

**Report of the Jurisdictional Learning Visit
Tower Hamlets and Hackney, London, UK
July 1 – 5, 2013**

By Kathy Witherow, Chris Sarellas, Clayton LaTouche, Elizabeth Gordon, Denese Belchetz-York Region District School Board

Report Summary - In addition to the many rich experiences available locally, the York Region District School Board values professional learning opportunities in key jurisdictions beyond Ontario for the purpose of benchmarking the Board's work against other high-performing global educational jurisdictions. This past July, 2013, a team from the Board visited London, UK to observe high-leverage improvement strategies in school districts in challenging circumstances. The learning from this and previous visits continues to impact our district's strategic thinking, and is highlighted in the London Jurisdictional Learning Report.

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Background and Purpose

The York Region District School Board has, for the past decade, engaged in a reciprocal learning exchange with the London (England) boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets. While this relationship started informally arising from visits to York Region schools and participation at the 2000 Quest Conference by colleagues from England, it has since become an annual opportunity for continued learning and reflection by school, system and classroom leaders. The York Region team typically would visit during the first week of July (while public schools in England are still in active session) and a contingent of educators from the UK would visit York Region schools as part of their participation in the annual Quest Conference later that year in November.

The purpose of these exchanges has always been to inform our own practice regarding those high yield strategies that are well documented in the data by critical friends in York Region, the province and globally (Hargreaves, Leithwood, Fullan, Marzano, Elmore etc.), as making a difference in schools. The boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets are well documented as among the lowest socio economic areas in London. OFSTED (the Office for Standards in

Education which reports to the British Parliament on school improvement efforts across the country) documents these specific boroughs as once the lowest performing in the country (see appendix links 1,2) More recent documentation also shows that these areas have pierced and now exceed the national benchmarks for attainment – a feat that is remarkable given the high needs of the populations served. Research emanating from the British experience to improve schools has demonstrated a significant alignment with the issues that we find ourselves addressing in Ontario (Hargreaves, A.: Shirley, D. 2009) In fact, many of the scholars who advise our own government regarding education policy are often the same scholars who are advising other jurisdictions internationally (Michael Fullan, Ken Leithwood among others). In the York Region District School Board, we feel strongly that these are jurisdictions from whose prior experience our district can significantly benefit – and in fact, over the years, we have learned much from this partnership.

It is well documented that we learn best from the experience and practice of others. (See Appendix links, 1,2,3,4). In the Province of Ontario, the Ministry of Education offers school districts excellent opportunities to learn from the practice of other colleagues in high performing district school boards. However, in a high performing board such as ours, it is also important that we constantly stay informed about the work of other jurisdictions. We do this so that we can be cognizant of the bigger picture of school improvement, student achievement and well being as we strive to situate our district and all its schools on the cutting edge of high yield teaching, learning and leadership practice. As noted by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), districts should build on the best of what we have learned from the past while also looking ahead for intelligent alternatives that will guide them forward in the future. (Hargreaves, A., Shirley, D., 2009).

Itinerary
2013 London Jurisdictional Learning
Sunday, June 30 to Friday, July 6, 2013
FINAL ITINERARY

Accommodations: Bedford Hotel, 83 – 95 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4HD

Date	Time	Activities and Locations
Sunday, June 30	3:30 p.m. 6:00 p.m.	Walking Tour of Central London with Alan Boyle <u>Location:</u> meet at Green Park Tube Station 3:30 p.m. Welcome Orientation Dinner <u>Location:</u> Andrew Edmunds 46 Lexington Street, London http://www.andrewedmunds.com/
Monday, July 1	9:00 a.m. 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Hackney Leadership Session Preparation Team time to finalize Hackney Session Prep for Quest: Questions for schools The Education Endowment Foundation Contact: Kevan Collins

		<p>9th Floor, Millbank Tower, 21 – 24 Millbank, London SW1P 4QP Email: info@eefoundation.org.uk Tel: 0207 802 1676</p>
<p>Tuesday, July 2</p> <p><i>Directions: Bethnal Green Tube Station (Central Line), the school address is Stainsbury Street, Bethnal Green (walk past the fire station continue to walk straight you'll then visually see the school playground)</i></p>	<p>9:00 a.m.</p> <p>12:00 p.m.</p>	<p>Tower Hamlets School Visits:</p> <p>Bonner Primary School Tower Hamlets</p> <p>Headteacher: Martin Tune www.bonner.towerhamlets.sch.uk Stainsbury Street, Bethnal Green tube station, London E2 ONF</p> <p>Tel: 020 89801004</p> <p>Morpeth Secondary School Tower Hamlets</p> <p>Headteacher: Sir Alasdair Macdonald www.morpethschool.org.uk Portman Place, London, E2 0PX Telephone: 020 8981 0921</p>
<p>Wednesday, July 3</p>	<p>9:00 – 12:00</p> <p>2:00</p> <p>7:00 -11:00</p>	<p>Hackney Leadership Team Session</p> <p><u>Location:</u> Tomlinson Centre, Hackney Queensbridge Road London E8 3ND</p> <p>Cultural Event Prince of Wales Theatre, Coventry Street, W1D 6AS</p> <p>Team Planning/Debrief YRDSB planning of board report and Quest preparation</p>

Notwithstanding the changes that are currently underway in the British education system, we continue to be impressed with the dramatic improvement in the Tower Hamlets and Hackney student attainment results. From the start of their focused efforts when only 9% of students reached the national targets, results have improved to their current level of 62% (in the case of Tower Hamlets) of students attaining or exceeding the national target. This has been achieved – as noted by Kevan Collins, the former Director of the Borough - through a focused agenda that has addressed the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and beyond; a focus on leadership and capacity building; working together to support the work in schools and classrooms; working across schools to leverage learning and leadership; a focus on the primary years as a seamless part of the learning continuum; raising student and parent aspirations; harnessing of community resources and engaging community faith groups to support student attendance.

Of course, as with any learning, a discussion is required as to what it will take to make this learning relevant in our York Region context. Outlined below are 10 of the broad, intersecting strategies and approaches that comprise some of the key learning arising from consolidated (and intense) discussion at our group's debriefing sessions. Following this outline we offer our considered recommendations aligned with furthering the work already articulated in our Board Improvement Plan. We believe these considerations will not only address our district's work going forward – but also going deeper.

1. Importance of Principal Leadership Practice

- Creating an ethos of collective ownership – nurtures the conditions for teaching and learning in the school
- Principal as lead learner
- Principal as an expert teacher – all Principals and Assistant Principals continued to have teaching assignments
- 'I would never ask teachers to do something if I could not demonstrate it or do it myself'
- Effective Principal leadership leveraged to support colleagues across schools
- Head teachers (Principals) involved in every conversation with teachers/data/case management
- Transparency of processes and systems
- Giving ownership and autonomy in the classroom to teachers
- Delegation means allocating responsibility, then stepping back and letting them lead
- Creating responsibility: Principal quote "I'm not here to carry you or micromanage your decisions, I'm here to help you develop as an educator and provide the environment you need to make it happen"
- Covering classes or groups to support teacher-collaboration, e.g. taking students for weekly assembly while grade partners meet
- Every professional should be encouraging each child to reach higher
- Each of **my** students make up all of **our** students – shared responsibility

26.9.12

Understanding the World

L.I: I can talk about past and present events in own life and in the lives of family members by creating a timeline of myself.

Name: Alisha
 Date: 14.11.12

L.I: I know about similarities and differences between myself and others and among families, communities and traditions by looking at items linked to Diwali on a table and discussing the story of Diwali, what I like about the celebration and why.

Level: Emerging Expected Exceeded

Other Notes:

- Diwali, celebration of fireworks.
 - They hang lights up in the road

Date: 17.1.2013 Alisha
 L.I: - Understanding the World
 * I can talk freely about the features of my own immediate environment and how environments might vary from one to another by drawing a picture of something I saw and liked from our walk as a class and give my reasons why.

Level: Emerging Expected Exceeded

Other notes:

I liked seeing ban's' house because it has a blue door.

Name: Alisha,
 Date: 23.1.13

L.I: I know about similarities and differences in relation to places, objects, materials and living things by exploring what happens when I mix water and corn flour together.

Level: Emerging Expected Exceeded

Other Notes:

It feels like play dough. It feels like mash potatoe, its soft.

2. Pastoral Care/Focus on Well-being/The Family Path

- Home School Worker - liaising with child care, home visits, transition into school
- Formal support systems / personnel with the sole responsibility to support students and their families
- Parent workshops with topics identified by parents
- Mentor teachers following students for 5 years

- Universities, schools and charitable organizations work together as partners to leverage resources
- Every high school teacher has responsibility for 30 students through their tutor groups. These students remain with that teacher for 5 years.
- Supporting families through education and health care is a focus
- Look to the Finland model where 80% of moms have post school education – providing opportunities to families to improve their learning
- Adults who help children to play are adults who help children to learn.
- Know your community – direct approaches to new families – sharing ownership – target specific families
- Every school regardless of size has a minimum of one dedicated staff member (e.g., CYW, social worker) who can serve proactively as a link between student life, school life, family and community life
- 'We do this because our families are an important part of this work'
- Focus on providing experiences for students (field trips, guest speakers) to expose students to opportunities outside of what families traditionally offer students from homes of low SES – these experiences were heavily subsidized by the school

3. Early Years

- Strong connections with social services
- Emphasis on early intervention
- Child care centres as the hub of all points of contact with families from birth on
- 0 to 2 years in schools - get the families early
- Home path: connections with families early on, transition to school
- Home visits by reception (i.e. kindergarten) teachers and a support staff in late spring prior to school entry in order to inform the school about the child and family to support their transition to school and build relationships with parents to support school success (e.g., connect to community resources, recommend strategies and interventions to address gaps)
- Importance of outdoor learning spaces: outdoor play areas as an extension of the indoor learning space; connected explicitly to the curriculum, inquiry, etc
- In Hackney, up to 20% of disadvantaged 2 and 3 year old children are allocated 20 hours of free child care (paid by the government) each week – there is a great emphasis on community partnerships.
- Phonics is taught in a purposeful and focused way
- emphasis on mathematics and literacy in a play based environment
- Reading Recovery success is dependent on the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Dialogue with two RR teachers indicated that they begin reading intervention in Reception (our K class) so they can focus RR on the lowest of the Year One readers
- There is a shared belief that happy children make good learners
- Learning portfolios for children begin in child care so parents see themselves as their child's first teacher – parents provided with cameras to document learning



4. Strategic Succession of P/VP

- Leadership opportunities that keep Principals in their school – not looking for promotion or system positions that take Ps out of their school to demonstrate system leadership
- Stability of tenure
- Strategic placement of Principals – Vice Principals following Principals in the same school
- The toughest schools need and must get the best Principals

- Effective and accomplished head teachers receive identification as ‘National Leader in Education’ – others come to shadow and learn from these leaders – could also be asked to go to work with other schools
- Schools with strong leaders and teachers are identified as “teaching schools” – incentive to participate includes funding to support professional learning, not personal monetary benefit to the Principal

5. Teacher Autonomy and Professional Learning

- School based PD is most impactful
- Advanced skills teachers are leveraged to work with colleagues across schools
- Keep teachers with students
- Implementation of initiatives sequenced over a longer period of time - 10 half day sessions with follow up in school that includes coaching and class observations
- Entire school “buys in” to being a culture of learning
- Implementation strategy includes consultant coming into classroom twice a year - co-teach and work between sessions
- Ethos of teachers to do their own PD
- Ownership is key for teachers: we do need to unpack why teachers feel threatened by another teacher to be in their classroom – we did not see evidence of that in the schools we visited – all teachers felt accountable for their students and shared their learning willingly with colleagues – they valued observation of their practice and the debrief that came with it - Principal: "I'm here to help you learn and use the skills to adapt every day – being a professional means being in charge of your own professional development based on research - not your opinion
- Time for teachers and TAs to meet: Principals often did weekly assembly so meetings can take place – it was important that they find a way to make it happen
- Teachers have autonomy to teach children from where they are – assessment for learning
- Teachers must continually be “up skilled” to successfully move students ahead
- Up skilling is best addressed in the classroom environment
- (Large scale/system-wide/school-wide?) Diagnostic assessment is not always necessary but the Head requires certain processes to be in place – has a raising attainment meeting focusing on key areas – talks teachers through as they reflect on their practice - ‘talk to me about what really worked here’
- Teachers observe each other – while there is no formal feedback they find opportunities to reflect on and debrief their visits; administrators provide time to facilitate the observations and teachers make time for the reflection and debrief, demonstrating ownership/responsibility for their professional learning
- Teachers have autonomy in an accountability framework

6. New Teachers

- Providing professional learning for OTs
- Ongoing learning for first year teacher
- Transition into new school before starting in September
- Weekly training opportunities for newly qualified teachers
- New teachers have mentor partners in their department
- Teachers have ownership and are seen as key to decision making in the school

7. Evidence-based

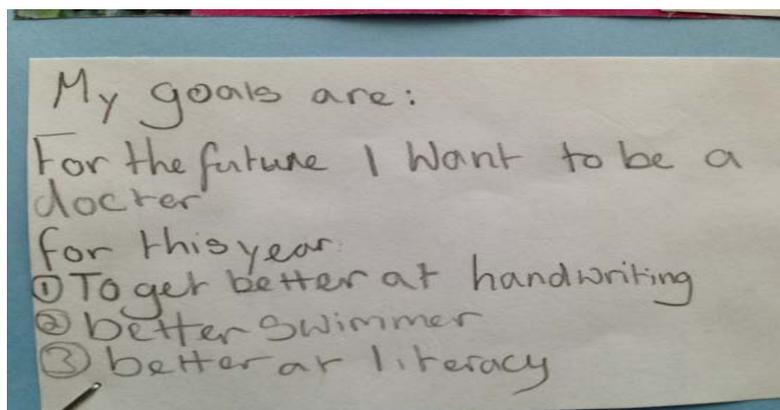
- How are we bringing in evidence? - know the research; We are not starting from zero - How are we monitoring if it works?
- Having confidence in going to scale by trying it out in many different contexts
- Values, strategies, and structures can only take you so far - you need evidence
- We heard about the Singapore Math Strategy that is proving successful in Hackney schools. This was an approach developed in Singapore in the 80's to support students having difficulty with word problems
- Interventions don't work if the quality of teaching and learning is not of the highest calibre – interventions must connect to the classroom
- Partnerships with universities to bring in evidence-based practice and on-going learning for staff

8. Keeping leader consultants in schools

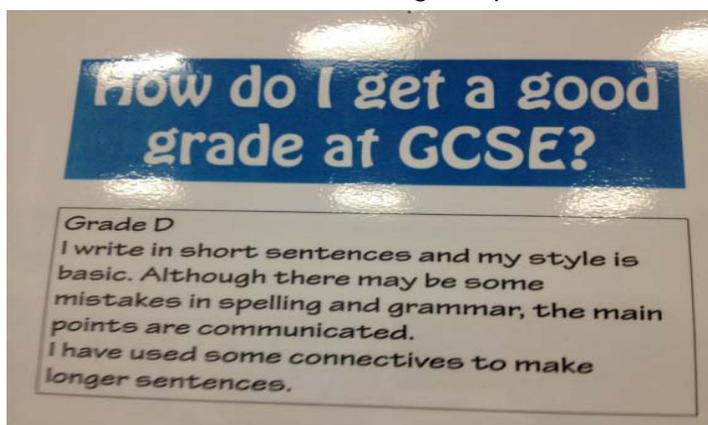
- System level leaders continue to have teaching responsibilities in their home school
- EY Coordinator: how can I ask teachers to do this, when I am not in a class to do it myself?
- What does this mean for consultants in YRDSB and our model for system leadership?

9. High Aspirations

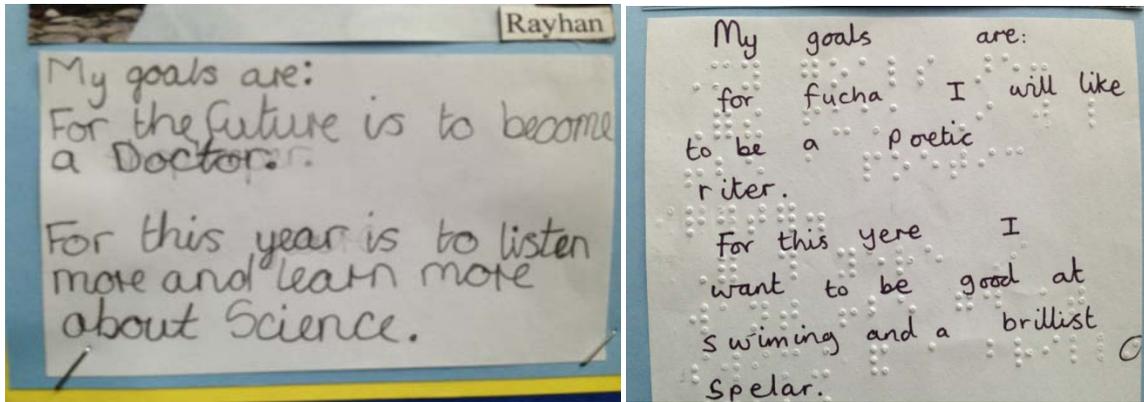
- Capturing and instilling high hopes, dreams and aspirations for all students in all parents
- Encouraging students to raise their aspirations, and regularly documenting
- Expect that children will exceed the national standards
- Belief that students will leave this school above the national standard



- Students must develop a growth mindset and see their efforts as a path to mastery (artifacts spoke to students continuous focus on their growth)
- Collective commitment and high expectations of all staff for improved results and outcomes for all students



- Focus on providing experiences for students (field trips, guest speakers) to expose students to opportunities outside of what families traditionally offer students from homes of low SES



10. How do you bring change across schools?

- strong sense of fellowship across schools - being in the trenches together – collaborative sharing of practice is a valued opportunity for job embedded professional learning
- bought in ethos of how we do things together
- sense of being a family of schools
- Schools have chosen to continue to be networked/federated/connected to a district school board despite the thrust of the current government to actively promote independent academies – one of the secondary schools in Tower Hamlets (Morpeth) has declined the opportunity to become an academy believing it will lose the beneficial impacts of being in a federation with other schools.
- Encouraging student voice and participation
- Building collegiality and professional trust
- Earned autonomy for teachers
- Shared learning across schools
- Challenge of mobilizing knowledge among all teachers to impact all students in a school
- Leveraging funds to best serve the needs of the school
- What does it mean to use evidence based improvements?
- Sustainability is based on the schools being internally aware of the importance of learning for themselves
- We received consistent messages from all the Head Teachers we met as well as from our discussion with Kevan Collins. A profound message that we heard is that change comes when there are 4 key concepts in place – engagement, knowledge, expertise and community



Recommendations

This was a powerful week of incredibly rich learning. The opportunity to observe successful practice in a jurisdiction which we have come to know well over the years is a superb form of professional development and capacity building for any district – but especially for us given the relationship that has developed with our UK colleagues over the years.

We are pleased to share the following recommendations for further consideration with our colleagues.

- **An Enhanced Focus on the Early Years** – It was interesting to see how these jurisdictions have advanced their thinking on the importance of the Early Years. There is a clear overlap with the work we are doing in our district to emphasize the importance of the years before the start of school into a seamless continuum of service to our youngest learners and their families.

Their emphasis on outdoor learning environments and the importance of play and inquiry was highlighted. It is recommended that the Early Years Team be asked to specifically incorporate this thinking as they continue to formulate our district's Early Years' Strategy.

- **Leveraging the Family Path** - This is an area that we are still in the early stages of exploring across our system. While there is some good thinking and practice already underway, there are other examples from which we can learn in addition to the strategies we have outlined in the section above. A discussion of what this might look like for the York Region District School Board is recommended.
- **Leadership Practice** – As we have seen on previous jurisdictional learning opportunities, the leadership practice of the Principal is a key to the success of the school and to the improvement and wellbeing of all its students. More than ever now, we believe that the time is right to address the role of the school leader in the context of the leadership practices and resources outlined in the Ontario Leadership Framework and the mandate principals have to improve their schools. We are also aware that the leadership role of our teachers is evolving as we focus more on respecting their professional judgment in the process of supporting students. Therefore, we are recommending that we revisit more comprehensively, the role of school and classroom leadership.
- **Leadership Succession** – It has long been a challenge in the York Region District School Board to provide stability in tenure for school leaders. Given our local context we know this is not always possible. However, we do recommend that consideration be given to approaches that leverage leadership and build succession across schools.

Conclusion

The five participants on this year's jurisdictional learning came away excited about what they had seen; recognized the intrinsic benefits of learning in this way and were each in their own way, eager to bring their learning back to our district – not only to share with colleagues, but also to further the work of our district as it continues to go from good to great – and from great to excellent.

We are grateful for the opportunity and submit this Report for the consideration of the Director and Senior Team.

*Respectfully submitted by the participating team
July 27, 2013:*

*Kathy Witherow
Chris Sarellas
Clayton LaTouche
Elizabeth Gordon
Denese Belchetz*

Appendices:

1. Press release: Reading by six: how the best schools do it – Ofsted

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/reading-six-how-best-schools-do-it-ofsted>

2. East London Lines boroughs have mixed fortunes in latest Ofsted school report

<http://www.eastlondonlines.co.uk/2012/11/east-london-lines-boroughs-have-mixed-fortunes-in-latest-ofsted-school-report/>

3. Hargreaves, A., Shirley, D.: *The Fourth Way: the Inspiring Future for Educational Change*. Corwin Press; OPC; NSDC. 2009.

4. What we can learn from Finland's successful school reform

<http://www.nea.org/home/40991.htm>

