



Building Roads for Students' Success

Reflection Sheet: Perceptions of Assessment and Student Learning

Key Points

- Principals and teachers have different perceptions of the implementation and impact of the SEF.
- The majority of teachers, principals, and SEF leads suggest that the SEF has promoted higher order thinking skills in students.
- Participants perceive that students are becoming more responsible for and engaged in their own learning.
- Teacher focus groups indicated the SEF may have resulted in a loss of broader subjects (such as the Arts) and basic skills.
- Teachers are concerned that the SEF is having a negative impact on students with special needs.

Overview

In the research project *Building Roads for Students' Success*, focus groups were conducted with teachers, and interviews were conducted with elementary principals and with School Effectiveness Leads in 7 school boards in Eastern Ontario. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand teacher and principal perceptions of both the implementation and effectiveness of the School Effectiveness Framework and how it impacted on assessment and student learning at the classroom level. Qualitative analysis was completed to help identify overarching themes from the focus groups and interviews. Findings demonstrated that teachers and principals have had different perceptions of the impact of the School Effectiveness Framework on assessment and student learning.

Highlights

Three main themes emerged with regards to changes in student learning as a result of the implementation of the SEF:

- 75% of teacher focus groups, 90% of principals and 100% of SEF leads reported that the implementation of the SEF had promoted **higher order thinking skills**, or more critical analysis in student learning.
- 100% of teachers focus groups and 0% of principals or SEF leads reported that the SEF emphasis on increasing student literacy and numeracy had resulted in a **loss of broader subjects and basic skills** being learned by students.
- 100% of teacher focus groups, 60% of principals and 83% of SEF leads reported that the increased collaboration had changed the way that students learn in that students are **becoming more responsible and engaged in their own learning**.

Several general findings emerged from the research:

- Overall, the majority of respondents suggested that student learning and teaching practices have generally improved.
- The SEF has raised teachers' awareness of the use of specific assessment tools and increased their ability to help students make personal progress in knowledge and skills.
- Issues were raised by the teachers about the consistency in assessment procedures, especially regarding students with special education needs, or students who were ELL. It was suggested that students with IEPs are in fact suffering from practices endorsed by the SEF, and that there is a lack of appropriate guidance for teachers trying to meet the needs of students with IEPs.
- Many teachers perceived that the focus had shifted from teaching all students to teaching those mainly "in the middle".
- Teachers expressed concerns regarding the lack of alignment in assessment and instructional practices from the junior grades to high school, especially for children with special needs.
- Principals and teachers from large school boards discussed the inconsistency among resources for different schools and how lack of resources impacts on the consistent implementation of the SEF.
- Teachers' accounts speak to a tension they experience between keeping their own autonomy and decision making power on the one hand, and the need for clear directives from school administrators on the other.

"Overall, respondents reported that the SEF had been effective in helping students to think more critically and to learn to collaborate with teachers and fellow students to improve their learning."



This Reflection Sheet was based on portions of the 2010 Building Roads to Success research paper produced as part of a MISA Professional Network Project with funding assistance from The Ministry of Education of Ontario. (Contact: Marilyn Kasian: marilyn.kasian@ottawacatholicschools.ca)

Questions Raised

- What could account for the differences in perceptions of the School Effectiveness Framework by teachers, principals, and SEF leads?
- What are indicators of success in the Revised SEF framework? How does this differ from the older SEF framework?
- How is the implementation of the SEF monitored within schools, or boards? Is the SEF implemented consistently within boards?
- How do these findings fit with quantitative results from the study?
- Are there similar perceptions by teachers and principals at the secondary level?