

What's inside...

In this issue we highlight the final reports of the Expert Panels on Students At Risk, focusing on literacy, and the Program Pathways Work Group,

which were presented at a symposium in October. As well, we speak with Limestone District School Board Director of Education, Barry O'Connor, and three At Risk Leaders about

implementation of the Students At Risk initiative in their boards.

We also report on a conference held in September to enhance the capacity in Ontario schools for teaching students with autism, and take a look at new resources and training for educators. In addition, this issue also marks the beginning of a three-part conversation with educator Luce Willam, as she embarks on her first year of teaching.

Comments and suggestions can be provided through 'Point of View'. If you would like to receive your own copy of Curriculum Update, please subscribe at the address below.

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Curriculum update

Presented by the Curriculum Implementation Partnership
in cooperation with the Ontario Ministry of Education

Expert Panels and Program Pathways reports introduced

The final reports of the English and French-language Expert Panels, and the Program Pathways Work Group, were discussed at a symposium, held in October, for At Risk Leaders, directors and representative elementary and secondary principals. The second major meeting in the past 5 months to focus on initiatives to assist students at risk, the symposium gave attendees the opportunity to listen to presentations, participate in workshops, and meet the new Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy.

The English and French-language reports, titled *Think Literacy Success* and *La littératie en tête*, focus on building literacy skills, while the report of the Program Pathways Work Group, *Building Pathways to Success*, sets out a framework for developing courses and supports that will prepare students for employment upon graduation. Participants also received a supplementary document, *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches Grades 7 – 12*, a guide to effective classroom literacy instruction.

"The acquisition of literacy skills is a right for all students". Those are the words of Expert Panel Chair Marilyn Gouthro, as she addressed symposium participants. "Effective literacy instruction starts with the needs of the learner. The single most valuable contribution any teacher can make is to equip students

with the literacy and math skills they need for life, and for lifelong learning. It is the duty of schools to make this happen."

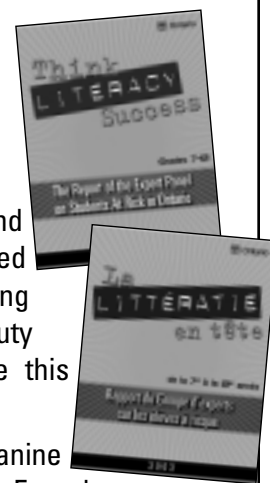
Her counterpart, Janine Griffore, Chair of the French-language Panel, noted that the reports reflect current research from Canada and abroad, and are supported by the extensive experience of educators across Ontario. "These reports represent a call to action," she said. "They are designed to provide a framework for building high literacy standards and practices across the curriculum, from Kindergarten through to Grade 12."

A cross-curricular approach

Think Literacy Success and *La littératie en tête* are resources that support schools and boards to develop and implement effective cross-curricular literacy plans, with emphasis on Grades 7 to 12.

Based on the core belief that ensuring students graduate with the essential literacy skills for life is a shared priority, the reports call on teachers, principals, superintendents, directors, families and community members to work together.

In defining students who are at risk, the reports deal with two interconnected concerns: failure to acquire literacy skills for learning and, as a consequence,



failure to graduate with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. In addition, the French-language report identifies students who lack foundational knowledge of the language of instruction as being at risk.

Think Literacy Success and *La littératie en tête* set out guiding principles for effective literacy planning. The French-language report additionally provides five strategic goals, and five corresponding areas of intervention. The reports also outline lessons from current research on how adolescents learn, risk factors for failure in school, and supports that can enhance student achievement.

Key areas identified for action as foundations for successful implementation are:

- developing cross-curricular literacy skills;
- using information to improve student achievement;
- identifying the roles and responsibilities of educators;
- developing family and community connections;
- providing professional development, and
- encouraging innovation and accountability.

Factors necessary to help students achieve success and strategies to close the literacy gap for students at risk in Grades 7 to 12, within and outside of general classroom instruction, are also outlined in the reports.

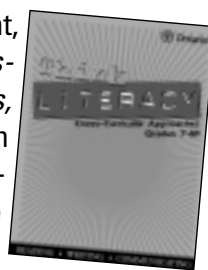
Systematic planning, according to *Think Literacy Success* and *La littératie en tête* is key to helping students who are at risk. Because reading, writing and oral language skills are developed over time, students need the benefit of planning that spans grades and subjects.

Critical to the planning process is the effective use of qualitative and quantitative data. The reports note that a

wealth of information is available to educators, at the classroom, school and board levels, and that this data can be analyzed and interpreted to help identify effective improvement strategies.

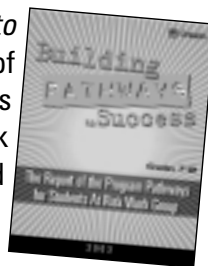
Think Literacy Success and *La littératie en tête* also provide recommendations to promote innovation and accountability for adolescent literacy, including the establishment of a board-wide literacy committee, and school-based literacy teams, and the provision of literacy resources and professional development for teachers, as critical operational components of an effective board-wide approach to literacy.

A companion document, *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7 to 12*, has been developed as a technical guide to effective instruction at the classroom level. A diagnostic tool, *Continuum en lecture, écriture et communication orale*, is being developed to enable French-language educators to assess students' literacy skills.



Pathways to success

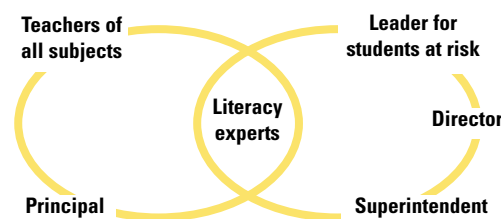
Building Pathways to Success, the report of the Program Pathways for Students At Risk Work Group, is intended to provide support and direction to Ontario district boards as they develop program pathways for students at risk.



Key to this direction is the need to bring about a re-thinking or re-culturing so that the entire range of postsecondary destinations is equally valued.

"We need to redefine what we mean when we talk about student success," Work Group Chair David Armstrong told symposium participants. "The long-held assumption that university or college are the pathways of preference needs to be set aside so that the culture of our schools better reflects the values and

aspirations of the entire student population. Students who obtain their diploma or certificate and find employment must be equally considered a success."



Educators at every level have a role in making literacy a priority

Building Pathways to Success explains that the term 'program pathway' refers not just to the combination of courses and supports that make up a student's educational program, but also to the underlying purpose that motivates students in their choice of courses. A program pathway is designed to lead a student to a particular destination. This does not mean, however, that the student will always end up in that destination. Motivations can change, and students should be free to make new choices as they develop new interests and abilities.

The report states that Program Pathways should:

- provide students with the opportunity to complete secondary school diploma or certificate requirements;
- meet the entry-level requirements of a specific industry;
- develop employability and industry-specific skills, and
- obtain experience in the workplace.

Building Pathways to Success provides educational leaders with a model for strategic planning and implementation, and a range of tools for At Risk Leaders and their planning teams. The report outlines a series of 'Critical Success Factors' that have been shown to increase the potential for student success. As well, resources are included to help build and maintain connections at the board, school and community level,

Continued on back page

Special Conference Report

Teaching Students with Autism: Enhancing capacity in Ontario Schools

September 10 – 12, 2003

International experts on teaching children with autism shared their expertise at a 3-day conference hosted by the Ministry of Education and its partners the Council of Directors of Education (CODE), Geneva Centre for Autism, Autism Society Ontario and the Council for Exceptional Children.

Attended by school board leaders and specialists, as well as parent and Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)



Keynote speaker Rita Jordan

representatives, the conference provided an in-depth exploration of the latest evidence-based strategies for teaching children with autism. Designed as an important step in building capacity in Ontario schools, the conference provided board leaders with tools and techniques that can be applied locally, to assist teachers in working successfully with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students.

"I think capacity is critical," said Peggy Blair, Coordinator of Special Programs at the Grand Erie District School Board, "and one of the best ways to build capacity is through a conference like this. It really provides you with a one-stop shop of experts. It's a wealth of information that's critical for teachers, but which would be impossible for any one individual to source. We're incorporating what we learned at the conference into workshops for staff. So this is a very exciting opportunity."

Marg Spoelstra of Autism Society Ontario agrees that training is a critical component of capacity building. "We surveyed 450 parents of children with

ASD in Ontario schools, and the number one thing they're looking for is training of professionals in schools," she says. "What this conference means, for parents especially, is that there's a concerted effort to begin a formal process of providing sound training to educators. Teachers are being faced with children who have very complex needs, and their university training alone does not typically provide them with the tools or the experience to use those tools successfully. This is a very encouraging initiative."

People confuse equality with treating people the same.

The conference opened with keynote speaker Dr. Rita Jordan of the University of Birmingham, England, an internationally recognized authority on ASD who spoke about current research and practice in meeting the special educational needs of ASD children.

"When people talk about equality, they often confuse that with treating people the same," she said. "Actually, in order to give people equal opportunities, you have to treat them differently. Because they have different needs."

It is critical, according to Jordan, that educational approaches and systems remain flexible, and responsive to the needs of the individual student. While every student in the classroom is an individual, she said, in autism the extent of that individuality is extreme, and demands that we, as educators, first adapt to the child, before expecting the child to adapt to us.

"By way of analogy, autism is much more akin to a sensory disturbance than to a learning difficulty," she says. "We could say to a blind child, the world is made for sighted people, so it

would be much easier if you could see. We wouldn't do that to a blind child, but this is the message we often give the autistic child. The world is not going to adjust to you, so you just need to get on with it. To some degree, of course, that's true. We do have to prepare students for the world they will face. But in the beginning, we need to be the ones making the adjustments."

Jordan believes that one key to working successfully with ASD students lies in understanding their perspective, and not relying entirely on our own natural intuitive



Peggy Blair

responses. "Autism is a transactional disorder. It takes someone to have autism, and someone else to notice," she said. "Autism, therefore, has as much to do with how we react to the student as how they're responding themselves."

Often, Jordan explained, we risk mistakenly attributing the causes of the autistic child's behaviour. "We don't respond to behaviour, when interacting with others. We respond to what we believe gave rise to that behaviour," she said. "We talk about behaviour that's aggressive, for example. People with autism are hardly ever aggressive, but they're frequently violent. That's the kind of distinction we need to make. Because if you view the behaviour as aggressive, the way you treat that behaviour is very different."

"...it's very important that we have knowledgeable professionals in place, right from the beginning."

Early intervention is an equally critical success factor, Jordan suggests. "We really mustn't waste time," she said. "We have to ensure that the systems we have in place respond early enough. So it's very important that we have knowledgeable professionals in place, right from the beginning."

"...training is a critical component of capacity building."



Marg Spoelstra

Reflecting on the conference's emphasis on board leadership, Jordan comments that while the work with ASD children happens in the classroom, it also requires system-wide support.

"It's not just the responsibility of the people doing the face-to-face work, but the whole system that needs to allow people to make sensitive adjustments. Teachers have to know how to make those adjustments, but the system has to allow them to use what they know."

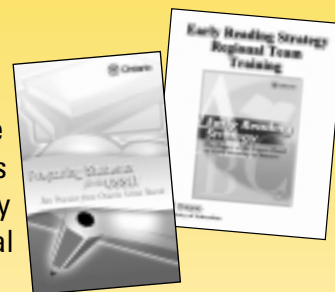


Next issue: See the Winter issue of Curriculum Update for information on regional forums, to be held during the winter of 2004, based on information learned at the conference.

Fall 2003: New Resources for Educators

Preparing Students for the OSSLT

A new booklet entitled Preparing Students for the OSSLT: Best Practices from Ontario School Boards was distributed to boards, school authorities, secondary schools, senior elementary schools and Provincial Schools in June 2003.



The booklet which details successful approaches developed by 14 boards, is intended as a guide to effective student preparation for teachers, schools and board leaders.

Additional copies can be obtained by contacting the ministry's toll-free information line at 1-800-387-5514. The booklet can also be viewed on the ministry website at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/osslt/>

OSSLC Supports

The new Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) curriculum document and course profile were distributed to boards in August 2003. The curriculum document can be viewed on the ministry website at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/grade12/index.html>, and the course profile is available in electronic form on the Ontario Curriculum Centre website at <http://www.curriculum.org/occ/profiles/12/literacy.shtml>

During September and early October 2003, ministry staff provided training for the implementation of the OSSLC. The training included approximately five staff members from each board. These individuals will in turn provide training to teachers within their boards.

Training Programs

The ministry will be providing more than 30 training programs and conferences for educators throughout the province during the fall of 2003. These include:

SEPTEMBER

OSSLC: Regional training sessions on implementing the OSSLC.

First Nations Training: Training sessions for First Nations school staff on ministry policies, procedures, curriculum and current initiatives

Technological Education: Workshops for principles and technological education teachers (through November 2003)

OCTOBER

Students at Risk: Two-day symposium on Students At Risk for board-based Students At Risk leaders, Directors of Education and an elementary and secondary principal from each board

Early Reading / Early Math Strategies: For all boards, school authorities, provincial schools and First Nations schools, two 3-day lead teacher training programs on effective instruction in early reading and math, respectively, 1-day training on instructional leadership and effective use of data for principals (through December)

NOVEMBER

Exemplars: Training to mark the Grades 1 and 5 student samples for the Physical Education Exemplars

Personalized Placement Learning Plan Training and Development: to support *Cooperative Education and Other Forms of Experimental Learning 2000* (through January 2004)

Luce Willam: A year in the life

Part I: Looking forward

Curriculum Update follows a new teacher through her first year in the classroom



More than 8,000 candidates are expected to qualify as new teachers in 2003. What they experienced this September is a unique career milestone familiar to every teacher; their first year in the classroom. This article begins a three-part profile of Luce Willam, a new teacher at St. Charles Garnier Catholic Secondary School in Whitby. We spoke to Luce about her decision to enter the teaching profession, and her expectations for the fall of 2003.

What lead you to teaching?

Well, there's a story behind that. Teaching is not my first profession. I am originally from Belgium, where I was a labour lawyer. After my children were born, we decided to move to Canada.

Since I did not qualify to practice law in Canada, I immediately looked for a profession that might use some of my skills. After taking evening courses in Montreal, where we lived at the time, I qualified for a career in human resources, and worked in that field for 10 years.

By that time, my children were in high school, and we found that there really weren't many resources for youth in

our community. So as good parents, we started a youth club. It took up most of our weekends for a number of years, but it was a wonderful time.

Did that experience attract you to teaching?

Yes, partly. I enjoyed being with young people, and found it very rewarding. But at the same time, I also noticed in my human resources work that there are many, many people who never really find their way to a satisfying career. They never discover their true talent.

A good deal of my time was spent helping people seek out a more promising career path. And in doing so, I began to think about teaching and using my background and experiences as a means of influencing young people in a very positive way. It was a profession I had thought about earlier in my life.

When my husband and I decided to move our family to Peterborough, I thought the time was right to make the change.

Where did you attend teachers' college?

I attended the University of Ottawa. I commuted between Ottawa and Peterborough during the year. It was difficult, but it was worth it.

What was the highlight of teachers' college for you?

I would have to say my practicums. We started our course work in September, and in October we had one week at a school and in November, we had five weeks of practicum. In the second semester, I was able to do a practicum close to home in Peterborough.

I had excellent practicum teachers. The first explained her teaching methods to me, and initially had me teaching a portion of the course work. But by the end of the practicum I was teaching a very large part of the work. My second

practicum was similar. My practicum teacher helped me out the first week, and continued to review my lesson plans. As I progressed, I became more autonomous. The difference between the two experiences was that in the second practicum I learned more about evaluation; whereas the first focused more on the teaching process.

I understand you qualified as a specialist?

Yes. My Bachelor of Law and Bachelor of Human Resources gave me more than enough course credits to qualify as a specialist in history, as well as a specialist in French as a second language.

How did you find a teaching position?

I was very lucky. Teachers with French language have several options: immersion programs, core French, and the third avenue, which is a French-language school, such as St. Charles Garnier.

I was also lucky that the Peterborough school at which I did my practicum is a part of this board and that the board starts its hiring process quite early. I actually had my first interview while I was still on my practicum.

Were you looking in particular for a job in a French language board?

Yes, I was. French is my first language. In the classroom, you need to maintain multiple levels of attention. You have to concentrate on what you're saying, but you also need to remain mindful of what is happening in the classroom. And when you do all of that in a second language, it's more difficult. I also think it's a little easier for me to have a real connection with the students in my language – humour and that sort of thing. You know, you really can't afford to be anything less than your best in the classroom, because once you've lost them, you've lost them forever.



What will you be teaching at St. Charles Garnier?

I'll be teaching History, as part of Canadian Studies, Grades 7 and 8.

How did you prepare for school this summer?

I think it's important to have a 'big picture' plan for the year. You might not have all of your lesson plans, in fact it's probably not a good idea to be too rigid, since you may have to adjust during the year. Some things the students may pick up more or less quickly than you expect, and some areas they may have more or less knowledge. But it's important to have the overall plan. The rule of thumb I've been given is to start the year with two full weeks of lesson plans ready.

What kinds of tools are you using to prepare?

Well, of course you have the curriculum documents, exemplars, and the course profiles for the secondary subjects. You have the textbooks selected by the board, so that's a big help for preparation.

There is another teacher in the school who is teaching the same subjects, so I'm hopeful that we can share information. I met with the teacher who taught these courses last year. He gave me some idea of what worked. For example, he held a trial in the school, which was very successful. So I'm planning to do the same.

Do you expect your first year to be challenging?

Yes, I think that's probably the major challenge for most teachers when they're starting. It's very important to know the children well, to be able to evaluate them fairly. They're not always as open, in a classroom setting among their peers, as they might be in a one-on-one situation. Neither do you have a lot of extra time, beyond the time taken up with the lesson plans. I am, however, hoping to become involved in some extra-curricular activities to have more opportunity to connect with my students. I think that's very important.

It is possible that I may have a student with a learning or behavioural challenge, and it will be important for me to address these situations correctly.

At this point, I'm anxious to meet my students. To find out who they are. I think that first week in the classroom will be critical; making a bridge with them; understanding them; establishing a rapport.

Do you expect other challenges?

Well, I think classroom management is the main challenge. But it's also very important to be well integrated into the school, with your colleagues. It's important to be part of a team. On the other hand, I've worked with many people in many work settings, so I'm not really anticipating that this will be a difficulty.

It's also important to establish a good relationship with the parents. There again, I'm a parent, and I think I understand what parents care about. I can put myself in their shoes.

Do you think you're at an advantage, coming to teaching later in your career?

Well, I think it's a double-edged sword. Certainly, there are advantages to having had the experiences I've had. You know, working in human resources is not always easy. You're not always working with happy people. I have a good deal of experience working with people, and I think that will be a great advantage in my teaching career.

On the other hand, I suppose a younger teacher might be more able to connect with the students, because there is a smaller age gap. I may not be as up to date. So I'll have to work on that area, and really try to understand the world the students are living in.



Do you have any particular hopes or expectations for this new career?

Yes. I believe this is very important work. I think teachers help students touch the future, even if they're teaching history. When I was a teenager, we were the majority. We had importance in society. I don't think children today have that same sense of their own importance. Yet, they have a lot to offer. The way they manage information, for example. So my hope is that, beyond the lesson plans, I will have the opportunity to make them conscious of their own place, have a sense of their power, and take part in society. Because that's what creates a better future.

"Agents of Hope" At Risk Leaders

At Risk Leaders met in June, and have been developing implementation plans. In this issue Barry O'Connor, former Chair of the At-Risk Working Group, and Director of the Limestone District School Board, shares his thoughts about the work ahead. Three At Risk Leaders also share their implementation plans, which demonstrate the diversity and range of approaches being used to tailor the Students At Risk initiative to individual board circumstances.



Barry O'Connor

"This is not just an opportunity to do a job. It's an opportunity to create a legacy."

Barry O'Connor spoke passionately to Ontario's At Risk Leaders, who gathered in Toronto in June for a leadership conference. He told the leaders that they need to champion a dramatic shift in the way educators view and serve students at risk of failing, with particular emphasis on those who choose not to attend college or university.

"When I get a haircut, when I have my tires rotated and my oil changed, when I have a new deck built, I'm reminded of the value these talented and skilled people bring to my life. The fact is, there are many, many people who are incredibly successful who have not chosen a college or university path. It's time to make sure we're serving all students in an effective and meaningful way, many of whom are on a school-to-work pathway."

Students will be discouraged during their school careers, he said, unless they can see a future for themselves.

"What happens is that you end up with situations in which students and their parents believe there's no hope. They think they'll never pass the literacy test. They're falling behind in their credit count. They should have 16 credits after Grade 10, but they have nine, so they think they may as well drop out and try to get a job right now."

The result, says O'Connor, is that these students leave school unprepared and underskilled. "On the other hand, we've all seen a student who, at some point in time, is suddenly turned on. For example, our board has a Building Construction Internship Program, through which we've built 40 houses with the local construction industry. Often, after a semester in the construction program, a student who used to hate going to school, used to have trouble getting up in the morning, is all of a sudden willing to go back to school because he sees a path where he wants to go, and knows that school is the key to succeeding on that path."

New literacy supports are also critical for these students, said O'Connor. "Every student should have the opportunity to graduate. The concept of the new Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) makes sense, because it adds to the range of assessment strategies. So if, in fact, you are given five, six, or seven assessment opportunities to demonstrate your ability in literacy, and you have a committed, caring teacher who will work with you, the success rate for students will be significantly increased."

In speaking to the At Risk Leaders, O'Connor stressed the need to ensure the Students At Risk initiative is a board priority. "If the At Risk Leaders are to be senior staff people in the board, which I believe they should be, then they should be in direct contact with the Director. The Director needs to know what's happening, and make sure this initiative is moving forward. If a board doesn't see this as important, then

they'll have some real issues when the data comes out, and the students are not successful. This initiative cannot be successful if it's viewed as an add-on. It requires a senior leader chosen explicitly to make it happen."

O'Connor also stressed the need for action. "You can philosophize to the point that nothing gets done. We found this in the early stages of the At-Risk Working Group. Someone would begin to philosophize, and I'd say hold on, that's not our mandate. You tell me what's wrong, and give me something you think needs to be done to fix it. Every issue needs to be turned into a recommendation. Likewise, at the board level, I would say to the At Risk Leaders that all the philosophizing has been done. It's now about implementation and action. We're not going to study, we're going to work."

Commitment at the school level is also critical to success, O'Connor said. "Where the OSSLC is concerned, this all has to start with a wonderful, committed teacher. In each school, we'll need to choose very carefully who is going to teach this course, because it's the teacher who makes the difference. This should not be seen as a last choice and given to a teacher who doesn't have an extra course or the most junior teacher. This needs to be someone with a real passion for literacy, someone who really cares about these students. Then we need to let them do their work and give them the support and resources they need."

As trailblazers in their respective boards, At Risk Leaders are truly agents of hope for hundreds of thousands of students, said O'Connor. "With the new board leaders, there's a real chance for us to influence in a positive way the future opportunities for students. We can turn around, redirect, recreate opportunities for young people who thought they had no future. That's a legacy opportunity, and a very exciting one for every board leader."



Karen Hume

Durham District School Board

For Karen Hume, At Risk Leader at the Durham Board, the implementation process began with a series of fact-finding meetings.

She met with elementary and secondary administrators to ask a series of key questions. She wanted to know how they would characterize the students they see as being at risk, how they would identify these students, and what kinds of structures they already had in place to support them. She invited them to engage in big-picture thinking by asking them to imagine, if all restrictions were removed, what kinds of structural, cultural or environmental changes they believed would make a real difference.

Following the June meetings, she began the process of pulling together qualitative data and created a plan that responded with six basic beliefs.

Six Core Beliefs

1. The teacher is critical

"I think the teacher is absolutely critical to the success of the Students At Risk initiative. So it's the teacher we'll be working with, directly."

2. All students should benefit

"We decided that the actions we are taking should benefit all students. We're not going to be pulling kids out to do remedial things, so everything we do is about improving the experience for every student in the class."

3. Learning is a process

"The learner – whether a teacher or a student – has to be scaffolded at his or her own level of understanding, and then supported in taking the next step."

4. Action is information-driven

"All of our decisions – and our actions – need to be driven by information. It's really critical. I don't think we do enough of that."

5. We have the capability

"We do have the ability to do this. We're dedicated, we're creative, we've been creating all kinds of positive differences for kids, and will continue to do that."

6. Creative thinking is key

"The sixth core belief is a big one. Creative thinking and thoughtful experimentation are going to be the order of the day."

Structures facilitate system-wide participation

The approach developed by Hume revolves around the concept of creating structures that will facilitate teacher-driven solutions, and engage the entire system, rather than a top-down approach.

As a cornerstone of this philosophy, one individual will be identified in each school to serve as an in-school resource, and as a 'champion' for the initiative. The Durham approach will also take advantage of, and extend, the board's family of schools format. Board facilitators will be working, for example, with both a local secondary school and the elementary schools that support it, bridging between the two panels.

Communication throughout the board is another critical component Hume is putting in place to generate visibility and understanding of the initiative. Continuity will be maintained through a bi-weekly newsletter called 'Breakthrough', reflecting a central theme that will be used throughout the initiative.

Breakthrough will be used initially to communicate the core concepts of the program, and later for sharing documented successful practices, strategies, research, and school successes.

Another structure being put in place to support the initiative is the 'rapid results' technique developed by U.S. educator and researcher Mike Schmoker. The method will be used with groups of teachers to brainstorm potential solutions, test those solutions in the classroom, and then measure their effectiveness. It's a very powerful technique, Hume explains, that generates results, not in years, but in months or weeks.

Hume is planning staff recognition programs in support of the initiative, and developing staff book clubs, designed to mirror the literacy efforts being made with students. Through the clubs, staff will be invited to read a selected book title and attend facilitated discussions, to keep the richness of ideas flowing through the system.

Hume will also provide 'arts afternoons' run by community artists and specialized supply teachers, to enable selected teachers to participate in Students At Risk sessions. "We're providing the students with something that's curriculum-based, and enables us to release the teacher without subjecting the kids to babysitting," she explained.

A final and critical structure will be the development of pilot projects throughout the board. The board will make funds available to support classroom, school or family of schools initiatives that are consistent with the board's Students At Risk priorities.

"This is a huge challenge," Hume said. "But I'm very excited by it, and I'm confident that it's going to have an impact on this very important student population. That's extremely gratifying."

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Kerry Stewart

Limestone District School Board

"Probably, in my career, this is the most positive anticipation of change that I've ever experienced," said Kerry Stewart, At Risk Leader with the Limestone District School Board.

"Some fabulous work has already been done by large numbers of people to lay the groundwork for individuals like me, working in school boards, to really get started," she said. "The new OSSLC, in particular, is a stunning piece of work. In fact, I did an in-service on it within days of coming back from the conference."

Stewart has devised a broad range of initiatives with both short-term and long-term goals for implementation.

Grade 10 test preparation

One key area of concentration for the Limestone Board will be students who entered Grade 10 in September.

"I see this as the very highest immediate priority," said Stewart. "One critical piece here is to ensure that we've gotten all of the students who are at risk of not passing the Grade 10 literacy test identified to their teachers, and beyond that, to ensure that all students – not just those at risk – will have opportunities to practise the types of questions they'll be experiencing on the test so they'll be comfortable with the testing situation in October. And those students who are at risk will be getting some extra help with tutoring assistance prior to the test as well."

Tutors will be used this fall, to help prepare students for the test. "What we're looking at is imbedding much of the support students need into the school day, without jeopardizing student success in other courses," said Stewart. "Because students have full timetables, that's going to be a challenge."

Test management

Another critical short-term focus for the Limestone Board will be OSSLT management. "The gathering and tracking of student success on the test is highly complex, and critically important," Stewart said. "We have to set something structurally in place that ensures that no student is missed."

Grade 10 Literacy Course

The remaining short-term priority for the board will be implementation of the OSSLC. In-service will continue for teachers to ensure that they have the information and resources they need to make the course successful for students.

Numeracy

Another area of critical importance to at risk students is numeracy. Stewart will be working with the local math council over the next year, looking at Grade 9 and 10 applied math, where failure rates are a concern. The priority will be to explore new resources and new instructional strategies in those two programs.

Intervention strategies

In the longer term, Stewart will lead the board's efforts to explore methods for making better use of data on student success from the Grade 3 and 6 EQAO tests and from other local assessments, in a way that's useable and meaningful for teachers.

The intent of this initiative will be to identify students who require additional instruction, or more learning time, or different learning strategies, well

before the point that they're writing the Grade 10 test. This will allow for interventions to be put into place and worked with over an extended period of time.

"...it isn't just a matter of giving them the skills...but giving them confidence as well."

"In our view, that process should begin by Grade 7 at the latest," Stewart said. "And it isn't just a matter of giving them the skills they need to be successful on the test, but giving them confidence as well. Most kids who have weak skills know their skills are weak, and so they've also come to lack the confidence they need. So that's something we need to develop over time."

Pilot projects

To facilitate the development of effective intervention strategies, the Limestone Board will also implement pilot projects in families of schools that will be aimed at supporting students with literacy needs, and evaluate a variety of approaches to student intervention. The board will identify patterns, and determine what is working and what needs to change.

School-work pathways

The issue of pathways for students who are moving from high school to the world of work will also be a major focus at the Limestone Board. That entails two major components, explained Stewart, the first having to do with providing appropriate pathways, and the second involving a reculturing and education process.

"In the first area, we'll be doing some long-term board-wide planning to ensure that the board is able to offer school-to-work pathways to students, in a range of areas of interest."

One strategy may involve offering programs on a family of schools basis, rather than replicating them across schools.

The second component, Stewart said, is the need to do some fundamental reculturing to ensure that teachers, students and parents view the school-to-work path as a viable and valuable choice.

Technology renewal

In support of the pathways initiatives, the Limestone Board will also be focusing long-term on technology renewal.

This will address the needs of students who are excellent hands-on learners and whose preferred learning courses are in the technology and trades areas. To protect the integrity of those programs, the board will engage in technology renewal planning to ensure that appropriate equipment remains in place so that it can offer a broad range of programs to students.

Professional development

"The final piece, and in some ways the most exciting piece of all, is that if we're going to implement this initiative in the right way, and if we're skilful in doing so, we need over time to be investing teachers with the skills they need to be able to teach functional literacy in any and every course, whatever the course happens to be," said Stewart.

"I'm quite certain that as we move further into this process, more and more will be added, and it's certainly not the case that we haven't been working on this already," she said. "A lot has been happening within the board and the schools. But this is an opportunity to bring in a bit more structure, to raise the profile of these initiatives, and to constructively share best practices, which is very exciting for teachers, and ultimately, all of the students across the board."

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Constance Legentil

Conseil scolaire de district des écoles catholiques de Sud-Ouest

Working with smaller schools, in a geographically diverse board, has enabled the Conseil scolaire de district des écoles catholiques de Sud-Ouest to build a highly personalized approach to the Students At Risk initiative.

"Small is good," stated Constance Legentil. "We are able to better tailor our programs to the needs of our students. Geographical diversity does present its challenges, but we are moving forward with a data analysis process monitoring individual students who are at risk. This allows us to work efficiently with students from JK to grade 12."

Leadership and shared understanding

One of her first priorities was to build leadership teams who worked together towards developing a shared understanding of the concept of students at risk.

Two committees were established within the board: an implementation committee focusing on action plans at the school level, and a literacy committee which, through its input, guides the process and ensures clear communication amongst stakeholders.

The implementation committee is a comprehensive board-wide team made up of all secondary school principals as

well as representation from elementary principals, administration, Formation du personnel à l'amélioration de la réussite scolaire des élèves (FARE), and support staff.

"In putting together the literacy committee, the broader community is involved, and has input," said Legentil. "This work group includes representatives from the community, from the federations, from elementary and secondary principals, from the student body, as well as various departments, such as special education, pathways and curriculum."

A data-driven approach

The school teams' first step was to examine the data in the detailed school profiles, identify individual students' needs, and develop a shared understanding of the initiative, as well as implementing an action plan with appropriate and effective programs and services.

The board has maintained a database on student performance on coursework for a number of years, and has always done a close follow-up on the Grade 10 Literacy Test. Student career and academic orientation, attendance and suspension records are examined in order to make sound decisions and to create effective, highly tailored programs.

Successful practices

Another critical component in this approach is the identification of successful practices that lead to continuous improvement.

"We've looked at past support programs, in order to determine the keys to their success," she said. "For example, a Saturday program, set up by a motivated school team, showed that the genuine interest demonstrated by dedicated individuals can foster caring relationships, which in turn, leads to improvement in student performance, confidence and motivation. In this particular project,

each student benefited from an individualized program geared to his or her needs.”

Professional development

Teachers and school leaders are participating in training sessions to facilitate the implementation of this initiative. Materials, such as *A vos marques*, a resource developed by the Centre franco-ontarien de ressources pédagogiques (CFORP) for the 12 French-language boards, are used to enhance teaching strategies from grades 7 to 12.

A comprehensive training program has been planned for the teachers of the new literacy course, as well as for those who will prepare students for the literacy test. In October, the board

focused on building strong, school-based teams, catalysts in the change process.

In addition, the board is working with elementary teachers and school leaders to identify students at risk in the early grades, and to develop appropriate support program and strategies.

“It’s a JK-12 ongoing process of improvement,” said Legentil. “We’re very pleased with the results of our initial accomplishments, as well as the interest and professional dialogue around individual student needs. It is important to recognize and celebrate our achievements and those of our students.”

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At a glance:

The Students At Risk initiative

The Students At Risk initiative is a province-wide program designed to provide assistance to students in Grades 7 to 12 who need extra help to succeed in school and prepare for the transition from school to the workplace or post-secondary education and training.

Highlights of the initiative include:

- A new Grade 12 Literacy Course (OSSLC)
- Board-based At Risk Leaders
- Literacy and numeracy teaching supports for Grades 7 to 12 teachers
- New program pathways models for workplace transition
- Successful practices resources for boards and schools
- \$50 Million in funding

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Point of View

Our readers write

I just finished reading Curriculum Update and J'ai été très impressionné! The articles focused on Students At Risk were excellent and presented a terrific précis of this new initiative. Super Q&A section to answer questions about the new literacy course.

It was also great to see a face (Educators in Action) and hear the views of people in the ministry such as Leslie Banner. It provides a more human connection, and allows us to recognize the sincerity of the people who preside over us with respect to building and sustaining an excellent education system. I also appreciated the one-page overview of the revised 5-year curriculum review cycle. Good at-a-glance update.

All the rest was current, succinct and well written. Any educator would find Curriculum Update an excellent resource to keep up to speed with initiatives and information pertinent to their roles in education. Well done! I look forward to the next issue.

*Paul Toffanello
Northeastern Catholic District
School Board*

Do you have comments or suggestions? Write or email at the address on the front page.

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and to develop effective communications to shift the attitudes of students, parents, teachers and the community towards understanding and valuing appropriate program pathways for all students.

Building Pathways to Success recommends a number of priorities for At Risk Leaders, including:

- establishing board and school-level steering committees;
- gathering data and reviewing existing practices;
- identifying areas of need and developing supports;
- providing professional development;
- communicating effectively with staff, parents, students and the community, and
- tracking program results to measure success.

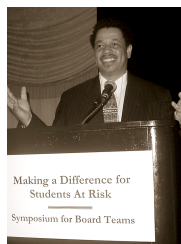
Students may be disengaged for a variety of reasons, which tend to be reflected in very poor attendance. The report states that successful program pathways require the active involvement of educators at every level of the organization, including board superintendents, coordinators and consultants, school administrators, guidance teachers, department heads and divisional leaders, cooperative education and technological education teachers, elementary and secondary classroom teachers, and school literacy and numeracy teachers.

It also advocates the collection and analysis of local data to gain an accurate perspective at the board level, and recommends 11 potential data sources to be considered in designing a data collection process.

In presenting the report, David Armstrong also reflected on his experience as Chair of the Program Pathways Work Group. "If any of you have the opportunity to work with the ministry, go for it," he said. "It's been a wonderful experience."

A system-wide priority

Leo Plue, a former Durham District School Board Principal, and a member of the Program Pathways Work Group, stressed the need to build a greater link between elementary and secondary schools, especially in communicating about students who may be at risk.



Zollie Stevenson, Group Leader for standards, assessment and accountability at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington D.C., spoke on the American experience in implementing the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"Students who enter secondary school should not come into this new environment as strangers. The first reporting cycle is too late for secondary teachers to find out that a student is not 'making it'," he said.

Plue also spoke of the need to take an individualized approach to the needs of students. "Teachers have always been good at teaching the collective but we need to look at teaching each individual, especially at the secondary level where our focus is on specific subject disciplines and content," he said. "We have all been successful in our own education because we were able to adapt our

learning style to the teacher's style. It should be the other way around."

He concluded by throwing a challenge out to participants. "Most adults can tell the story of a particular teacher who changed their lives," he said. "I challenge each of you to choose one student in your classroom, a student who is academically able, but disengaged. Work with that student on a one-to-one basis. Understand that student's needs and aspirations. And become the teacher who will change that student's life. When every teacher does this, keeping in mind that there may well be a thousand or more secondary teachers in a particular board, we change the lives of not one, but one thousand students. Yes, we need to approach the concept of large-scale re-culturing. But we can do it, one student at a time."

WHERE CAN I GET THE REPORTS?

The reports will be distributed to the boards and available through the ministry website at www.edu.gov.on.ca and Publications Ontario at 1-800-668-9938, in December.

Common Themes:

While the reports of the Expert Panels and Program Pathways Work Group deal with distinct aspects of supporting students who are at risk, common themes emerged across the three documents.

- **A cross-curricular focus:** addressing the needs of students at risk is a cross-curricular priority, involving all teachers, teaching all subjects, in all grades.
- **A community priority:** families and communities must be encouraged and supported to take action in supporting students at risk.
- **A data-driven approach:** decisions for the individual, the school and the board must be based on a wide range of timely, relevant and accurate information.
- **A re-culturing process:** supporting students at risk will require a re-defining of student success, and a re-culturing through which the career destinations chosen by students at risk are recognized as being of equal value to those students who choose post-secondary education.
- **A critical professional skill:** through professional development, all teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to model and teach effective literacy skills in their subject area.