

Date: August 24, 2006
To: Directors of Education
From: Frank Kelly, Executive Director
Re: CODE Special Education Project 2006-2007 - "Improving Literacy and Numeracy Achievement for Students with Special Education Needs"
Cc: Superintendents Responsible for Special Education,
Superintendents Responsible for Literacy and Numeracy Initiatives, and
Superintendents Responsible for Student Success Initiatives.

The purpose of this memo is to alert you to the availability of funding for the 2006-2007 school year through the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE). The criteria for 2006-2007 CODE project proposals will be based on learnings and identified successful practices from 2005-2006. CODE will continue to employ a coaching model to assist school boards across Ontario to improve learning and achievement for students with special education needs. The memo also provides an initial description of the impact of the 2005-2006 CODE Special Education Projects.

2005-2006 Project Implementation and Review

The Ontario government has made improvement in publicly funded education the centrepiece of its mandate. The CODE Special Education Project was a strategic action to address recommendations from *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6 (2005)* and to assist school boards across Ontario to develop lateral capacity building projects to improve teacher professional practice and raise achievement for students with special education needs.

Project funding was distributed to all school systems based on a consistent and equitable application, selection, distribution, reporting and monitoring process. Eighty-five projects were conducted throughout the 2005-2006 school year which included 72 school boards, partnerships with all school authorities, and French and English provincial schools. Seventy-five (75) supervisory officers responsible for special education, approximately 21,000 school board employees, and almost 2 million students were involved in CODE projects.

A mixed model research design was used to collect data from multiple sources which included board project reports, interviews and surveys of supervisory officers, system staff, principals and teachers (classroom & special education). All CODE school board projects incorporated evidence-based instructional strategies found in *Education for All (2005)*.

Over 90% of board projects provided data that indicated positive impact for teachers and/or students. For teachers (classroom and special education) this included increased knowledge and practice using instructional strategies from *Education for All (2005)*. Positive impact for students included increased academic achievement in areas such as reading, oral language, writing, as well as increased use of learning strategies and increased access to, and use of assistive technology in the regular classroom.

Members of the CODE Expert Leadership Team in their review of the final reports submitted by project participants identified evidence of the following:

- Improvement in achievement of students with special education needs;
- Increased classroom teacher capacity to apply the principles of universal design and differentiated instruction, evidence-based practices and effective use of assistive technology;
- Increased capacity of special education teachers to collaborate with and support regular classroom teachers in effective literacy instruction;
- Increased capacity of supervisory officers, principals, educational assistants and professional support staff related to differentiated instruction and universal design, assessment and evaluation for students with special education needs, the development professional learning teams, and;
- Monitoring and analysis of results to determine effectiveness and implications for sustainability and changes to program and service delivery.

Reflections of System Leaders - Lessons Learned

Many system leaders reflected that change had occurred in their leadership role as a result of their involvement in the CODE project. Supervisory Officers reported the following:

- a shift to a greater emphasis on an instructional leadership role for both supervisory officers and school principals;
- the development of new, positive, and meaningful relationships at system and school levels. Many referred to “silos” beginning to be broken down as a result of the CODE project;
- the critical importance of communicating clearly and in a timely manner to all key stakeholders so that a consistent project message was shared. Many shared that the use of the document *Education for All (2005)* created a common language for staff that facilitated understanding of project goals;
- the need for regular professional learning for staff which included a combination of out-of-school training with ongoing in-school support;
- the use of assessment data was effective in showing positive results for students and could be used for effective decision making at system and school levels. This area was also identified as a critical need area for further professional learning;
- the establishment of a provincial professional network as part of the CODE Project was beneficial and should be maintained; and,
- the need to plan for both short and long-term effects of their CODE projects and to develop a long-term commitment to measure sustained success for teachers and for students with special education needs.

Key Learnings

All CODE projects reported positive change. Varying levels of enhanced teacher capacity and/or improved student achievement were reported. Initial results identified the following key factors that are linked to success:

- Measurable outcomes for students and staff based on effective assessment and instruction
- Professional learning teams
- School principal as instructional leader
- School based coaches and coaching
- Precision in project design, implementation and monitoring
- Targeted allocation of teacher and student resources
- Communication strategies that created a common goal and sense of understanding of the project.

The final research report will be shared on November 3, 2006. It will provide results describing school board strategic actions and structures, changes to supervisory officers responsible for special education, teacher capacity and student achievement, as well as challenges, enablers and plans to sustain projects.

2006-2007 Project

“In a transformed system, special education programs and services would support a learning environment that enables students to acquire, demonstrate, and apply the knowledge and skills necessary to maximize their potential for success in school and beyond. Based on their individual learning needs and abilities, all students would receive supports in schools that foster a culture of commitment to achievement.”

Special Education Transformation, Ontario 2006

2006-2007 Proposal Development and Assessment

The Belief Statements contained in the document *Education for All* will continue to guide the 2006-2007 project.

- Belief #1: All students can succeed.
- Belief #2: Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students.
- Belief #3: Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience.
- Belief #4: Classroom teachers are the key for a student’s literacy and numeracy development.
- Belief #5: Each child has his or her own unique patterns of learning.
- Belief # 6: The classroom teacher needs the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special needs.
- Belief #7: Fairness is not sameness.

Attached is a form, to be completed by all boards entitled **CODE Special Education Project Proposal 2006-2007**. CODE wishes to assist in the development of proposals by providing templates, which will facilitate the application and reporting processes and will help to focus efforts on addressing the needs of students with special education needs.

The proposals must support the belief statements, one or more of the recommendations from “*Education for All*”, and must reflect the key learnings from 2005-2006 as described above. These initiatives should result in an alignment with school boards’ special education plans, boards’ improvement plans, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat initiatives and Student Success projects. Board staff responsible for special education are strongly encouraged to work with staff working on other literacy and numeracy and student success initiatives.

Boards may wish to build upon last year’s successes, but are advised that funding is not available to merely continue 2005-2006 projects, but rather to extend and deepen capacity.

As Directors and Supervisory Officers develop and implement their project proposals, the following aspects should be considered:

- the collaborative roles of special education teachers and classroom teachers to improve achievement for students with special education needs;
- the professional development needs for supervisory officers, principals, teachers, educational assistants and professional support staff related to assessment for learning, differentiated instruction, the use of learning profiles and assistive technology, and the development of professional learning teams;
- a process for utilizing project results to determine the effectiveness of current special education programs, services, and organizational structures on improved student achievement.

All projects will be required to submit mid-year and final reports. Templates for these reports will be provided by the CODE Expert Leadership Team. The monitoring process established in 2005-2006 will continue to collect information regarding project development and implementation. Boards will be required to provide, in their Final Report, specific assessment data about pre and post project student achievement and evidence of staff use of effective assessment and instructional strategies that benefit students with special education needs.

Professional Learning for Supervisory Officers

One of the goals of CODE is to continue to support a professional learning community of superintendents responsible for special education. Regional professional learning/networking sessions for Supervisory Officers responsible for Special Education will be held prior to September 15, 2006. A member of the CODE Expert Leadership Team will communicate the details for each regional meeting to boards.

Following this initial professional learning/networking session the Expert Leadership Team will be available on an individual basis to consult on the development of proposals.

Funding Process

The funding levels for CODE projects are intended to provide school boards with the opportunity to develop and implement a project to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students with special education needs. The successes from the CODE projects should subsequently be used to influence system-wide decisions.

CODE has been allocated funds to distribute to District School Boards. An initial allocation (\$50,000.00) will be given to each district school board to begin planning ways to enhance the capacity of classroom teachers to improve literacy and numeracy achievement for students with special education needs. Additional funding is available (\$200,000.00) to implement 2006-2007 proposals.

Proposals for further funding must be submitted using the attached form and will not exceed \$200,000.00. The total possible funding for any Board will be the initial allocation of \$50,000.00 plus the potential of an additional \$200,000.00 for a total of \$250,000.00.

In the event that a Board determines that the initial allocation will meet their needs in the 2006-2007 school year and does not submit a further proposal, the Board will be required to submit their plan using the attached form and adhering to the deadlines as described. Boards will be required to report on how the key findings of their 2006-2007 projects will be incorporated into special education program and services and thus be sustained.

Funds will be sent on approval of projects as follows:

- October 3, 2006 - initial allocation (\$50,000.00)
- January 30, 2007 - mid-year allocation – 50% of additional allocation
- June 30, 2007 - final allocation – remainder of funds after submission of the Board’s Final Report

Project Timeline

DATE	ACTIVITY
August 24, 2006	Release of Project Criteria
Prior to September 15	Regional Professional Learning/Networking Session – Superintendents responsible for Special Education
August 24 to September 29, 2006	Optional consultation with CODE Expert Leadership Team
September 29, 2006	Submission of Proposal
October 3, 2006	Release of initial funding allocation to boards
October 1 - 14, 2006	Review of proposals – CODE Expert Leadership Team
October 16, 2006	Notification of funding for approved proposals
November 3, 2006	Provincial Supervisory Officers’ Network meeting and release the 2005-2006 Final Report
November 2006 - June 2007	Monitoring of Projects – CODE Expert Leadership and Monitoring Teams
Late January 2006 - Mid February 2007	Regional leadership/networking sessions – mid-year report due
Late May - Early June 2007	Provincial leadership/networking session – final report due

Conclusion:

This CODE project is being managed by the CODE Special Education Project Management Team, which is made up of Directors of Education representing the three provincial supervisory officers’ associations. An Advisory Committee of provincial representatives also provides advice to the CODE Special Education Expert Leadership Team, which has responsibility for the development of the process for the approval of proposals, the distribution of funds and the monitoring and assessment of projects.

**PROPOSALS WILL BE ACCEPTED UP TO 2 P.M., SEPTEMBER 29, 2006
AND FINAL APPROVAL WILL BE COMMUNICATED BY OCTOBER 16, 2006.**

For further information, please contact:

Frank Kelly
Executive Director, CODE

Telephone: (905) 845-4254 Email: frank_kelly@opsoa.org

