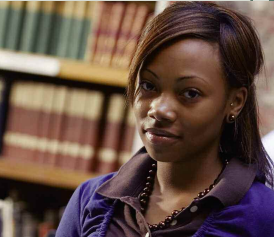


NOEL York Collaboration

“Our collaboration has enabled all of the school boards, big and small, suburban and rural, to move forward and access important data through the Cognos tool. That’s a significant success story. Cognos is the known world leader in BI tools, and these school boards have teamed up with the Ministry to offer a revolutionary collaboration.”

Diane Findlay, Project Lead for NOEL



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NOEL (Northern Ontario Education Leaders) is an alliance comprising the leaders of educational organizations from eight northwestern Ontario school boards. The alliance is a collaborative forum in which directors, principals, teachers, and school boards from eight northern Ontario boards unite to develop projects and optimize budget resources to benefit students directly.

In 2006, NOEL teamed up with the York Region District School Board, just north of Toronto, to form NYC. NYC’s goal was to pool resources and share ideas on how best to use business intelligence (BI) and other technologies within the nine educational entities to increase and encourage student achievement. With funding from the Ontario Ministry of Education, the school districts merged ideas and technological expertise to deploy a solution from Cognos, an IBM company. With a common objective and platform for producing a data set for student enrollment and accomplishments, the group is changing learning practices for tomorrow’s classrooms.

Challenges faced

As the NYC was formed, the members determined that they needed a solution that granted principals and senior management in Ontario schools timely access to critical student information. NYC needed to develop tailored school plans for continuous improvement, and enable administrators to direct more resources towards the students.

“There’s a culture here at NYC. I think that’s the key. The philosophy within these organizations is to use data to inform administrators and improve achievement. All of the boards are committed to continuing down this path,” says Diane Findlay, project lead for NOEL. “Historically, a lot of the educational data is old, snapshot information still used and recycled for decision-making. We are moving into a different era where we need to capture data immediately.”

Another challenge was the act of combining different data sources as NOEL and York fused together. As they began working together, the school districts needed a system to

Industry: Education

Geography: Canada

Information needs:

- Standardized reporting system
- User-friendly, intuitive tool
- Tracking tool for student success and progression

Platforms:

- Windows
- SQL Server

Users: 550

Solutions:

- IBM Cognos 8 BI
- Cognos Professional Services

Benefits:

- Easy access to information that is more accurate and timely
- Better informed decision-making
- Powerful analytics
- Flexible reporting
- Better collaboration among school districts

standardize the massive amount of disparate data formats that made it difficult to share information. By deploying a common BI platform, data would be shared and accessed communally.

Strategy followed

Both NOEL and York already used BI solutions from Cognos, but the NYC project initiative called for an all-encompassing BI solution that would incorporate new reporting and analysis for school principals and senior board management. Pleased with its existing Cognos solutions, the collaboration chose to continue its joint relationship with the company by embarking on a project to standardize all BI configurations in the NYC, and establish best practices for viewing and analyzing student information.

The Ontario Ministry of Education launched a province-wide initiative, entitled Managing Information for Student Achievement (MISA), which provided funds to assist boards to develop local capacity to use data for reporting and analysis. As a result, the Ministry provided NYC with three years' funding towards its Cognos BI project.

As the first phase of NYC's Cognos project, NOEL analyzed the York BI configuration and was pleased with the benefits achieved from the individual school district's setup. NOEL contracted Cognos Professional Services to implement IBM Cognos 8 BI and configure it similarly in its eight school districts.

The second phase of the project was the development of the system for NYC, merging York and NOEL. In order to move forward, NOEL and York had to compare configurations, determine the challenges and differences, and collaborate on best solutions. The final phase consisted of adding more data sets into the shared system, including new student information, and most importantly, new report developments and enhancements. Since the information was pooled together to be managed across nine different school boards, the data rules and policies needed to align to the same objectives.

"What we've created is a common data warehouse design. A common set of extraction transformation load protocols. A shared set of reports that deliver data to school principals that will actually move the needle on student achievement," says Russ Coles, Senior Manager for Computer Applications at York Region District School Board. "As a result of the ability to analyze data and create interventions, we can increase student achievement and therefore augment our bottom line—student accomplishment."

Furthering their relationship, NYC worked with Cognos to develop a tool to support principals in their school planning process for continuous improvement. The next step of the project will be to put this data into the hands of teachers, which will expand the number of users from 550 to 8,000.

IBM Cognos 8 BI gives users constant access to the data for analysis and planning, allowing them to go into a report, bring up an individual student file, and view their complete history. Cognos allows school administrators to view student history instantly, and develop progress reports and strategies for students on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

"NOEL and York have been implementing a more comprehensive suite of reports and as a result, the

principals are happy with the changes and continuing to ask for more," states Findlay. "So, we're working with Cognos to anticipate additional user requests and modify and tailor the reports as needed."

Benefits realized

Since deploying and standardizing its joint Cognos development, NYC has achieved better school planning and access to student records with the ability to look into both organizations and demonstrate the value of the collaboration.

"Cognos has improved teaching strategies and helped students. We are all very distinct school boards and our Ministry funding is based on student enrollment," notes Findlay. "Our collaboration has enabled all of the school boards, big and small, suburban and rural, to move forward and access important data through the Cognos tool. That's a significant success story. Cognos is the known world leader in BI tools, and these school boards have teamed up with the Ministry to offer a revolutionary collaboration."

"Part of what has made us successful is just the relationships we've developed through this partnership," says Findlay. "There's something about Cognos not regarding this only as a job, but rather as cultivating relationships. They've demonstrated that they have an interest. Many have kids in education—and they've all paid special attention to this passion because we are forging new ground in Canada."

Coles sums up NYC's collaboration using Cognos tools and expertise by noting that, "Essentially, the collaboration has eliminated the notion of 'size matters' in the utilization of world class technology."

About Cognos

Cognos, an IBM company, is the world leader in business intelligence and performance management solutions. It provides world-class enterprise planning and BI software and services to help companies plan, understand and manage financial and operational performance. Cognos was acquired by IBM in February 2008*. For more information, visit <http://www.ibm.com/software/data/> and <http://www.cognos.com>.

**As a result of the acquisition, product names have now changed to reference IBM at the beginning of the software or service.*