

Instructional Leadership and Literacy Development: Part 2

Podcast Transcript

Martin

Welcome to another podcast presented by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.

My name is Martin Smit and I'm an educational consultant for LDAO and the LD@school project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Today we continue with part two of our conversation with Jodi Sepkowski

Superintendent of Student Achievement at the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board.

You mentioned, Jodi, a little bit about K–12 and obviously, you know, the focus carries on right through your educational career.

But we know that a lot of this focus has been on early literacy and evidence-based instruction around early literacy.

And we actually did some videos with your board looking at some of the instructional practices

in early literacy, but also moving into junior.

What about after junior in the intermediate and secondary years?

Have you had a chance to think a little bit or do any work around evidence-based instruction in that portion of a child's educational career?

Jodi

Martin, this is what keeps me awake at night.

I think about

Our kids, like I said before, a child, we have kids that enter into whatever grade.

They may have been a KPR student or not, but we have kids who are struggling still in foundational literacy skills.

And where we see that is it's the kids that are wandering the halls during English class.

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They are, and they will say it themselves, I can't read.

And so what are we doing about that?

We can't just wait for, the Right to Read came, were really great and strategic in our early years and it's moving toward the Junior grades, we can't wait for those kids to catch up.

What about the kids that missed those opportunities prior to Right to Read?

How are we informing instruction with that?

So we also, in our meetings, we have a secondary focus as well.

So when I'm visiting the secondary schools that I support, we talk about literacy every single time and their school improvement plans must reflect that.

We also have spent a lot of time working between, we have opportunities in many of our schools where there are Grade 7–12 buildings.

So we have intermediate

classes within the high school.

So that strategic work of getting the grade 6 EQAO scores to inform grade 7 and 8, and then our grade 8 and 9 teachers working together, our de-streamed English teachers working with our grade 8 teachers.

So we've really placed a focus.

We need to do more for sure around how are we implementing high-yield instructional strategies across K–12.

We feel like we've got a really good handle on the primary moving into junior, but now what is our focus to ensure that all students are reaping the benefits of high-yield instructional practices?

Martin

And so we'll have to definitely keep an eye on your board and see what's going on there as we move forward.

Jodi, you talked a little earlier about the multi-tiered system of supports.

And we know that that's the system that we use in Ontario for supporting students.

And more specifically, I think we would recognize Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 supports for students.

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Really sounds like Tier 1 is happening in KPR for sure.

You've got good resources in place.

It sounds like you've got a really good plan for your educators, for administrators, and the senior team as well focused.

LDAO has also been having conversations with boards across the province around Tier 2 because it seems to be that's where a lot of work remains to be done and specifically around the progress monitoring.

And I'm wondering if you could talk to us maybe a little bit about the system-level thinking around Tier 2 supports.

Jodi

Okay, I will do my best.

we've been talking a lot about Tier 1 and we've got a really good handle on that.

And I think we've also got a fairly good handle on Tier 3 for complex, more complex profiles and use of empower.

But what about those kids in the middle who are really struggling and how do we move them ahead in a strategic way.

So it's giving permission for schools.

They're getting really proficient in understanding data-informed decision making and assessment that leads to adjustment in instruction.

And so now when they're looking at that Tier 2, it's like, how are we pulling small groups of students who are in risk at a certain area to really dig down and do short bursts of additional support for them.

So we're seeing that in schools where they're creating similar groupings for kids, whether that's through the classroom teacher or their early intervention teacher or the SERT perhaps, even seeing principals doing it.

And how do we monitor their progress over time?

So it's determining through the Acadience screener, let's say, or diagnostics.

So let me give you an example.

So

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There used to be a time we had these spelling tests that would cause a lot of stress.

And that data did not inform instruction in any way except were kids really good at memorizing which letters in which order.

So now a Tier 2 intervention that we see is they may be doing oral dictation where a teacher is providing a sentence on

skills that students have acquired over time and what can they write independently.

And then pulling from that data, oh, look at this small group, we really need to work on consonant blends or CVC or really digging in and using that data to inform what small groups can we pull now to get some short, sharp, and shiny instruction in place to move them along and then reassess and make sure that they've acquired those skills in that session but also independently

can they do those tasks over time?

And I feel like we're at that place where people are really understanding what the data is telling them and then how to create instructional and learning opportunities for kids to move them along in those short bursts of intensive support over short periods of time.

Martin

And I think your board has done such a great job of using your early intervention teachers.

We saw them earlier when we came to visit the board for shooting those videos.

seeing them working within the classrooms, partnering with teachers, modeling for teachers, doing those Tier 2 supports, whether they were teaching the class, allowing the teacher to do the supports or the early intervention teachers doing supports while teachers were teaching and sort of, you know, passing that torch or, you know, I don't know how you say it, like kind of fading away slowly from the classroom until educators felt more comfortable doing the whole piece themselves.

I thought that was a really, really clever way of doing it.

Jodi

I think comfort is key.

It hasn't been an easy process because there are people that are open to having other people in class with them.

And sometimes it's very intimidating.

to have another teacher.

Teaching is a very isolating profession.

You're in a classroom with students by yourself.

And so having another adult in, it's how to build those, it's all about relationships, right?

And how we build those relationships and that no one person is an expert.

We're gonna learn with and alongside each other.

So it's been over time that this practice has developed.

You know, there's been bumps along the way for sure, but we keep refining and supporting and people always anxiously

Are we getting early intervention teachers?

Are we getting literacy coaches this year?

And so you can see how that has, it's just an accepted and profound change in how teachers teach.

And then you think, okay, if this is working in literacy,

how do we transform this to other areas?

people are seeing the value in co-teaching, collaborating, co-planning, or even having conversations with people to say, I'm really stuck in this instructional strategy.

Can you help me figure out how to move forward?

So that coaching model has been instrumental in building capacity, but also giving people the confidence and the comfort to know that they have the competency

to instruct in their classes.

Martin

So it's great to hear the educators are getting more comfortable that way.

What about the senior team?

Do you think they're getting more comfortable around evidence-based instruction and working within the tiers so when they head out into schools, are they getting more comfortable asking questions and knowing what to look for?

Jodi

I believe yes, and I've seen it.

So being in KPR for the past three years,

Like I said, we co-develop questions together and we meet in small groups and we say, what have you seen from your last school improvement visit?

Let's focus on literacy.

What have you seen?

What did you hear?

Where are the gaps?

What are our next steps?

And so we build that confidence and competence together.

And we also have our system leaders.

We have literacy coaches and we have early intervention teachers coming to senior team to provide us instruction and showing us how to access resources so that

that we are more confident and comfortable when we're meeting with principals one-on-one or at their school sites around those pieces.

So yes, I would say we are building it, but we're building it together.

The expectation is we're learning alongside each other and that we debrief.

Every time we do a school improvement visit, we say, okay, that was the third school improvement visit.

We're coming back.

This was our focus.

Let's debrief together.

And now what are our next steps?

Where do we need to move to next?

And what is our own learning in relation to that?

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Martin

What are next steps for the board, Jodi?

Jodi

There's always work to do in instruction and assessment, but our focus is continued depth and precision about foundational skills instruction and intervention across K–12.

So we want to scale up across the grades, especially beyond primary.

We, like I said previously, we've got a good grounding in primary.

How do we scale up across the grades?

Talking about continued alignment of tiered instruction in all classrooms.

Does everyone know what Tier 2 instruction intervention looks like across all K–12 classrooms?

In fact, all of our system principals are currently building a common understanding of what is Tier 1, what is Tier 2, what is Tier 3, and they're building a comprehensive resource interdepartmentally because we use that language all the time.

What is Tier 1, Tier 2, and do we have a common understanding?

So we talk about that

We talk about how can one educator make it possible to improve reading and outcome achievements for students.

So we need to get to each educator at a time and where they're at.

Continued emphasis and support of effective Tier 1 strategies for all students.

Like I said before, we're building a common understanding with our system principals in each of our departments so that we have a resource for the system which will be introduced.

next year in our special education day on September 3rd on the PA day.

We need to build a common understanding because we all have a different understanding.

We realize that really quickly.

If we don't have a common understanding, the system doesn't.

So we're working on that.

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And also refined focus on supporting students with special education needs.

Martin

Of course.

Jodi, it's been such a pleasure chatting with you today.

And it's fun for me.

I learn something new every time I chat with another school board.

But before we leave today, I guess I want to ask you one more thing.

And that is, do you have any advice for other boards as they embark on this journey?

Jodi

Wow.

When I think about advice, I just think about how important

the interdepartmental work is, and I think the best advice I can give is we don't have to work in isolation.

We all have the same common goal.

You know, we're all working so busy.

Each board is working busy towards improved outcomes for kids.

But it's sharing those ideas and having conversations.

I know as superintendents we have networks, you know, within our region and area to say, hey, what are you doing about that?

How are you leading this?

and inviting other boards to come in.

We've gone over to other boards to learn about interventions for students and how they're building capacity and they in turn come to us.

I think we have to remove the barriers of we're all moving in the same direction, but how can we work more effectively as a province to improve outcomes for all kids across all districts?

Coming from three different districts, kids are kids.

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Teaching is teaching, assessment is assessment, but we're all working so hard in the same direction.

I think we can work better as a team across districts to support one another in this work.

Martin

Thank you very much, Jodi.

You have been listening to Jodi Sepkowski and Martin Smit discussing educational leadership.

To learn more about resources provided by LDAO, have a look at our websites, LD@school and LDAO.ca.

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