LEARNING FOR ALL K-12
An Overview For Parents

Welcome to this presentation for parents on some exciting new initiatives in education found in the Ministry of Education’s new document titled Learning For All – Kindergarten to Grade 12. The purpose of this presentation is to give you, the parents, a better understanding of the Ministry of Education’s renewed commitment to keep, as its focus, the individual needs of each and every student.

Since the release of “Learning for All K-12” in 2009, the 16 boards and 3 school authorities in the London region have worked collaboratively on special projects with funding from the Ministry of Education. These projects are intended to help educators use the strategies in Learning For All to better meet the needs of all students.

In this presentation you will learn about the following:

- BACKGROUND LEADING TO “LEARNING FOR ALL K-12”
- THE MORAL PURPOSE OF EDUCATION
- ACHIEVEMENT GAP
- THE STRATEGIES IN “LEARNING FOR ALL- K – 12
- A THREE TIERED APPROACH TO PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION
- STUDENT PROFILES and CLASS PROFILES

You will also see some examples of teacher and student success in the classroom that have been a direct result of using the strategies in Learning For All.
BACKGROUND

In 2005, the Ministry released a document for educators called “Education for All”. This document was aimed at students in Kindergarten to grade 6 and it targeted literacy and numeracy as the corner stones to student success. As the name suggests, it was intended to reach ALL students, including those with special needs.

The Education for All document was based on the 3 core priorities of the Ministry of Education:

- High levels of student achievement
- Reduced gaps in student achievement
- And an increased confidence in publicly funded education
“Education for All” contains a number of core beliefs:

- All students can succeed
- Each student has his/her own unique learning patterns
- Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence based research and are tempered by experience
- Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected ways of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students
- Classroom teachers are the key educators for a student’s literacy and numeracy development
- Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports all students
- Fairness is not sameness

So how did Learning For All come about? It began with the Education For All document which provided the seeds.

(Read Quickly) Then the Ministry drew upon the research of experts such as Michael Fullan, Carmel Cervola and Peter Hill who, in their book, “Breakthrough” outline the moral purpose of education. Using these resources, in 2008, the Ministry released another document called “Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education”. The Learning for All document grew out of a combination of the big ideas from these three resources.

It contains strategies to better meet the needs of all students from Kindergarten to the end of high school.
MORAL PURPOSE

The philosophy behind Learning for All K-12 is based on the moral purpose of education as described in the book “Breakthrough”. The moral purpose of education clearly states that the partners in education must serve all students to a high standard. This moral purpose is based on a set of four core beliefs:

- All students can achieve high standards given significant time and support
- All teachers can teach to high standards given the right conditions and assistance
- High expectations and early intervention for students who are struggling are essential
- Teachers need to be able to put into words what they do and why they do it.

To summarize, educators must raise the bar so that all students can reach their full potential.

They must also plan their instruction and assessments to close the gap between a student’s achievement and his or her full potential.

So, assessment of student progress must be used to show the teacher how to tailor instruction and tasks to meet the needs of all students.
There are two kinds of assessment – The first is what most parents are familiar with. The assessment used to get marks. This is called summative assessment and it is used to ensure that students understand concepts.

The other kind of assessment takes place all the time. It’s the kind of assessment that teachers do in order to make sure that students are on the right path so they can do well on the summative tasks.

Let’s look at it in terms of a treasure map. The white X is what the teachers want the students to know. The student demonstrates they have achieved this knowledge through a summative assessment. On the other hand, the formative assessments, the yellow X’s, are found during the journey to attaining this knowledge. There may be several stops required to recharge or refuel before arriving. The formative assessment lets the teachers and students know what additional steps are needed to get to their final destination.
WHAT IS AN ACHIEVEMENT GAP?

An achievement gap occurs when a student doesn’t reach his or her full potential. Learning for All focuses on the importance of eliminating achievement gaps, helping every student to reach his or her potential and on closing the gap between different groups of students. Research shows that achievement gaps can be closed and improvement in achievement can occur when the responsibility for making educational change is shared by all the partners in education – students, educators, parents and community partners.

When Educators focus on individual students’ strengths and needs, when assessment is used for learning about students’ strength and needs and when instruction is crafted to meet those needs, students are more successful.
STRATEGIES IN “Learning for All K-12”

“Learning for All” gives teachers educational strategies that have proven to be effective in helping all students learn regardless of whether they are high achievers or those who need added support.

“Learning for All” says that instruction and assessment of learning must put the student at the center. Teaching strategies must be tailored to meet the learning and motivational needs of all students.

Instruction and assessment must be precise and give the teacher the information needed to know where a student is in any particular subject. This information is then used to help the teacher provide instruction based on the needs of the student. Exactly like formative assessment. Let’s look at some specific educational strategies in the “Learning for All” document.
UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING AND DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Two classroom strategies that are very successful in meeting the needs of students in raising the bar and closing achievement gaps are Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Universal Design for Learning or UDL ensures that instruction meets the needs of all students. Universal Design for Learning clearly states that there is no one way for all students to learn and reach their full potential. Rather UDL says that:

- every learner is unique
- it’s absolutely necessary to accommodate the differences among students
- teachers must create learning experiences that suit the individual student so each one can maximize his/her ability to progress.

In other words - The aim of UDL is to provide access to the curriculum for all students and to assist educators in designing products and environments to make it accessible for all regardless of age, skills or situation.

This means that teachers no longer plan instruction for students with average achievement levels and then make after the fact modifications to meet the needs of certain students who didn’t reach their full potential. The needs of all students must be considered. UDL says that what is necessary for some can be good for all students.
Think of Universal Design for Learning this way. An architect designs an access ramp to give persons using a wheelchair easier access to a building. But the ramp also makes it easier for a parent with a stroller, a cyclist or someone using a walker to get into the building. The ramp was necessary for some but good for all.

Educators realize that a teaching strategy or materials that respond to the special needs of one specific student can also be beneficial for all students. For example, a surround sound system is necessary for hearing impaired students but it also helps all students in the class to learn better.

A visual schedule in the classroom may be necessary for some but is also good for all.

The use of computers and programs like “Smart Ideas” are necessary for some but benefit all students.

UDL stresses the importance of flexibility in the amount of time students are given to complete a task. It allows all students to have a real learning experience regardless of their performance level.
So, what does a UDL classroom look like?

- Teachers use a variety of strategies and materials that use all 5 senses
- The level of difficulty and style of presentation are adjusted to meet the needs of the students
- Assistive technology is provided when needed
- Different types of assessments that allow students to use a variety of formats and response options are used
- During assessment students have access to the same supports they have during instruction unless those supports undermine the purpose of the assessment
- Classroom space is used to maximize learning
- Students are provided regularly with feedback on their progress
- Instruction and assessment are adjusted to maximize learning for All students

The following will demonstrate a number of aspects of Universal Design for Learning in action in a classroom.
DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

All children have different interests, learning styles and readiness to learn. Differentiated Instruction allows teachers to plan instruction and assessment based on these differences. Teachers can differentiate one or several elements in any learning situation. Differentiated Instruction challenges students at their own level and uses a variety of strategies, materials and groupings.

Differentiated Instruction in a classroom is similar to a group of people who are exploring an island. The exploration by each person may vary by: Which parts of the island will be explored, how long is spent on exploring, the method used to explore the island, the route taken and how each person reports on the results of their exploration.

Similarly, in a classroom differentiated instruction is used to adjust:

- What students are going to learn
- When they are going to learn it
- The types of tasks and activities students will do
- The ways students will demonstrate their learning
- The environment in which students learn and demonstrate that learning
How does Differentiated Instruction work?

- Teachers gather information about students' learning styles and interests
- They offer instruction and activities based on students' interests so that students are engaged and interested
- Instruction is meaningful and relevant
- Teachers tailor instruction and assessment to students' individual needs
- They give students guidance, support and encouragement
- Students are given opportunities to practice skills
- Teachers do ongoing/formative assessment of student learning
- Based on information gathered from ongoing assessment, the teacher can adjust instruction to better meet the needs of the student
- Students can adjust their learning strategies and set new goals
- Groups are flexible and may be based on interests, learning styles, skill level or difficulty
- Sometimes whole class instruction is given where all students are working on a task based on individual needs and strengths.
- Cooperative learning is used where students are placed into small groups and given a specific task that requires them to work together to complete the task.
- Students are presented with realistic, believable problems that can only be solved by learning to use a new skill.

The following is a sample of differentiated instruction in action in a classroom.
A THREE TIERED APPROACH TO PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION OF ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Previous methods of teaching can be compared to fishermen aboard a fishing trawler. Their sonar alerts them to a school of fish nearby. They lower their nets and when they pull them up, the nets are full of fish. What they missed however were all the other fish that were swimming ahead of or lagging behind the ones they caught. The new emphasis in education says that we must include all learners. We must catch them all. So education is shifting away from:

- learning by most to learning by all
- content delivery only to learning how to learn
- pass fail mindset to ensuring growth
- learning as a product to learning as a process
- competition to collaboration
- local to global

This is an adaptation of a design created by Marco Bucci, when he was a high school student in the York Catholic Board. It beautifully represents the tiered approach in action to “catch them all”. Imagine a typical classroom. In that classroom we know that 80% of the students get it. They do well with whole class instruction. We also know that there are students who struggle and require more assistance in order to learn. This group represents about 15% of the students. In a typical class, there are also about 5% of students who will continue to struggle. This 5% will need much more intensive help and some may require services that go beyond the classroom. This is what teachers deal with on a daily basis.
To catch them all, raise the bar and close the gap, appropriate interventions for students who are struggling must take place early on. A three tiered approach is used to accomplish this. A three tiered approach ensures early intervention for students who are struggling. We want to accelerate their learning rather than wait for them to fail which results in learning gaps. We need to find out early where a student is falling off the tracks and intervene before the gap becomes too big. Students who receive intervention as soon as they need it are less likely to require special education services later.
HOW DOES TIERING WORK?

Tier 1 includes all students in the class. Effective, differentiated whole class instruction takes place. Tier 1 includes teachers evaluating student progress so they can flag any students who might be falling behind. High quality, whole group instruction as well as some small group focus should be adequate to meet the learning needs almost all, 80%, of students who begin the year at grade level so they can move on to the next target.

In tier 2, the teacher identifies students who are not progressing satisfactorily. The teacher then works with these students using focused, explicit instruction either in small groups or individually and includes Tier 1 instruction as well. The teacher may work directly with one group while others are engaged in meaningful tasks. Groups are formed and reformed to meet the needs of all students while the teacher monitors student progress. Tier 2 instruction can be changed based on how often the students need this strategy. The intensity of tier 2 intervention can also change. Perhaps there is a need to have fewer students in the group so each one can have more interaction with the teacher. The length of time that students need to remain in the group can also change based on the needs of the student. The teacher may consult the special education staff in the school to get further help in meeting the needs of the students.

If a student is not responding to the tier 1 and 2 interventions, the teacher moves to tier 3. The student is given intensive, individual, explicit instruction. If necessary, specialized assessments, support and instruction is given by Special Education Services. Some Tier 3 students are formally identified and have an Individual Education Plan, that is – an IEP prepared for them which explains the student’s specific learning needs in detail.
KNOWING YOUR STUDENTS – STUDENT PROFILES AND CLASS PROFILES

Knowing the students is the first step in effective teaching, assessment, and meeting the needs of all students. The strategies outlined in this presentation can be effective only if teachers really know their students. So, to do this, teachers prepare class profiles and student profiles.
CLASS PROFILE

At the beginning of the year or semester, teachers collect information about their students from parents and the previous teacher. More information is gained through classroom observations, diagnostic and unit assessments. Teachers find out about students’ interests, learning styles and readiness to learn. This information allows the teacher to plan instruction and assessments, form flexible groupings and choose appropriate materials to meet the needs of all students. As the teacher begins to work with the students, they may discover other information to update the class profile.

The class profile is also a tool for recording and summarizing information about where a student is and how he/she is progressing. Not every student in the class will need information in the class profile other than his/her learning profile information. The focus of concern in the class profile is on the at-risk students. Class profiles are used to record the students’ learning and growth as well as the teacher’s plan for assessment and instruction to help students reach their full potential. Teachers note learning needs and recommended interventions for students who are struggling.

They monitor the progress of these interventions and make adjustments as needed. When a student has ongoing difficulties, the teacher may need to give more intensive instructional support or get special intervention by the in-school team. Teachers work with the in-school teams to make sure that the strategies used meet the needs of the student.
STUDENT PROFILE

When a teacher sees that a student needs more time and support to be successful in reaching his/her full potential, a student profile is created for that student.

A student profile is detailed and in depth and is based on teacher observation and student assessment. It allows the teacher to plan instruction and assessment to meet the needs of that student. Sometimes, the in-school team can be called in to help decide on effective strategies and accommodations that will help the student reach his/her full potential. When needed, an Individual Education Plan that contains specific information about the student’s learning needs is prepared. As the student progresses, the IEP is adjusted to reflect the needs of the student.
CONCLUSION

Effective instruction begins with an understanding of the strengths and needs of the learners both as a classroom unit and as individual students. By developing a class profile and individual student profiles when necessary, we, as teachers, establish informative and insightful references to guide the selection of effective teaching and learning strategies and interventions to maximize all students' achievement. Using these tools through the work of professional learning communities will help schools improve practices. As a result, this process more effectively supports and sustains improvement in student achievement over time. The bottom line reason for using the strategies that you have just seen from Learning For All is to help students be successful. Listen to what some students and teachers have to say about Learning For All.

Thank you for your attention. Hopefully, you now have a better understanding of the strategies in Learning For All and our commitment to better meet the needs of all students.