



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
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# Wiiji Kakendaasodaa: Let's All Learn

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
THE MODEL SCHOOL PROJECT

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## What is Wiji Kakendaasodaa?

A four-year (2010 to 2014) project to improve student achievement in reading and writing

## Who were the partners?

- Kettle and Stony Point First Nation
- Walpole Island First Nation
- Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative
- Pathy Family Foundation
- Lawrence and Judith Tanenbaum Family Foundation
- Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

## Why did we focus on reading and writing?

- Reading and writing are essential for school success
- At the age of 9 or 10, students 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
- Reading proficiency at the age of 9 or 10 is the most reliable school-based predictor of high school graduation

## Which schools were involved?

- Hillside School, operated by Kettle and Stony Point First Nation
- Walpole Island Elementary School, operated by Walpole Island First Nation
- Both schools offer Senior Kindergarten to Grade 8
- Senior Kindergarten has been an all-day program in both schools since 2012-2013
- Walpole Island Elementary School offers all-day Junior Kindergarten
- English is the language of instruction
- Ojibwa is taught at all grade levels
- All teachers at the Wiji Kakendaasodaa schools are members of the Ontario College of Teachers

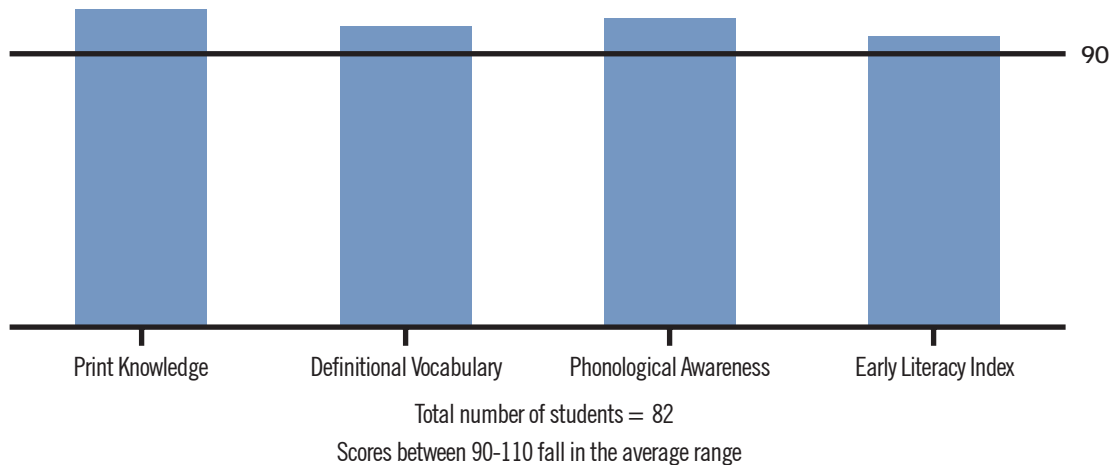
## What did we do together?

- Our project was informed by research on teaching and learning
- Schools personalized the research and brought it to life in their own community context
- Our focus was teaching time, teaching quality and resources for teaching
- Schools increased teaching time for reading and writing
- Teachers were engaged in continuous, intensive, onsite professional learning with emphasis on:
  - Increasing expectations for students
  - Increasing expectations for teachers
  - Teaching oral language
  - Teaching reading and writing
  - Using assessment to inform teaching
- Tele-education supplemented on-site professional learning
- Principals and school leadership teams were engaged in professional learning and coaching
- School-community partnerships encouraged student attendance and community engagement
- New resources (e.g., levelled books, assessment materials, classroom furniture and equipment) were introduced to support teaching
- Library resources and library-based activities were expanded
- Progress was measured by objective annual evaluations

## Who were the students?

- All students enrolled in Senior Kindergarten to Grade 6 during Wiji Kakendaasodaa
- There were 473 students in total, 233 boys and 240 girls
- When Wiji Kakendaasodaa began, high numbers of students entering Senior Kindergarten were identified for speech and language services despite scoring on average within the normal range on the Test of Preschool Early Literacy (TOPEL)© PRO-Ed Inc, 2007

**Figure I. Average scores on TOPEL for students entering Senior Kindergarten in 2011 and 2012 only**

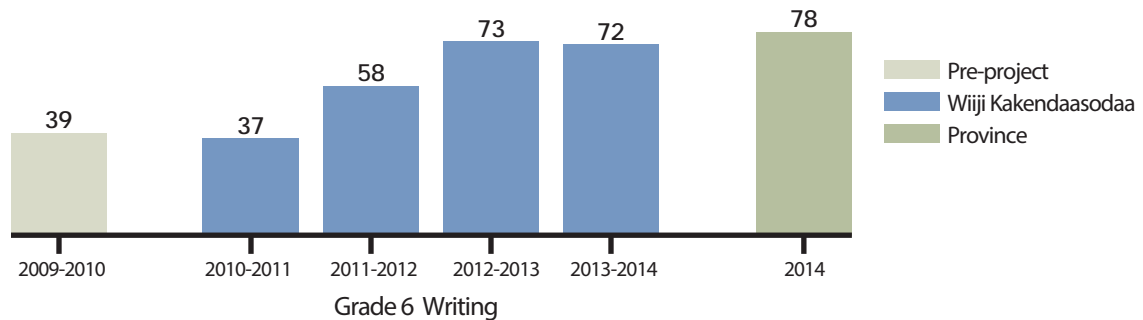
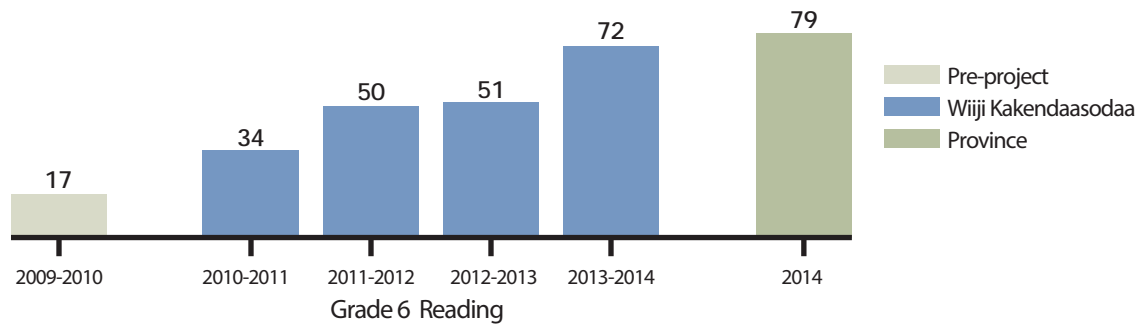
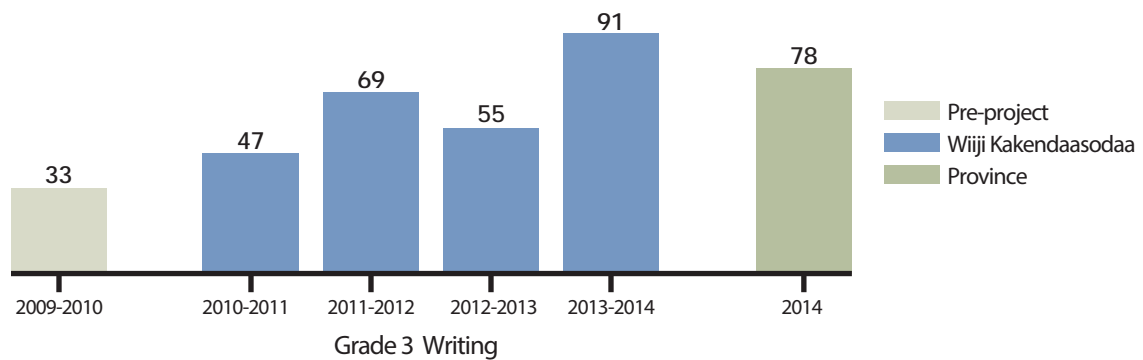
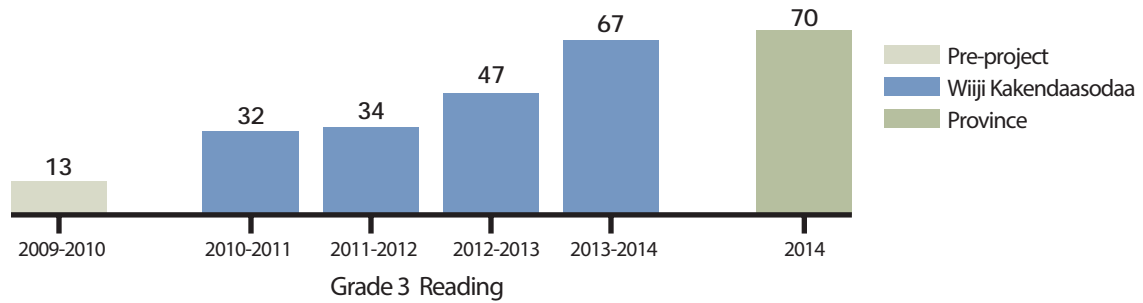


- During Wiji Kakendaasodaa, the percentage of students identified for speech and language services decreased from 45% to 19% in Senior Kindergarten to Grade 3; the percentage of students identified for special education services decreased from 24% to 4% in Grades 4 to 6
- As expectations and the quality of teaching improved, students with special needs were more clearly distinguished from those whose underachievement in reading was due primarily to the quality of teaching

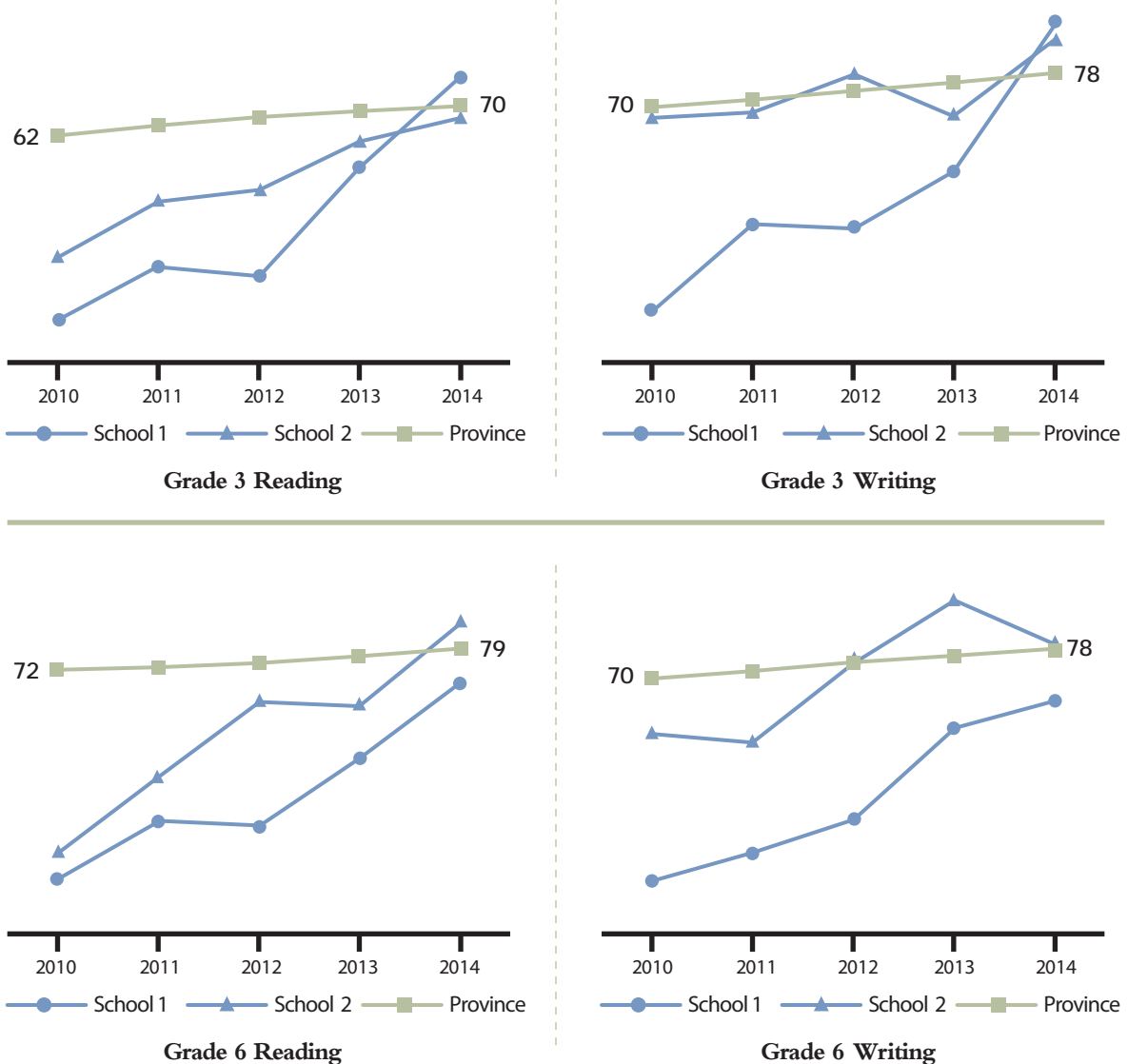
## How successful was Wiji Kakendaasodaa?

- Success was measured by achievement on Ontario's provincial assessment of reading and writing, EQAO, administered to students in Grades 3 and 6
- The provincial standard is Level 3, considered to be equivalent to 70% – 79%
- When Wiji Kakendaasodaa began, most students did not meet the provincial standards in reading or writing
- When Wiji Kakendaasodaa ended, *most students met or exceeded provincial standards*
- Individual schools exceeded provincial achievement levels at times
- During Wiji Kakendaasodaa, 26 students completed the EQAO in Grade 3 (2011) and again in Grade 6 (2014) – 69% of those students maintained or rose to the provincial standard in reading between those grades, and 73% maintained or rose to the provincial standard in writing
- In reading, girls outperformed boys every year during Wiji Kakendaasodaa – 71% of girls and 62% of boys in Grade 3, and 78% of girls and 64% of boys in Grade 6 met or exceeded the provincial standard in 2013-2014
- No consistent differences in writing were evident between boys and girls

**Figure 2. Percentage of students that met or exceeded provincial standard over time**  
*(Number of students per grade and year range from 29 to 51)*



**Figure 3. Percentage of students that met or exceeded provincial standard, by school and year**  
*(Number of students per grade, year and school ranges from 7 to 28)*



### What did we learn together?

The essential elements for success are:

- Collaboration among the partners
- School and community support for students and teachers
- High expectations for both students and teachers
- Committed, supportive principals and school leadership teams
- Maximum classroom time devoted to reading and writing
- Resources to support effective teaching

Most importantly, we confirmed that with effective teaching:

- Fewer First Nations students are identified with special needs, and
- First Nations students excel as readers and writers

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 enjoy the associated cultural, social, educational and economic benefits