Wiiji Kakendaasodaa: Let’s All Learn

Final Report
The Model School Project
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What is Wiiji Kakendaasodaa?

Wiiji Kakendaasodaa is a six-year partnership (2010-2016) to improve reading and writing achievement for students in Kindergarten to Grade 6 in two First Nations’ schools. An initial phase (2010-2014) of intensive work was followed by a sustainability phase (2014-2016).

Who are the partners?

Kettle and Stony Point First Nation
The Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation is located along the shores of Lake Huron, 35 km northeast of Sarnia, Ontario. The Nation has two land bases, one of which was the focus of a half century long land dispute that has had repercussions across Canada. The Kettles or “concretions” that distinguish Kettle and Stony Point are, according to the oral historians of the Nation, Thunderbird eggs. For geologists the concretions are natural occurring phenomena among sedimentary rock that formed millions of years ago. Kettles are rare around the world but Kettle and Stony Point is the only place on earth where spherical concretions can be found.

The Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation have 2,418 registered members, with 1320 members living on the Nation’s reserve land (1).

Walpole Island First Nation
Bkejwanong First Nation, also known as Walpole Island, is located near Wallaceburg, Ontario at the mouth of the St. Clair River. Walpole Island encompasses six islands and has never been set apart as a reserve, giving it the distinction of being un-ceded territory. Bkejwanong is home to some of the most diverse wetlands, oak savannas, and tall grass prairies of the Great Lakes region. Today, the Bkejwanong First Nation has a total membership of 4805 people with 2330 people living in the community (1).

The Ojibwa, Potawatomi and Odawa peoples have occupied both First Nations' territories for thousands of years. These Nations also represent the Council of the Three Fires, a political and cultural confederacy that has survived the test of time. Ojibwa is the traditional language of both Kettle and Stony Point and Walpole Island First Nation. Currently, English is the predominant language in the communities. Both First Nations operate their own elementary school, offer preschool and daycare programs and have a community library.

Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative (MAEI) seeks to improve elementary and secondary school education outcomes for Aboriginal Canadians through the implementation of specific programs and the application of appropriate research.
**Pathy Family Foundation** supports organizations that provide critical aid to meet basic human needs, and that empower individuals and communities to generate and sustain positive social change.

**Lawrence and Judith Tanenbaum Family Foundation** provides assistance by financial donations, in an organized fashion, to various Canadian charitable organizations, prescribed non-Canadian universities, and certain charitable organizations outside Canada.

**Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)** at the University of Toronto is a research-intensive faculty of education and the only all-graduate faculty of education in Canada.

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**Which schools are involved in Wiiji Kakendaasodaa?**

**Hillside School**
Operated by the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, the school was relocated back to the community in 1995. The school Principal also serves as Program Manager for Education Services in the community with responsibility for Elementary, Secondary and Adult Education. The appointed Education Committee provides guidance and consultation to the school administration with final decision making retained by the elected Chief and Council. Day to day operational matters remain outside of the political process.

Hillside offers Senior Kindergarten to Grade 8. In the 2012-2013 school year Kindergarten was extended from a half to a full day program. Hillside School has approximately 135 students enrolled each year.  

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**Walpole Island Elementary School**
Operated by Walpole Island First Nation, the school was built in the early 1970s. Along with the school Principal, an Education Program Manager and Education Committee support and assist the education program on Walpole Island First Nation.

The school offers Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8. Junior and Senior Kindergarten are both full day programs. In the 2015-2016 school year Walpole Island Elementary added the option of Junior Kindergarten through Ojibwa immersion. Walpole Island Elementary has approximately 250 students enrolled each year.

We did a lot with less. We appreciate the MAEI. In order to continue on we have to further develop our capacity to develop holistic education around culture and language.

~ Chief Dan Miskokomon, Walpole Island First Nation

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1 Funding from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada supports instructional services in on reserve schools (First Nations-operated and federal) and the costs of on reserve students attending provincial schools.
taught at all grade levels. Both schools follow the Ontario provincial school curriculum and administer the Ontario provincial assessments (EQAO) in reading and writing in Grades 3 and 6. These First Nations do not operate high schools. When students graduate from Grade 8, they enroll in provincial public high schools close to their community. They are funded through tuition agreements between the individual First Nation and the provincial school board.

Why did Wiiji Kakendaasodaa begin?

Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and Walpole Island First Nation invited the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative to work with them to improve educational outcomes for their children. The invitation is significant and courageous given the history and legacy of residential schools in Canada, where the atrocities committed against Aboriginal children were carried out in the name of education (2).

Why did we focus on reading and writing?

Both First Nations want their children to know their language and culture, be proud of their identity and have the academic skills to compete successfully in the world at large. These goals for education are interdependent. Language, culture and identity strengthen and are strengthened by children’s development as speakers, listeners, readers and writers in one or more languages (3, 4).

When a First Nation makes education a priority, we create a caring environment for boosting Anishinaabe students’ self-esteem, which in turn, boosts academic achievement.

~ Chief Patrick Madahbee,
Grand Council Chief,
Anishinabek Nation

The Kettle and Stony Point and Walpole Island communities understood that proficiency in early reading is critical for their children’s success in school. At the age of 9 or 10, children need to read well enough to learn from text and to write what they know and think, or they risk falling behind in all areas in school. Achievement in all academic school subjects is dependent on the ability to read and write well. It is not surprising that reading proficiency at age 9 or 10 has been called “the Golden Ticket” and is the best school-based predictor of high school graduation (5).
Both First Nation communities were concerned about their students’ underachievement in reading and prior to Wiiji Kakendaasodaa had taken steps to improve achievement. Wiiji Kakendaasodaa offered the opportunity to go the extra mile.

The Martin Initiative provided the support and the hope that we could succeed, pushing beyond the systemic barriers that are in place for First Nations schools.

~ Steven Styers, Principal, Walpole Island Elementary

What did we do together?

2010 – 2014
Partners worked intensively together to improve achievement in reading and writing.

2014 – 2016
Schools worked to sustain and build on their progress with minimal support from the other partners.

Planning for Improvement
Wiiji Kakendaasodaa began with extensive school-wide assessments to understand the steps already taken to improve reading achievement. Staff reported that high absenteeism, lateness, lack of opportunity, poorly developed language skills and issues within home environments were posing challenges to improved literacy achievement. Student disengagement and disruptive behaviours were seen as additional barriers to progress.

Expectations were low. Discussions with staff, classroom observations and review of available student assessment data and work samples were used to determine the starting point for a literacy improvement plan at each school.

They’ll never be able to do it, don’t worry, do what you can, that kind of attitude. I’ve never felt good about that, and I always pushed my students, but it was easy to accept where they were at the end of the year. Now we’re not going to accept that. You know you can do better. It’s just that drive, we believe in the students and the students believe in themselves.

~ Craig Lindsay, Vice-Principal, Hillside School

Research informed the improvement plans. Factors consistently shown to influence children’s reading achievement across many studies, in different cultural contexts and languages provided the framework for the improvement plans (3, 5, 6). They are:

- Organization of Time, Space and Resources
- Teaching and Learning
- Assessment to Inform Instruction
- Parental Involvement and Community Engagement

The crucial role of leadership was imbedded within each section of the framework. The framework was common to both schools but Hillside and Walpole Island brought their specific plans to life in their own way, consistent with their own context.
Organization of Time, Space and Resources

Time

Student Attendance
Teachers can’t teach students who are not in school. Both schools had been recording attendance for several years and had attendance strategies in place. During Wiiji Kakendaasodaa they added new strategies including:

- Letters to parents with graphs showing how much instructional time their child was missing
- Vice Principal visits to the home
- Providing battery-powered alarm clocks for households with no electricity
- Phoning students (with the students’ prior agreement) every morning to wake them up
- Awarding prizes for attendance

Hillside school introduced Lunch With A Cop. Every month, students with perfect attendance were entered into a lottery. The community Anishnaabek police took the winners to lunch in the police car and they visited the police station.

Students are thriving. They’re engaged and they enjoy coming to school and that is a part of the initiative as a whole.

~ Grade 2 Teacher

The Education Committee in Walpole Island successful sought community support for an attendance campaign in which all community organizations promoted school punctuality and attendance via work of mouth, posters and signs.

Inconsistencies in reporting practices made it difficult to estimate the impact of these strategies over the years. By 2013-2014, half of the students were attending more than 89% and half less than 89% of the time.

Instructional Time
When in school, students need sufficient time dedicated to teaching reading and writing. A dedicated literacy block of 100 minutes was timetabled. All students attended the literacy block in their homeroom and interruptions (e.g., announcements) were eliminated during the block to minimise distractions and focus on teaching and learning.

Prior to Wijii Kakendaasodaa many students were in “pull-out” programs for reading instruction. During Wijii Kakendaasodaa all students attended the classroom literacy block with additional support for children struggling with reading scheduled outside that block. The involvement and allocation of ancillary staff such as resource teachers was determined based on needs of the children.

Throughout the years, I’ve noticed that the children have become a lot more focused and independent as readers. The students who need a lot of support have become independent readers and writers.

~ Grade 3 Teacher

Space

Classroom space should be organised to support a literacy rich environment. Classrooms were organised physically to include areas for large group instruction, small group guided instruction and independent workspaces. A variety of reading
materials (a library corner) and writing materials (e.g., markers, paints) were located to be easily accessible to the children.

Resources

Materials
Teachers need appropriate resources to support rich literacy environments in their classrooms. New resources featured relevant instructional supports such as leveled texts, books featuring Indigenous content, graphic organizers (e.g. beginning, middle and end) and success criteria (e.g., what will a good descriptive paragraph look like). Demonstrations of student success covered the walls. An extensive class library of ‘just right’ books was purchased for a daily take home reading program for the primary grades. Non-fiction books with a focus on cross-curricular topics and student interests were purchased.

Now we have a good supply of books the children can read and we have a good supply of books for home reading during the year and over the summer.

~ Grade 1/2 Teacher

I learned how to dive into the resources and make better use of them. We have many cross-curricular materials that allow us to teach literacy throughout the day.

~ Grade 2 Teacher

A school library, staffed by a teacher librarian, influences children’s reading achievement (7). Both school communities contributed their own resources to the development of their school library. Walpole Island had a library in place prior to Wiiji Kakendaasoda. A renewal process for the library was undertaken and continues to this day.

At the start of Wiiji Kakendaasoda Hillside did not have a library. The school and community created space, purchased books and other resources and hired a teacher who was mentored by retired teacher librarians. The librarian coordinated her sessions to reinforce what was happening in classroom programs. Students request purchases, assist in the library, and publish a school newspaper under the direction of the teacher librarian.

Kids are taking ownership of their own learning so if there’s a topic that they really want to know about, they know that they can get that information themselves in the library. It’s really neat to see kids embracing the culture of learning.

~ School Librarian

The library is now the heartbeat of literacy in the school. It’s a thrill to see the development of students as producers and consumers of knowledge or to watch a child be totally immersed in the joy of reading.

~ Vaughan Stoyka, Program Director, Wiiji Kakendaasoda.

School leadership prioritized literacy in school life. They ensured that decisions about time, space and funding for resources support improvement in reading achievement. This focus continues today.
**Teaching and Learning**

Teachers do not control what happens in students’ lives outside of school but they do control what happens in school. Once children step over the threshold of the school, the quality of teaching is the most critical factor in learning to read and write and it is the teacher’s responsibility to teach them (8).

There is no guru you can send for; no program you can buy; teachers teach children how to read.

~ Julia O’Sullivan, Chief Advisor

**Professional Learning**

From 2010-2014 a program of intensive professional development was underway in the schools, led by the Wiiji Kakendaasodaa Program Director. Professional development focused on deepening teacher knowledge of child development, understanding the curriculum, the importance of oral language in reading, using assessment to inform instruction and pedagogical practices that foster developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive literacy learning opportunities (3, 9, 10, 11). It involved all staff including homeroom and resource teachers and educational assistants. Some difficulties arose due to insufficient supply teachers for coverage. School leadership took part when possible.

Professional development was delivered using a variety of approaches: whole school, divisional, grade level and individual. Individual mentoring and coaching was available to teachers during the literacy block. The Program Director worked with the individual teacher in his or her classroom and provided mentoring matched to his or her needs.

The biggest change I’ve noticed is the teachers’ confidence in the skills that they have.

~ Literacy Lead.

Feedback from teachers highlighted the very beneficial impact of the professional development, especially the one-on-one mentoring, on their teaching and their students’ learning. Teachers’ expectations for students and for themselves increased when they started to see the impact of their teaching on their students’ reading and writing.

I have gained so much. I kind of thought I was a really good teacher before but I am a way better teacher now having been through the professional development, the instruction, the support and the feedback.

~ Resource Teacher.

Principals were supported and coached individually as they worked to lead the climate for improvement in their schools. Principals and Vice-Principals began daily walkabouts and to a lesser extent, classroom observations. Principals ensured release time for teachers to plan and work together. All of these efforts contributed to a climate of increased accountability.

The biggest challenge for principals in First Nations schools is the isolation. Whenever I needed advice I just had to lift the phone. This kind of support does not exist for principals in First Nations schools.

~ Steven Styers, Principal, Walpole Island Elementary

**The Role of Anishinaabemowin-Ojibwa Language and Culture**

At the outset of Wiiji Kakendaasodaa professional development was focused on teaching reading and writing in English - the language of instruction in the schools. The Ojibwa language and culture teachers were invited to participate in the professional development program along with their colleagues. Over time, the Ojibwa language and culture teachers led some of the professional development sessions, as did Elders and other Nation members from the community. Topics included, First Nation perspective, language at the heart of cultural knowledge, detecting bias in text and on-the-land learning.
Together we have created a positive foundation for our children to ensure that they have the essential tools. But more importantly, our children now have a strong sense of ownership in their language, culture and history as a result of this project.

~ Chief Tom Bressette,
Chipewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation

These developments promoted the infusion of language and culture and increased consistency in the teaching and learning of English and Ojibwa in both schools. All school staff including those who were not Ojibwa speakers began to use common phrases in Ojibwa with students, in classes, school announcements and signage. School libraries increased their collections written by and about First Nations culture and traditions. The Ojibwa classroom at Hillside was moved from an “out of the way” location to the centre of the school building; in 2015-2016 Walpole Island introduced the option of Junior Kindergarten through Ojibwa immersion.

A lasting legacy of Wiiji Kakendaasodaa at our school is the increased importance of the Ojibwa program and Ojibwa teachers.

~ Cathy Hampshire, Principal,
Hillside School

Videoconferencing reduced travel time and costs and enabled ongoing professional interaction. Group sessions, feedback following classroom observation and individual planning sessions utilized videoconferencing. In the first year, one teacher from each school participated in a modified Reading Recovery pilot project (partial face-to-face and partial distance). Feedback from teachers was very positive. ²

Assessment for Instruction

Teachers need to know what good reading and writing looks like and expect all their students to achieve it. Teachers need an up-to-the-minute understanding of student strengths and weaknesses to adapt their instruction to student needs (3). A framework for ongoing assessment to inform instruction was established (13). Teachers and other education staff learned to administer a variety of assessments (e.g., concepts of print, running records). The results were analyzed and patterns of strengths and weaknesses became the focus for ongoing professional development. Early in Wiiji Kakendaasodaa assessment indicated weaknesses in oral language especially in Kindergarten and Grade 1. Oral language is closely linked to reading comprehension (14) and supporting children’s oral language development became a focus.

With all the professional development we could clearly see we were working as a team. With all the assessment tools that we used we had results and can see that the hard work has paid off.

~ Grade 8 Teacher

Through small group sessions and individual coaching, teachers adapted their practices to reflect their deepening knowledge of the relationship between curriculum expectations and assessment data. Tracking boards provided a visual representation of ongoing assessment and student

² The focus on teleconferencing to enhance teaching and learning is quite different from providing technology (e.g., computers) to students. Recent OECD research makes clear that simply providing computers to students does not enhance learning and students’ technological literacy is dependent on their ability to read (12).

Technology to Support Teaching

As Wiiji Kakendaasodaa entered its third year video-conferencing was included as a compliment to and substitute for “on the ground/on site” support.
performance and highlighted instructional groupings for intervention (e.g., educational assistants worked with small groups for short-term skills boosting).

Now when we have conversations with other staff they are saying how much better they feel about their teaching. They feel more confident in the way they are teaching and that has to do with the professional development we have been getting.

~ Kindergarten Teacher

Support for Students Struggling with Reading

When Wiiji Kakendaasodaa, began almost 50% of students in Kindergarten-Grade 3 had been identified with special needs in speech, language and reading. There is no research evidence that reading disability (dyslexia) occurs more often among First Nation than non-First Nation children (15). Accurate identification of children with special needs is vital to ensure early and appropriate intervention for those who need it and to avoid identifying children who do not (16). During Wiiji Kakendaasodaa, protocols were developed and implemented for the identification and intervention for students with special needs including special needs in reading. Committees were established to review assessment outcomes for individual students and make recommendations for timely intervention. Hillside established a bi-weekly schedule for these meetings and through videoconferencing involved a specialist in early intervention.

I have higher expectations for all of the students and I have improved in getting some of the more challenging students to work at their best level.

~ Grade 3 Teacher.

Faculties of education need to do a lot more to ensure all their graduates can teach reading and writing well, from the first day on the job.

~ Julia O’Sullivan, Chief Advisor

Parental Involvement and Community Engagement

Supportive parents and communities help children succeed in school (5,6,10,11). Both schools had always worked hard to involve parents, families and community. During Wiiji Kakendaasodaa the schools expanded their efforts, establishing new, creative and successful initiatives.

Parents were invited to participate in various family literacy events and to learn how to support their children at home. These included Family Literacy Days where parents participated in the literacy block and Literacy Night at Hillside where parents bring their children to school in their pajamas for bedtime reading activities in the library. Walpole held evenings where parents spent time at different “stations” discussing their children’s progress and how to help them with teachers. Surveys from parents indicated they wanted more evenings like this and had suggestions about what additional “stations” they wanted included.

The kids want to learn. It’s like there’s a fire that’s been lit and they’re proud to be part of the school. The parents are not apprehensive to come to school. A lot more parents are coming to see what’s going on.

~ Parent
At both schools parents were invited to events that celebrated their children’s achievement, school assemblies, awards ceremonies for writing competitions, and science fairs. Parents also took part in special events, for example, peregrine falcon demonstrations and a mudpuppy (salamander) visit by the community heritage centre at Walpole Island.

I feel like the door has been opened in a way. I feel like the parents have found their place in the school and I think they’re really enjoying the way that they’ve been included.

~ Parent

What turned things around was when we started to talk to parents and families about what their children could do instead of what they could not do.

~ Cathy Hampshire, Principal, Hillside School

Elders, community members, visiting authors and artists were invited to enhance programming. At Walpole “Celebrity Readers” (community members) came in to read and talk about their favourite books. Both schools funded the involvement of visiting First Nation authors, hosted book fairs, and offered enhanced experiential learning opportunities for the children tied to literacy. Through Family Gardening days and planting events, Hillside built and developed the school gardens and the children read and wrote about gardens. The Hillside gardens received an award from Communities in Bloom. At Walpole, Kindergartners learned about duck hunting, brought the ducks back to school, learned how to cook them and then ate them! They wrote and drew pictures about these experiences including how the duck tasted.

We lead a cultural program on Wednesday nights. We do arts and crafts and the children have to come with the parent. When we have assemblies we are packed!

~ Ojibwa Teacher

Increased parental involvement and community engagement went hand-in-hand with both communities growing pride and confidence in their school. School Principals consistently promoted the achievement of their students and staff within their communities and to other partners in education. The Chiefs provided vocal support for the Principals and schools in the community and through local and national media.

How successful is Wiiji Kakendaasodaa?

Everything we did together was dedicated to improving student achievement in reading and writing. This was the ultimate goal in Wiiji Kakendaasodaa. Measuring students’ progress was critical to ensure we were on track and were able to make changes if needed. Every year from 2010-2014 several standardized tests were used to measure student progress in reading, writing and oral language. Using this regular assessment...
schedule, we were able to track progress for individual students over time as well as compare progress in each grade year-to-year. An annual report was sent to both Chiefs and school Principals detailing progress and outlining recommendations for the next school year.

Measures
Kindergartners early literacy skills were measured on The Test of Preschool Early Literacy (TOPEL, © PRO-Ed Inc, 2007), administered by speech and language specialists. This gave us a good picture of their strengths and weakness at the beginning and end of Kindergarten. To track progress in oral language and reading in the Primary Grades we used selected subtests from the Woodcock-Johnson III ® (WJ III®, Woodcock, McGrew, Mather, 2001). Reading and writing achievement in Grades 3 and 6 were measured on Ontario’s provincial assessment of reading and writing (EQAO). All data belonged to the schools and they gave permission for the analyses.

The data allowed us to ask and answer the following questions:

- Did reading and writing improve?
- Did both boys and girls improve?
- Did oral language also improve?
- Did we predict which Kindergartners would struggle with reading in Grade 3?
- Did identification of children with special needs improve?

Did reading and writing improve?

Yes. Ontario’s provincial assessment of reading and writing (EQAO) was administered to students in Grades 3 and 6. Students can score from Level 1 to Level 4. Level 3 is the provincial standard and considered to be equivalent to a mark of 70% -79%.

Before Wiji Kakendaasodaa, most Grade 3 and 6 students did not meet the provincial standards in reading or writing on the EQAO. After four years, most students met or exceeded provincial standards.
It leaves me speechless to see how far the kids have come in such a short time.

~ Educational Assistant.

During Wiiji Kakendaasodaa individual schools exceeded provincial achievement levels in reading and writing at times.

**Figure 2**
Percentage of students that met or exceeded the provincial standard, by school and year *(Number of students per grade, year and school range from 7 to 28)*

Twenty-six (26) students completed the EQAO in Grade 3 (2011) and again in Grade 6 (2014). Of those students, 69% maintained or rose to the provincial standard in reading between those grades, and 73% maintained or rose to the provincial standard in writing.

**Did both boys and girls improve?**

*Yes* but girls outperformed boys every year in reading. After four years 71% of girls versus 62% of boys in Grade 3, and 78% of girls versus 64% of boys in Grade 6 met or exceeded the provincial standard in 2013-14. Differences between girls and boys in reading have been found in research around the world. We did not find consistent differences in writing between boys and girls.
I think it’s clear that there are huge changes in the school just by looking at students’ work. Our students’ work has gone from very few written sentences in the first and second grade to longer stories. The thought behind each sentence is more coherent and it’s clear that students have a sense of pride in their written work.

~ Literacy Lead

Did oral language also improve?

Yes. Our focus on oral language made a big difference. We tracked reading and oral language progress from the end of Senior Kindergarten to end of Grade 1 (2012-13 and 2013-14 school years) using Woodcock-Johnson III ® (WJ III ®, Woodcock, McGrew, Mather, 2001). These children made on average 18 months’ progress in oral language (story recall subtest) and 16 months’ progress in reading comprehension in Grade 1.

The students seem to have a love of reading. A lot of changes have occurred in the children’s attitudes towards reading.

~ Grade 5 Teacher

Did we predict which Kindergartners would struggle with reading in Grade 3?

Yes. The Test of Preschool Early Literacy (TOPEL, © PRO-Ed Inc, 2007) measures children’s understanding of the foundations for reading. Children entering Senior Kindergarten were on average within the expected range for their age. The communities prepared their children well for learning to read in school.
When we transition the children to Grade 1, they’re going to have the skills that they need. We talk about where we are; what we are working on; what our strengths are and what we need to build on. We determine our focus and we work together. The networking and working closely are important.

~ Kindergarten Teacher

Differences in the children’s print knowledge, including how books work, and ability to identify letters, as well as their spoken vocabulary, strongly predicted their reading achievement in Grade 3. These two subtests on the TOPEL were very helpful for identifying children who needed early intervention.

Did identification of children with special needs improve?

Yes. Accurate identification is essential to ensure resources are dedicated to children who need them. During Wiji Kakendaasodaa, the percentage of children registered for speech and language services decreased from 45% to 19% for Senior Kindergarten to Grade 3, and from 24% to 4% for Grades 4 to 6.

While the number of children identified decreased, the accuracy of identification increased. At the start of the initiative 42% of Senior Kindergarten students with average or above average scores on the TOPEL were identified for speech and language services but did not need them; 6% with below average scores were not identified and did not receive the supports they needed. By the end of Wiji Kakendaasodaa, the percentage of Senior Kindergarten children unnecessarily identified had fallen from 4% to 12%.

As expectations and the quality of teaching improved, students with special needs were more clearly distinguished from whose underachievement in reading was due primarily to the quality of teaching. This allowed resources to be targeted intensely for children with exceptional needs.

So many of the young children now have a better chance because they have not been mis-diagnosed with special needs.

~ Patricia Canning, Early Intervention Advisor.

Was progress sustained in 2014-2016?

Yes. In the 2014-2015 school year (the most recent EQAO assessment) 81% of Grade 3 students met or exceeded the provincial average in both reading and writing and achievement in mathematics was the highest on record at 54%.

The students seem enthused and motivated to achieve and now they are thinking beyond elementary school. They are seeing this as a stepping-stone.

~ Grade 6 Teacher.
Sustained progress can also be seen in changes in Grade 8 students’ elected high school routes. The students who will graduate from Grade 8 in 2016 were involved in Wijii Kakendaasodaa since Grade 2. In comparison with Grade 8 graduates before Wijii Kakendaasodaa began, the number of 2016 graduates electing academic courses in high school has increased by 300%!

**Figure 8**
Percentage of Grade 8 graduates electing academic, applied and essential routes in high school.

For years I have been looking at the scores of our Grade eights as they are getting ready to transition to high school and I have noticed that each year we keep getting better and better.

~ Resource Teacher

Overall, we confirmed that with effective teaching in schools that celebrate students’ heritage, culture and language, First Nations students could excel as readers and writers and fewer young children are miss-identified as having special needs. ³

There is every reason to expect that with effective teaching First Nations students can excel as speakers, listeners, readers and writers in two or more languages and go on to enjoy the associated cultural, social, cognitive, educational and economic benefits.

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³ For technical questions regarding outcomes please contact monitoring and evaluation coordinator Maggie Dunlop at maggie.dunlop@mail.utoronto.ca

I wish my older children had been in the school during the Martin initiative. I can really see the benefits my daughter is getting and how much she loves to learn. I want my children to have a better education than I had.

~ Parent

What are the keys to our success?

The success of Wijii Kakendaasodaa rests on the relationship of trust and confidence established among the partners. This took time and commitment to build but it enabled the collaboration and hard work that led to success. We are often asked what commercial reading programs or “how to” manuals were involved in Wijii Kakendaasodaa. There were none. Commitment, passion and hard work in both schools made the difference.

Wijii Kakendaasodaa lives now in the expertise of school staff, school leadership and the Kettle and Stony Point and Walpole Island communities who made it their own. In the end it is the children who are the beneficiaries – as we intended from the start.

Miigwetch for giving the Anishinabek Nation inspiration and unequivocal proof that, with adequate financial resources and strong school leadership, we have the expertise to provide quality, culturally relevant education and to administer our schools.

~ Chief Patrick Madahbee, Grand Council Chief, Anishinabek Nation
References


