

Education in the Asia-Pacific Region:
Issues, Concerns and Prospects 52

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Leading and Transforming Education Systems

Evidence, Insights, Critique and
Reflections



ASIA-PACIFIC EDUCATIONAL
RESEARCH ASSOCIATION



Springer

Chapter 1

Leading and Transforming Education Systems: Two Canadian Examples



Avis Glaze

1.1 Introduction

Education systems across the world are redoubling their efforts to transform their schools and to improve outcomes. Providing equity and excellence, closing achievement gaps and paying attention to governance issues are primary motivations. The truth is that politicians are demanding these changes, parents and community members are expecting them, and educators want these changes to happen. Most important, students deserve improved outcomes. Developing educational cultures characterized by high expectations for learning and achievement is a primary objective of school administrators, teachers and political leaders alike.

Ontario and Nova Scotia are two Canadian provinces that have been leaders in educational transformation. This chapter will discuss the Ontario journey to improve student learning and achievement and Nova Scotia's determination to improve their governance structure. My first-hand account and close-up perspectives emanate from the leadership role I had in these transformations. These reform initiatives have been recognized internationally. Organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and McKinsey and Company acknowledged Canada's leadership in system change:

Perhaps the most important lesson that we can learn from international comparisons is that strong performance and improvement are always possible. Countries such as Japan, Korea, Finland and Canada display strong overall performance and, equally important, show that a disadvantaged socioeconomic background does not necessarily result in poor performance at school.

(Schleicher & Stewart, 2008)

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M. Jones and A. Harris (eds.), *Leading and Transforming Education Systems*, Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects 52,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4996-0_1

In an article on transforming school systems, international guru Fullan (2012) uses the Ontario system as a case in point:

...Improvements began within a year, and some eight years later, the province's 900 high schools have shown an increase in graduation rates from 68 percent (2003–04) to 82 percent (2010–11), while reading, writing, and math results have gone up 15 percentage points across its 4,000 elementary schools since 2003. Fewer teachers and principals leave the profession in the first few years, and achievement gaps have been substantially narrowed for low-income students, the children of recent immigrants, and special-education students. In short, the entire system has dramatically improved.

Fullan (2012) concluded that the strategy of the McGuinty government at that time consisted of assertive goals and high expectations, combined with a strong commitment to developing partnerships with the education sector to develop capacity and ownership and to bring about continuous improvement in student learning and achievement.

Canada in general, and Ontario specifically, did not achieve this reputation by chance. It came about as a result of targeted interventions and intentionality of purpose. Success can be attributed to a well thought out, research-informed strategy. As well, Ontario instituted a methodology to reform that called upon the ultimate professionalism of its teachers. When other countries were employing more negative and punitive approaches at that time, Ontario adopted a collaborative stance that focused on capacity building as the major strategy for improvement. It also meant that we harnessed the energy of key partners in developing and implementing the education reform agenda.

In retrospect, and knowing what was happening in many countries across the globe, I must admit that we made some good decisions—one being the decision to engage and work collaboratively with our teachers unions, faculties of education, universities, colleges, principals' associations, parents and all those who had a vested interest in the improvement of the education system. Instead of beating up on our teachers, calling them names as one government did, we demonstrated our respect for their professionalism in ways that were important to them. We listened to their advice and tried our best to support them throughout the reform process.

Transformation #1: The Ontario Improvement Strategy

1.2 The Context: A Snapshot of Ontario, Canada

Ontario is Canada's largest province, home to some 14 million people and a public education system with roughly 2 million students, 120,000 educators, and 5,000 schools. As recently as 2002, this system was stagnant by virtually any measure

of performance. In October 2003, a new provincial government was elected with a mandate and commitment to transform it.

It is important to note that Canada has no federal or national jurisdiction over K-12 education. Education is a provincial responsibility. Decisions are made and directions are established by each province. There is a Council on Ministers of Education (CMEC), a forum for policy discussion and idea sharing across the provinces and territories. But there is no national department of education as there is in many countries.

Ontario has:

- Over 1 million km² of land
- 2.1 million students
- 40% of Canada's 33.6 million people (it *is* the most populous province)
- 60% of 225,000 immigrants who come to Canada annually
- Four education governance systems: English public, English Catholic, French public, French Catholic
- 4.5% French-speaking population
- Because of its diversity, there are numerous languages spoken in schools. The official languages are English and French.
- About 5,000 schools in 72 school districts, plus 30 school authorities
- Six school sites for deaf, blind and severely learning-disabled students run directly by the provincial Ministry of Education
- Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding of \$19B (CDN) in 2008–09 (a 29% increase compared to 2002–03)
- Declining enrolment of 4.5% (almost 90,000 students) between 2002–03 and 2008–09.

In 2003, we stated that many parents, community members and the media described education in Ontario as a system in “crisis.” Glaze, Mattingley and Andrews (2003). Understanding the system as it was described then will illuminate the progress that has been made and what the system looks like “now” in the eyes of many observers Glaze (2013).

Prevailing Issues (2002–2003)	Strategy Results (2017–2018)
Flat lined achievement results	Continuous improvement in student achievement
Inequity in student results	Narrowing of achievement gaps
Disparate goals and priorities	Clear strategic goals. A focus on learning and achievement
Multiple, disjointed priorities	Priorities: achievement, wellbeing and public confidence
Limited reliance on research data	Research informed and data driven
Focus on compliance	Focus on professional accountability
Eroding confidence in public education	Increased confidence in public education

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Prevailing Issues (2002–2003)	Strategy Results (2017–2018)
Labour unrest within education	Extended period of labour peace
Rising enrolment in private schools	Increased public school enrolment
Disconnect—provincial and local priorities	Alignment and coherence at all levels of the system

Undoubtedly, there was a need for dramatic change and improvement in Ontario. So many factors converged at this time to make this possible. A new liberal government, led by Premier Dalton McGuinty, wanted to bring about meaningful change. With a focus on teaching and learning, Premier McGuinty was often described as “the education premier”—an earned title that reflected his commitment to the future of Ontario and the teaching profession. He was known to be more teacher-friendly than the previous government and, from my perspective, had the right approach to system change. He sought advice and perspectives on education from experts in Canada and around the world. Establishing a Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat to drive change was a key component of the strategy. I had the good fortune of being Ontario’s first Chief Student Officer and CEO of the Secretariat.

The Ontario approach reflected an inspiring *modus operandi*. We worked collaboratively at creating a positive culture and incubator for reform. We removed fear and supported capacity building as a primary strategy for change. We did not believe in the one-size-fits all approach to transformation nor what is described as the “teabag” approach to leadership: “put them in hot water to see their strengths.” Under no circumstances did we subscribe to the strategy disparaging our teachers and principals. We eschewed that approach and, instead, made every effort to listen to and provide professional support to those who were expected to implement the reforms.

1.3 Approach to Reform

The most important aspect of the Ontario strategy was the identification of three key goals. This was a dramatic reduction from the thirteen goals that we all tried to address in previous reform efforts. There is no doubt that a small number of precise goals helps to make improvement more realistic and attainable.

The Ministry’s three main goals with the emphasis on well-being emphasized in recent years were:

- Improve student achievement and well-being;
- Reduce gaps in student achievement, and
- Improve public confidence in the public education system.

To my mind, the third goal of improving public confidence in the public education system is an important transformation imperative. This reflects my long-standing interest in the areas of public and media relations. If parents and community members are not satisfied with the performance of a system, they will certainly seek out alternatives. If the media is not aware of the innovations they will not be able to communicate them to the public. And too often in education, we think that communicating to the parents is what public relations is all about. Schools do communicate well with the parents of the children in their schools. But in some communities, especially with aging populations, those who have children in schools are in the minority. So there has to be a public relations initiative geared towards those who are not parents. Some of these individuals resent paying high taxes for education because they do not believe they derive direct benefits. Hence, building public confidence in public education systems needs to be a priority in educational transformation efforts.

Taking the public for granted by not communicating regularly—an action that helps to build public confidence—is unwise. I remember serving on Ontario’s Royal Commission on Learning in the late nineties. Parents of modest means told us that they would mortgage their homes and send their children to private schools if the public schools did not improve. Improving both the performance and perception of public schools required urgent attention. Ontario now has one of the highest participation rates in public education with only a small percentage of parents opting to send their children to private schools. This was not always the case. It is a result of the interventions that were a part of the strategy and the subsequent improvement in system performance.

Within this culture we worked at:

- Rejecting the “shame and blame” “one-size-fits-all” approach to education reform
- Ensuring that excellence and equity go hand in hand.
- Holding high expectations for all children regardless of background or personal circumstances.
- Developing a common understanding, with concomitant actions, to underscore the belief that poverty, for example, should not determine destiny.
- Focusing on capacity building as the cornerstone for system improvement, and
- Choosing instructional improvement and leadership development as a priority to ensure that all aspiring, beginning and experienced leaders had the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions necessary for teaching and leadership success.

In brief, the strategy consisted of an emphasis on high expectations, combined with a commitment to partner with the education sector to build capacity and ownership for improved student learning and achievement. There are certainly conclusions to be drawn from this approach. For example, systems will be successful if they focus on a small number of key goals: build capacity on the part of the practitioners, implement research-informed strategies, persist with the process over time, monitor progress and do mid-course corrections based on the lessons learned.

There were other innovations that supported the strategy. The introduction of Full Day Kindergarten in Ontario provided opportunities for more than 250,000 children to build skills and knowledge that saw them performing at higher rates of reading, writing and vocabulary well past Grade 2. Implementing smaller class-sizes from JK to Grade 3 was very popular with teachers. Resources were provided to hire more than 13,000 teachers to ensure the small classes were implemented and that teachers of subjects such as art, physical education and music were reinstated. More than 600 new schools were built or refurbished, providing a meeting place for community members. Other initiatives such as the *Accepting Schools Act*, a comprehensive anti-bullying legislation, addressed that growing issue in schools. As a result of all of these efforts, graduation rates increased significantly and more students were able to achieve a post-secondary education.

1.3.1 The Ontario Improvement Strategy: Personal Reflections, Lessons Learned

Many lessons can be learned when individuals embark on the herculean task of whole system transformation. Although systems and contexts differ considerably, there are still strategies that work across cultures and some that do not. Individuals and systems do learn from the successes and failures of others. With constant reflection and critical analysis of our actions, we went through several phases of the implementation process. At all times, capacity building was our main focus.

We learned many lessons about school improvement. One of the most important was that whole system reform required strategies for engagement, commitment, ownership and sustainability. We had to pay special attention to what McGregor (2006) referred to as “the human side of enterprise”. Within that new culture that was created, specific actions had to be implemented with a sense of urgency and a high degree of coherence. School improvement has to be a whole-school responsibility. Schools must become more collaborative and, as Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) suggest, collective inquiry must be a primary goal.

Educators are encouraged to establish a relentless focus on a few agreed-upon priorities, bearing in mind that we cannot do everything well all at once. School improvement should focus on the most urgent learning needs of our students. This is more likely to happen when we establish a few non-negotiable, research-informed, strategies that everyone will implement. The ultimate purpose of any improvement process is that it results in action in the school and, most certainly, in the classroom, resulting in improved student learning. This requires intentional efforts to develop a safe environment for staff to ask the tough questions and discuss the challenges inherent in the implementation process in an open and honest manner.

Implementation matters. In organizations where change initiatives fail, it is often because of inconsistent or superficial implementation. It is important that we monitor implementation and student progress and be prepared to make mid-course corrections to improvement plans as needed. Communicating regularly is another key ingredient. It is important that we keep everyone informed of goals, progress and next steps. Too often the parents and the public are not aware of what the focus is and how they can play a role in the school improvement efforts. Building coalitions to support learning through community outreach and engagement make school improvement the collaborative and inclusive process that it should be. Finally, we must keep the sense of urgency alive and stay the course in spite of the challenges and setbacks that inevitably occur.

To summarize, some of the key conclusions and lessons learned about transforming education systems were:

1. Capacity building at all levels of the systems of those who are expected to do the work and was the hallmark of the Ontario strategy.
2. Collaborative inquiry and cooperative practices facilitate a supportive learning culture.
3. For large-scale change to happen, it doesn't require punitive forms of accountability and what is being described as "teacher proof curricula".
4. Ontario continues to show that partnerships with the widest possible cross-section of professionals and institutions—among educators, policymakers, unions, parents and communities—are essential for the success of any reform.
5. By building supportive networks of educators throughout the province, Ontario was able to spread successful practices and to facilitate multi-pronged communication webs and links.
6. Ontario was determined to achieve both equity and excellence.
7. In order to bring about systemic reform at all levels of a system, leaders must pay assiduous attention to the human side of the enterprise. People matter in reform initiatives. There must be sensitivity to their needs, aspirations and where they are on the willingness to change continuum. Without alienating the late adopters, leaders must have the skills to move them along the continuum towards ownership for the reform imperatives.
8. Desired outcomes can be achieved with a kinder, gentler approach, focused on respect for the professionalism of staff, holding them to high expectations student learning and achievement, and for their own learning. Intentionality of purpose and steadfastness of will are key elements success system reform.



THE ONTARIO IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY AT A GLANCE:

<i>At the Provincial Level</i>	<i>At the School Level</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set directions, expectations and timelines • Fostered a spirit of mutual trust, respect and collegiality • Negotiated achievement targets with each district • Built consensus and instilled a sense of urgency • Rejected the “blame and blame” modus operandi • Eschewed the “one-size-fits-all” syndrome • Established a few, precise goals and strategies • Instilled a strong research orientation in decisions • Developed partnerships with unions and others • Targeted supports to meet unique needs • Made capacity building the focus • Shared promising practices and <i>What Works</i> • Developed exemplars of student work • Devised the Schools on the Move initiative • Developed a School Effectiveness Framework • Monitored progress systematically • Provided intervention for low-performing schools • Celebrated successes and stayed the course! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established professional learning communities • Developed safe, caring, orderly and inclusive school climates • Monitored student achievement systematically • Used data to determine school improvement goals • Established a few “no-negotiable” expectations • Implemented un-interrupted blocks of time for literacy and numeracy • Protected and valued instructional time • Facilitated data-informed decision making • Created learning time for teachers • Provided early and on-going interventions • Established effective community partnerships • Engaged parents in meaningful ways • Solicited input from teachers and principals • Communicated progress and celebrated successes
<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><i>At the District Level</i></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established a vision for excellence and equity • Devised a few guiding principles, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All students can achieve given time and supports ✓ All teachers can teach to high levels ✓ Instructional effectiveness is key to improvement ✓ Effective school leadership is essential ✓ Capacity building is pivotal to achieve results • Established strategies for system and school-level monitoring, review, feedback and accountability • Set priorities and differentiated resources • Invested in leadership development • Provided needs-based, professional learning • Helped to align goals and priorities • Developed inclusive approaches to curriculum and instruction • Devised a mid-intervention process for low-performing students • Engaged unions in the improvement process • Worked with system leaders to monitor progress and provide support 	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"><i>At the Classroom Level</i></div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set high expectations for learning and achievement • Insisted on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ambitious targets ✓ Balanced literacy program ✓ Data walls ✓ Cross-curricular non-fiction writing ✓ Higher order thinking skills ✓ Diverse classroom libraries ✓ Differentiated instruction ✓ Early interventions for struggling students • Helped students set learning goals • Built upon student backgrounds and strengths • Provided tasks and exemplars for higher order thinking • Differentiated instructional strategies • Taught literacy across all subject areas • Scaffolded and chunked instruction • Provided students with exemplars of “good work” • Provided opportunities for purposeful talk • Used word walls and anchor charts • Made learning practical, rigorous and relevant • Ensured classroom materials reflected diversity • Used formative and summative assessments • Addressed importance of student teacher/relationships • Focused on continuous improvement and results

Prepared by Avis Glaze, Edu-quest International Inc.
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Transformation #2: *The Administrative Review of Nova Scotia’s Education Governance System*

Nova Scotia has a population of 940,000. There are 380 schools in 8 regional school boards—seven English-language and one French-language. Many international students, enrolled in secondary and post-secondary institutions, attend the schools from some 153 countries. There are 9,000 teachers and approximately 119,000 students, and there were concerns about the declining enrollment of 10.6%

between 2008–09 and 2017–18. The political leaders take education funding very seriously, even in circumstances of declining enrolment which is a concern in that province as well. Some \$1.5B, an 27% increase, was spent on education in 2012–13 compared to 2003–04.

The Mandate of this reform initiative was to review

- Roles, responsibilities, and administrative structure within education system governing school boards, school board central office administration, and the Department of Education and Early childhood development
- Processes and management structure in all areas of administration and operations (e.g. human resources, finance, transportation, programs) to ensure effective and efficient use of resources
- Increased accountability, transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency in decision making including budgetary decisions and resource allocation
- The strengthening of interagency service delivery for children, youth, and their families

This review, the first for the system in more than 20 years, also considered the cultural, linguistic and geographic contexts of the Nova Scotia education system and current government priorities for public education.

It was necessary at first to delineate a few key principles for decision-making. These were divided into two categories; foundational and supporting principles:

The Foundational Principles	Supporting Principles
Student learning and achievement	Integration, alignment and coherence
Equity and excellence	Trust, respect, and transparency
Well-being, character development, global citizenship	Empowered and responsible Responsiveness and flexibility within established parameters and goals Stewardship Efficiency and effectiveness Clarity of roles and responsibilities

1.4 The Consultations

Consultations were held for approximately 7 weeks in key centres across the province. As well, there was an online survey to which 1,500 individuals responded. The 91 consultations with groups and 500 individuals included elected boards, administrative

boards, superintendents, Department of Education staff, teachers, principals, parents, stakeholder groups, local high school students, mental health professionals, faculty of education staff and other community organizations.

It was very important for me to consult with individuals who are not in the habit of preparing briefs or seeking out reviewers to offer their perspectives. I asked specifically to visit the Waterville Youth Correctional Facilities, and in addition, to speak with Children in Care. These two meetings were among the most memorable aspect of this review. I will always remember how passionately these young people spoke about teachers, their schools, and their insights into what is good about education and what needs to change. Student voice is very important in any efforts to improve school systems.

The discussions in the different types of high schools I visited was very instructive. It was noted in the report that some students felt lost and unloved by their teachers and the school. Many appeared to be alternatively vulnerable and defiant. Some of their stories, especially from those in correctional institutions were deeply distressing. They reaffirmed my mantra that ‘there can be no throw-away kids.’ But in the final analysis, the vast majority of students loved and appreciated their teachers. The level of caring and concern on the part of those who taught and cared for these young people was evident.

I feel strongly that facilities for children in care and correctional institutions deserve our attention and vigilance to ensure that young people are given the education, skills, counselling and other supports to allow them to return to their neighbourhood schools wherever possible.

As I have in previous consultations, I concluded that teachers are our unsung heroes. Their dedication to excellence, equity and inclusive practices is certainly the cornerstone of a good school. The teachers I met in these institutions deserve many encomiums for their service and dedication.

1.5 What We Heard

Understandably, processes such as this consultation would attract those who had complaints about the system. In my experience, very few people take the time to come out to offer positive comments. It is as if there is no need to provide positive feedback. It is taken for granted. There was therefore a litany of complaints about roles, relationships, lack of trust, lack of effectiveness and efficiency, the fact that student achievement was below the Canadian average, and general dissatisfaction with the status quo.

1.6 What We Recommended

The report identified 6 catalysts for change and 22 recommendations.

Catalyst 1: Organize the System to Focus on Student Learning and Achievement

1. Shift from a system of nine disconnected silos to one coherent, aligned model focussed on student learning and achievement
2. Maintain the CSAP French Language Board provincial board structure with some changes

Catalyst 2: Concentrate needed resources into classrooms and schools

3. Move teaching support specialists (literacy leads, math mentors, etc.) out of regional education offices and into classrooms four days a week, with the fifth day dedicated to collaborative planning and preparation for the next week.
4. Encourage cross-fertilization between the Department and schools, bringing in classroom teachers to fill 50 percent of Department of Education (EECD) curriculum positions and deploying Department staff in the system.
5. Make all schools “wrap-around facilities”, where students and families can promptly access support from any government department, not just for education, but also support from mental health professionals, health care providers, justice, family services, and so on.
6. Give teachers and principals access to funding and responsibility for the selection of text books and learning materials to best support their teaching.

Catalyst 3: Make the system better for teachers and principals

7. Create a provincial College of Educators, an independent body to license, govern, discipline and regulate the teaching profession, helping to improve public confidence in the education system across the province.
8. Remove principals and vice-principals from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) and into a new professional association. Seniority, pension, benefits must not be impacted and there should be an option for those administrators who may wish to return to teaching and the NSTU.
9. Create maintenance and operations positions such as a building manager for schools or families of schools, freeing principals from such non-educational tasks.
10. Provide support for accounting and financial functions in schools, rather than making them the responsibility for principals.
11. Ensure teachers have the mobility and choice to work in any region in Nova Scotia by removing barriers in collective agreements while maintaining seniority rights.
12. Create a co-ordinated professional development system for teachers and principals, tied directly to teaching standards, student achievement, curriculum priorities, such as math, literacy, and culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies that can be readily implemented in their classrooms.

13. Make clear the importance of extracurricular activities, sports, and community volunteer by:
- Creating a dedicated Physical Activity and Extracurricular Coordinator
 - Streamlining transportation and volunteer policies
 - Providing additional support for the position of Athletic Director
 - Identifying Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation (NSSAF) in the organizational structure of the Department to show it as a priority for schools, students, and the EECD.

Catalyst 4: Increase trust, accountability, and transparency

14. Create an independent Student Progress Assessment Office (SPAO) taking responsibility away from the EECD and establish an assessment division to develop high-quality student assessments, reporting directly to the public on province-wide results, and ensuring the assessments are aligned with the curriculum.
15. Establish an Education Ombudsperson—an independent officer to investigate and resolve concerns or complaints on administrative decisions and practices that affect the education of the children of Nova Scotia.

Catalyst 5: Ensure equity and excellence in all schools across the province

16. The EECD must create new Executive Directors or similar level positions of influence and decision-making power for African Nova Scotian achievement and Mi'kmaw Education.
17. Establish a dedicated unit in the Department, in collaboration with the Office of Immigration, for emerging immigrant communities in school, with supports for students, teachers and parents.
18. Develop a coordinated workforce strategy to identify, recruit and retain teachers, specialists and educational support staff in the communities that need them. In addition, particular attention should be paid to:
- a. Increasing diversity in teaching and educational leadership programs, particularly African Nova Scotian, Mi'kmaw and Acadian teachers.
 - b. Hiring French language teachers and support workers for both CSAP and French Immersion programming, and English as an Additional (EAL) teachers.
19. Develop targeted educational strategies for specific challenges in the system:
- a. A French Language Education Strategy
 - b. A rural Education Strategy
 - c. A strategy for children living in poverty
 - d. A strategy for children in care in the province

Catalyst 6: Streamline the department’s administration and operations and invest savings in the classroom

20. The EECD, in concert with the Departments of Finance and Transportation & Infrastructure Renewal, should create a transparent, predictable and documented multi-year (five-to-ten) capital funding process for schools. The following elements should be included:
 - a. A mechanism to invest in existing schools to ensure that they are maintained appropriately
 - b. A review of excess space in schools by an independent reviewer
 - c. Improved planning of school construction and renovation projects
 - d. Synchronization of the fiscal year and the school year as part of the multi-year funding initiative.
21. Ensure that a new funding formula for schools is in place to replace the Hogg formula to better reflect the priorities of today and the decade ahead.
22. Any financial savings realized in carrying out these recommendations must be documented and shared publicly, with all savings going directly into schools.

1.7 An Implementation Strategy—The Key to Successful Reform

Included in the report are some key components of and steps to ensure **successful implementation**. This acknowledges the fact that so many studies and their recommendations do not achieve their goals because of spotty or shallow implementation of improvement imperatives. Ineffective or insufficient implementation is the greatest roadblock to school system improvement.

An effective implementation strategy has a number of important components. I drew upon research findings and integrated them with my own experience in educational reform (Glaze, 2018). Key actions include the following:

- Establish a Guiding Coalition with members including: head of government, minister of education deputies, union representation, directors of education/superintendents, business, parent and teacher representation.
- Select a lead person. This individual is a catalyst for change and a champion of the initiative. He or she must be knowledgeable about change processes and well respected within the field.
- Develop a plan with clear priorities. A good plan is sharp and focussed with a small number of key priorities.
- Have clear timelines and measurable indicators of success.
- Use strategies based on best research practices.
- Build a team for support. A key implementation task is to select a team of people who work together and support one another in achieving important goals. One

example is to ensure that each school and region has a School Improvement Team working in concert with a Regional Improvement Team.

- Provide on-going professional learning opportunities and development. Capacity building is key.
- Provide required resources: human, financial and material.
- Select a few non-negotiables goals within each plan at the local level. Allow some variation in local priorities if schools are already at the required level of proficiency in a particular subject. All subjects are important but reading is the gateway to all other subjects. Therefore proficiency in reading is non-negotiable.
- Require consistent and deep implementation of selected goals. Too often, individuals want to move on the new goals without the concerted efforts required to implement, embed and sustain the gains.
- Identify indicators of progress. It is vital to collect data to see if progress toward the goal is being made and to share that information broadly so that everyone can assess the progress and make mid-course corrections, if necessary.
- Monitor progress closely, regularly and purposefully in both student achievement and the implementation of the plan.
- Stay the course. Significant issues cannot be addressed effectively unless there is a multi-year commitment.
- Ensure early wins and celebrate success, and
- Communicate widely and often.

1.8 Response from the Minister of Education to the Recommendation in the Report

A few weeks after the report was submitted, the Minister of Education issued his response stating that the changes to the education system will provide more support for students and give communities more input. He said that this is a moment where government needs to press forward with a focus on those who need these changes the most—Nova Scotia’s students. The government accepted the spirit and intent of all 22 recommendations and stated that they will now work with partners in the education system to help implement the recommendations.

Our singular focus is on improving student success... This is a moment where we need to press forward together with a focus on those who need us most—our students. We have great people working in the system who are completely committed and dedicated to our kids. It’s our system that’s fractured. I accept the spirit and intent of the recommendations in this report.

Zach Churchill, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development (Arab)

While accepting the spirit of all recommendations the Minister specified the changes government would implement immediately were:

1. Unify the system by dissolving the seven elected regional school boards and create one provincial advisory council. The structure of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial will not change

2. Ensure that a portion of the money saved will go to enhance the role and influence of school advisory councils for all schools (or families of schools) in the province to strengthen the local voice in schools
3. Change the name of superintendents to regional executive directors and enhance their role to focus on student achievement, reporting directly to the deputy minister of Education and Early Childhood Development
4. Move principals and vice-principals from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, while protecting salaries, pensions and benefit.
5. Move teaching support specialists (literacy leads, math mentors) out of regional education offices and into classrooms four days a week, with the fifth day dedicated to planning and preparation
6. Create an independent Provincial College of Educators

The full list of government's initial changes and a copy of the report is online at ednet.ns.ca/adminreview.

The Nova Scotia Teachers Union took great exception to some of the recommendations made in the report. They took a strike vote to bolster their efforts to influence the government response and the actions that would follow. Reports indicate that some of the most troublesome recommendations for the union were the removal of principals and vice-principals from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union and the establishment of a College of Educators. It was impressive to see how many Nova Scotians became involved in the discussions which ensued on the future of their education system.

1.9 Challenges

Challenges are inherent in changes of this magnitude of system reform. Some include the fact that those who are expected to do the work already feel overburdened with the constant demands placed on them. There is still a need to remove distractions and barriers to ensure successful implementation.

Resources are often a challenge. The governments of both Ontario and Nova Scotia put large sums of money into the system even though they are experiencing financial challenges. The premiers of Ontario and Nova Scotia must be commended for ensuring that there were resources to implement the initiatives. Ensuring that children in special education programs, for example, receive the resources they need to catch up where necessary is essential if we are to close achievement gaps.

As well, all schools must rely on using high impact, research informed strategies that work. Having a system in place to measure impact and effectiveness of strategies is essential. Creating conditions for teachers to have both individualized and school-based capacity building is vital. Not all teachers need training on classroom management, for example. There must be a system in place to listen to what teachers and principal say they need to improve their skills and ensure that they can pursue

the learning that is important to them. Individualization and customization are keys to successful education reform.

We are doing so many things well and have made so much progress in educating a wider range of students to a higher level. To use the well-worn phrase, we are raising the bar and closing achievement gaps. Never before have we had such a rich research base and teachers who are, themselves, engaged in school-based research. Principals are focussing on what works in administering schools and are working effectively with the communities they serve.

The questions remains: Do we have the will and the skills to bring about success for **all** students regardless of demographic circumstances or other factors that locate them in society? The answer is a resounding “yes!” The teachers, principals and other educators with whom I have worked internationally are certainly prepared to meet these challenges.

I hope that you share my optimism for the future of education. I am convinced that, in spite of the challenges those engaged in education face each day, we have the skills and, most certainly, the will to educate our children successfully.

1.10 Addendum to article:

This article represents a point in time in education in Ontario. Time has elapsed. The new Premier and Minister of Education of the new government which is now in power have made many changes to the education system. You are encouraged to visit the Ontario Ministry of Education website to learn more about these changes.

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