depth and complexity in relation to students, teaching and learning. This has three interrelated components:

1. A *philosophy* of educational practice and what is the heart of it;
2. A *structure* of interdisciplinary teams and committees; and
3. A *culture* of collaborative professionalism for all students' success.

1. A Philosophy of the Heart of Educational Practice

Consortium educators viewed LfM as *their* concept, something that they had created and sustained even in the absence of government support. It was *their* initiative—not anything that came out of the Ministry or any other branch of the government. A director in one board explained that LfM "is making real your vision. It's about moving those ideas into concrete practice and making a positive difference, for all your students and for all your staff so that everybody just loves their learning environment…. [It is] this idea of wanting to get as close to the action as you possibly can."

In this view, LfM cannot and should not be reduced to a location such as a middle tier. Instead, it means getting close to the teaching and learning that is at the heart of the profession. In the words of one superintendent, LfM was about "subsidiarity; that the work and the change and the impact of that change will happen at the ground root."

LfM as a vision or philosophy of practice that stayed close to students was evident when Consortium educators identified "students of wonder" and studied their assets as well as their challenges; when students learned about the lives of missing Indigenous women, studied inequities in water quality across communities, or brought a refugee family to their community; when teachers strove to develop students' skills of self-advocacy in writing their own Individual Education Plans; when students were engaged in inquiring into and representing their own mental health issues; when teachers assessed student's work by sitting

beside them in processes of pedagogical documentation rather than using standardized tests to make data-driven interventions; when forums were organized for all students to share their ideas about what could be done to improve school climate; and when apps were designed that enabled students to inform educators when students are concerned about other students' lack of well-being.

In all these ways, LfM was about placing students, their learning and their well-being at the heart of and close to teachers' practice. It was about what and who is in the middle of educators' work.

The power of these beliefs and how they engaged educators with their students was expressed in a meeting of the senior administrative team in one board where participants displayed their understanding of LfM by writing on birch-bark slices where the rings of growth moved out from the middle.

This activity revealed how LfM was experienced as an organic activity that "grows and spreads from an idea." It involves "teacher-student voice" and trust to "let it grow, let it flourish."

2. A Structure of Interdisciplinary Teams and Committees

Some educators in the CODE Consortium have regarded LfM as a set of roles and responsibilities exercised by consultants, coordinators and mental health specialists who worked together. "When I think of Leading from the Middle," a board superintendent said, "an organization has to put some structures in place and identify what the function of that structure is." Throughout the boards, teams of consultants and instructional coaches worked cheek-by-jowl with teachers to inquire into and improve mathematics and other aspects of learning.



From this point of view, a diverse array of individuals could Lead from the Middle, including "district staff," "system leaders," "school leaders," and others as well. For example, in a board with a large population of students with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, mental health professionals provided by community-based non-profit agencies joined these interdisciplinary teams.

LfM is about what these diverse and locally responsive teams do as well as who they are. One elementary school principal stated that LfM could be understood as the "expertise that comes in and helps our team problem solve, and helps to build our knowledge and capacity and mindset." For a board director, LfM "means advocacy, it means people influencing the direction of the organization from the inside, in the grassroots, as opposed to top-down." Here LfM means "flattening the organization, so it's more that we're all Leading from the Middle. We're taking away the hierarchy and protocols and leading all together from the middle. We're all sitting at a table here. You have a voice at the table."

3. A Culture of Collaborative Professionalism

Consortium boards experimented with LfM as a method of group work. LfM is about habits and practices of collaboration. It overlaps with collaborative professionalism. One superintendent stated: "Our Leading from the Middle methodology is about the circle as a resolution." "The circle itself is very much an asset-oriented stance" to promote dialogue. "It's about the fact that everybody came [to one meeting] with a little cheat sheet of a few things they wanted to say, but when it comes together, it actually becomes the conversation." These conversations "speak to how the whole Leading from the Middle is a whole idea of trust. I'm trusting you to know what's really important for your students, for your staff." It is also about recognizing that teachers are leaders from the middle as well.



Summary

Drawing on the understandings of LfM expressed in the original 2011 report, among the members of the Consortium, and in the perspectives of participants in the research study, Leading from the Middle can be contrasted with Leading in the Middle in the following way.

LiM	LfM
Level, Layer or Tier	Center, Core and Heart
Improving Performance	Transforming Learning & Well-being
Better Systems	Stronger Communities
Coherence and Connection	Collective Responsibility
Implementing Initiatives	Taking Initiative

Leading from the Middle, then, regards those in the middle not just as a mediating layer that connects the bottom to the top through channels of streamlined implementation and control. Educators emphasized that it was about exercising the heart and soul of leadership that was profoundly concerned about Ontario's children, their learning, their well-being, and their identities.

Leading from the Middle is not, in this sense, just about incremental adjustments among levels, developing more coherent systems, or improving performance in the abstract. It is about supporting those who are closest to the practice of teaching, learning and well-being. Educators engage with one another so that they can work together purposefully, responsibly and transparently to develop strategies that will serve the children best.

Sustaining Leading from the Middle

Leading from the Middle is not self-sustaining. It must be nurtured continuously. It requires a structure of support, resources and direction, as well as an ingrained culture of shared habits and beliefs.

Not too long ago, using more than $25m of allocated government funding, ESGA galvanized all 72 boards and their leaders to develop an inclusive strategy for students with special educational needs. This supported other students, too. It yielded definitive gains in equity and attracted the attention of educators and policy makers around the world.

Since 2011, the work of the Consortium boards has retained and renewed LfM. This has been done first, by developing LfM projects related to government priorities of learning, well-being and identity within the boards, and second, by sharing and reviewing these with each other and with the Boston College team.

The data we have collected from these boards and from policy leaders reveal that the original collaboration among the 72 boards has faded away. In Ontario and elsewhere, the idea that cross-board collaborations can be funded as one-time projects and then sustained after the funding has been withdrawn is erroneous.

The reality now is that the strategy of Leading from the Middle that has gained global prominence because of how it developed in Ontario, is in danger of disappearing in the place where it began. If Ontario does not institutionalize the vision and support for Leading from the Middle, it will starve the thing that has been feeding the world.



Summary of Findings

We have been fortunate in being able to study how LfM is understood and enacted in one the most high-performing and multicultural educational systems in the world. We have undertaken this work in collaboration with educational leaders from one seventh of Ontario's school boards in a spirit of collaborative inquiry. We have performed this work at a time when Ontario Ministry policy has been stretching itself to develop all its children as learners and whole human beings for a stronger economy and a better, more diverse and inclusive society. This final section presents the study's 15 key findings.

1. *Ontario is moving from an Age of Achievement and Effort to a new Age of Learning, Well-being, and Identity.* The Consortium boards are continuing their focus on academic achievement that is now balanced with recognition of the needs, interests, identities and well-being of students, along with a deeper view of what constitutes worthwhile learning. Ontario is a global leader of this movement.

2. *Math reform is similar to and also dissimilar from literacy reform.* The province's strategy for improving math achievement has drawn on previous experiences with literacy, especially in its use of consultants and coaches, diagnostic assessments and early screening. But, compared to literacy, many elementary teachers lack confidence in mathematics. Without the infusion of relevant math-related expertise, relying on colleagues to improve math through collaborative inquiry is not always effective.

3. *Well-being initiatives are ubiquitous.* Well-being was addressed everywhere we studied – in student mental health committees, curriculum projects focused on indigenous identity, initiatives in emotional self-regulation, and in interdisciplinary teams discussing "students of wonder." Without any specific implementation strategy from the top, work on well-being has spread all across Ontario.

4. *An integrated and coherent achievement and well-being agenda can be undermined by persistence with the current form of large-scale, standardized assessments.* The large-scale assessment known as the EQAO is seen by most educators, at levels of responsibility below some board and Ministry leaders, as having negative effects on innovation and well-being. A new 21st century movement in learning that is embracing a range of innovative practices has outpaced a 20-year old system of large-scale assessments.

5. *Educators are eager for and are making significant advances in sophisticated uses of classroom assessments.* These include adopting various diagnostic assessment tools and undertaking digitally-enhanced pedagogical documentation on iPads to record student learning in real time, and to share what they are recording with their colleagues and the students themselves.

6. *Identity is integral to learning, well-being, and equity.* Young people with many diverse and intersecting identities increasingly see themselves in their schools – in their architecture, curricula, and leadership.

7. *Identity issues are foundational to well-being but they are also complex*. Identity is integral to all human development. Some identities are receiving greater attention than others, though. Identities are tending to be acknowledged most readily when they have been minoritized, when they are seen as vulnerable, or when they are part of the province's constitutional history.

8. *Emotional regulation programs are highly valued for enabling children to calm themselves in order to learn*. The work of particular authors and trainers in the fields of self-regulation and mindfulness has influenced teachers' adoption of an explicit curriculum of the emotions. This has enabled them to calm their students, to help students calm themselves, and sometimes to enable teachers to reflect on and manage their own emotions too.

9. *Programs of self-regulation that are now widespread in schools prioritize some emotional states over others.* Interviews revealed little attention was given to emotions like surprise (the basic emotion of creativity) or disgust (the basic emotion of racism) as part of self-regulation. This absence indicates that certain emotions – especially those that are conducive to ease of classroom management or more in tune with mainstream culture – are given greater prominence in the schools.

10. *There are four distinct relationships between well-being and achievement according to Ontario educators.* All these relationships are important and relevant. In maintaining public confidence and professional focus, it is essential that leaders and policymakers are able to articulate the mutually supportive relationships between achievement and well-being. The four forms of relationship are:
    - » Well-being is a crucial prerequisite for achievement.
    - » Achievement is essential for well-being; failure leads to ill-being.
    - » Well-being complements academic achievement; both matter.
    - » Well-being is a valued accomplishment in its own right.

11. *Student well-being is not possible or sustainable without educator well-being.* Teachers' well-being can be enhanced by individual programs of mindfulness and yoga. Well-being for educators also depends on the nature of their work environment in terms of having respected leaders, rewarding professional relationships, and an assessment system that they believe in.

12. *Collaborative professionalism is both **more** collaborative and **more** professional than in our last study of the 10 boards in 2011.* Collaborative professionalism entails helping professionals to build trusting relationships with one another. Collaborative professionalism is also about using precise strategies and protocols, where appropriate, and engaging in rigorous dialogue together.

13. *There are two kinds of humility that Ontario educators express in relation to their expertise when they engage in collaborative inquiry.* Genuine humility occurred when senior leaders decided to undertake collaborative inquiry on areas of their practice that they wished to improve. False humility arose when consultants set aside their own claims to expertise so as not to offend those they were meant to be helping. Teachers do not always want consultants to say they are not really experts. They welcome direct instruction from those who have expertise and are ready and able to share it when it is needed.

14. *Leading from the Middle is a powerful new strategy for change in complex systems that possess strong commitments to local and diverse communities.* LfM promotes deep learning that has meaning and purpose and that goes beyond the individual learner and his or her immediate needs. It enables students to become highly knowledgeable and skilled change agents in society. LfM is more than a level or a tier to help get the work at the top done. LfM is a driving force for educational and societal improvement in its own right.

15. *Leading from the Middle cannot spread or be sustained without continuing vision, support, and funding from the top.* Leading from the Middle cannot prosper and exert its impact in the long term if it is conceived as an initiative or a project with temporary funding and the hope that what started over a dozen years ago now will persist on its own.



Recommendations

The world can learn a lot from Ontario as it moves from an *Age of Achievement and Effort* into an *Age of Learning, Well-being and Identity.* At the same time, Ontario can also learn more about its own approach to change, and how it can improve further.

Recommendations from Ontario

Policy makers from many countries and US states travel to Ontario to learn about its educational accomplishments and to see if there are elements that can be adapted back home. Ontario has been a model of considerable success in education for a long time, yet its strategies continue to evolve. It is essential that other interested systems keep up to date with these developments, so that any policies or strategies that they adopt are accurately aligned with the current reasons for the province's success.

Ontario's educational goals, as set out in *Achieving Excellence* in 2014, and as we have studied their implementation across the Consortium boards, have at least four implications for other systems.

1. *Improve achievement through deeper learning.*

In the quest to improve mathematics achievement, boards did not try to engineer quick gains with students in the grades that are currently tested. Instead, they built a balanced approach to mathematics teaching and learning, beginning with the foundations of basic number sense in young children. The boards also piloted innovative curricular projects that led their students into real world problems and their potential solutions. Many of these involved the same kinds of problem-solving skills that are required in a complex and rapidly changing global economy.[27]

2. *Spread well-being without top-down implementation.*

Deliberate attention to student well-being has captured the imagination of educators across the province. It has spread by

- Inspiring educators with a framework that puts spirit at the heart of well-being;
- Injecting professional development approaches and curriculum guides for emotional regulation and mindfulness into the system;
- Stimulating innovation through the province's Teacher Leadership and Learning Project and other means;
- Providing Ministry and school board documents to guide teaching and change;
- Gaining the support and advocacy of Ontario thought leaders; and
- Networking strategies across schools and boards, including through the Consortium.

3. *Build collaborative professionalism.*

Ontario has shown not just how to help educators to work in teams with meaning and purpose, but also how to keep on improving so that a new culture of collaborative professionalism is becoming widespread and embedded in its schools and boards. The province is recognizing the importance of trusting professional relationships as a foundation for structured collaborative inquiry into the best ways to support teaching and learning. For others who are striving to build strong professional capital amongst their educators, Ontario is a positive and practical point of reference.

4. *Use Leadership from the Middle as a Driver of Change.*

LfM is not about joining up the dots of other people's improvements. It is about leaders who are close to the work of schools in different communities assuming shared responsibility for initiating and implementing needed changes themselves that will help all students in their systems to thrive.

Recommendations for Ontario

Although Ontario is an internationally-recognized high achiever and innovative leader, this does not mean that the province itself cannot also improve. We now close with seven recommendations that are based on our research findings.

1. *Make the well-being strategy more coherent and connected.*

The province has been successful in stimulating attention to the improvement of student well-being across the whole system. However, some of the programs of emotional self-regulation that we identified have not yet been assessed. What are the strengths of each program? What is the evidence-base behind them? Has the time come when the province can make prudent and evidence-informed decisions about which programs are worthy of the strongest investment? These questions can be answered through commissioned reviews of the international research literature; experimental-control studies that compare the impact of one program against another; or collaborative inquiry about the innovations and interventions in each particular board. One more way is to re-invent a system of cross-board collaboration – Leading from the Middle – where boards share their strategies and results, give focused feedback to one another, and where each takes the lead in areas where they are further ahead than their peers.

2. *Monitor well-being programs for the existence of unconscious cultural bias.*

This process can be built into guidelines for collaborative inquiry teams or in the specifications for program evaluations and program reviews. Is calmness a universal and culture-free emotional virtue, or does it sometimes gain prominence because it enhances teachers' capacity to manage a traditional classroom more effectively? Sadness is appropriate, when grieving over a loss, for example. Children needn't be hurried into "bouncing back" too quickly. Anger at injustice has been a virtue of some of the world's most inspirational leaders. Raucous expression befits some cultures or situations more than others. Do well-being programs embrace, acknowledge and investigate a sufficiently broad span of emotions? Is the learning environment designed to accommodate varied emotional ways of being, as when learning outdoors in nature encourages children to be loud and joyous? Or do we too often encourage children to become calm so they can adapt their emotions to the learning environment that adults prefer? Bias is rarely intentional, but it is ingrained in our assumptions. So, it is important to develop criteria to enable educators to inspect their biases about the kinds of well-being that they favour.

3. *Be critically inclusive of all students' identities.*

With the launch of Achieving Excellence in 2014, Ontario rightly regarded identity as being a big part of educational equity and well-being. If children cannot see themselves reflected in the curriculum and the school, they struggle to succeed in it. If their identities make them targets of exclusion, their academic achievement and overall well-being suffer. It is right that the acknowledgement of identity should be especially alert to identities that have been stigmatized and that have made children vulnerable to bullying and exclusion. But it is important not just to expand the list of overlooked identities. It is essential to be courageous and to be critical of some identities when they are exclusionary towards others and work against the kinds of free and open dialogue that are the life blood of democratic societies. It is also in the interests of everyone not to ignore the identities of those whose real-life struggles may not be as visible or palpable as others. We must understand and advocate for those who are different from us, as well as those who are the same. And, in our classrooms as well as in our leadership narratives, we must also help people strive for some sense of common identity and shared connection that transcends us all. Without this, there is no sense of common purpose or dedication to the public good.

4. *Strengthen public confidence by making the relationships between learning and well-being publicly and professionally explicit.*

People have different theories about the causal connections between well-being and achievement. Some think that achievement is the essential prerequisite for well-being; others believe the opposite. There is research support for each point of view. This report has drawn attention to at least four different theories of the relationships between well-being on the one hand, and learning or achievement on the other. Leaders of all kinds need to articulate clear narratives with compelling examples of the interrelationships between the two. Professional development and collaborative

inquiry exercises can also help educators to identify which implicit theory they most subscribe to and then facilitate engagement of these perspectives in dialogue with each other.

5. *Reclaim the collegial value of professional expertise.*

Collaborative inquiry should never be a solution that goes in search of problems. Sometimes, teachers may appreciate direct instruction from people who already know what to do. Collaborative inquiry groups need to include people with the appropriate expertise for the task in hand – ensuring that groups striving to improve mathematics achievement, for example, involve someone who has relevant mathematics expertise. In the interests of equity, coaches and consultants can sometimes downplay their expertise, but this should not be taken too far. Genuine humility is about acknowledging the expertise that defines teachers as professionals, while also admitting areas where that expertise is not sufficient for the issue under review.

6. *Review large-scale assessment instruments and practices.*

In the twenty years since Ontario's large-scale assessment, EQAO, was first established, there have been profound transformations in many areas of education. Given our advances in research, developments in classroom assessments such as pedagogical documentation, and the evidence of this study and its predecessor, it is time for the province's large-scale assessment system to catch up. Our interviews have revealed that the closer to the classroom the roles of educators get, the more that the holders of those roles see detrimental effects of large scale testing, not just on well-being, but on learning and innovation too. We welcome the current provincial review of assessment and express the hope that, based on international experience with other systems and recent developments in assessment, positive solutions will be found.

7. *Make Leading from the Middle structurally and systemically sustainable.*

Leading from the Middle, we have found, is not self-sustaining. It does not continue once project funds have ceased and attention has shifted elsewhere. Here and there, it may survive through personal relationships that were established when there was a deliberate cross-board focus, but otherwise, it is an evanescent innovation. Leading from the Middle can be assured by assigning responsibility to CODE with associated redirected budget support from other priorities, to drive particular areas of focus such as technology, or well-being, or mathematics achievement, for instance. Competitive funding criteria on Requests for Proposals could require plans for cross-board collaboration. Regional collaborations amongst boards can be established, like in Scotland, where boards take collective responsibility for each other's improvement and different boards lead in areas of their own particular strength. Last, accountability and progress measures can be applied to regions where boards take collective responsibility for results. Leading from the Middle needs to be supported by an inspiring vision at the top, and a structure of funding, support and accountability that will ensure its persistence over time. Eventually, Leading from the Middle may become a systemic habit, but in the midterm it will need deliberate structural design to ensure that it has a chance to take root.

Conclusion

The educators we interviewed in the CODE Consortium want more than just smarter systems, more coherence, and higher performance. They want strong and inclusive communities. They understand that leadership must promote a solid *philosophy* of learning and that this requires *structural* supports that will help their professional *cultures* to further evolve. Our evidence shows that they aspire towards education for meaning and purpose, in a morally just and economically dynamic society.

For these educators, the ideas expressed in Leading from the Middle offer a powerful new change strategy. From their point of view, Leading from the Middle promotes the determination to spread good ideas around rapidly and effectively, the willingness to scrutinize what is going well and what is not, and the aspiration for a new and better kind of collaborative professionalism. For these reasons, Leading from the Middle has started to capture the imagination of educators around the world.

Ontario has an opportunity to lead this new movement. It is the birthplace of Leading from the Middle. Its educators find in it a new theory of leadership that is integral to promoting learning, well-being, and identity. Ontario must not now abandon the child it has created. It must now Lead from the Middle, for itself and for the rest of the world.

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Notes/Ideas/What Now?



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