

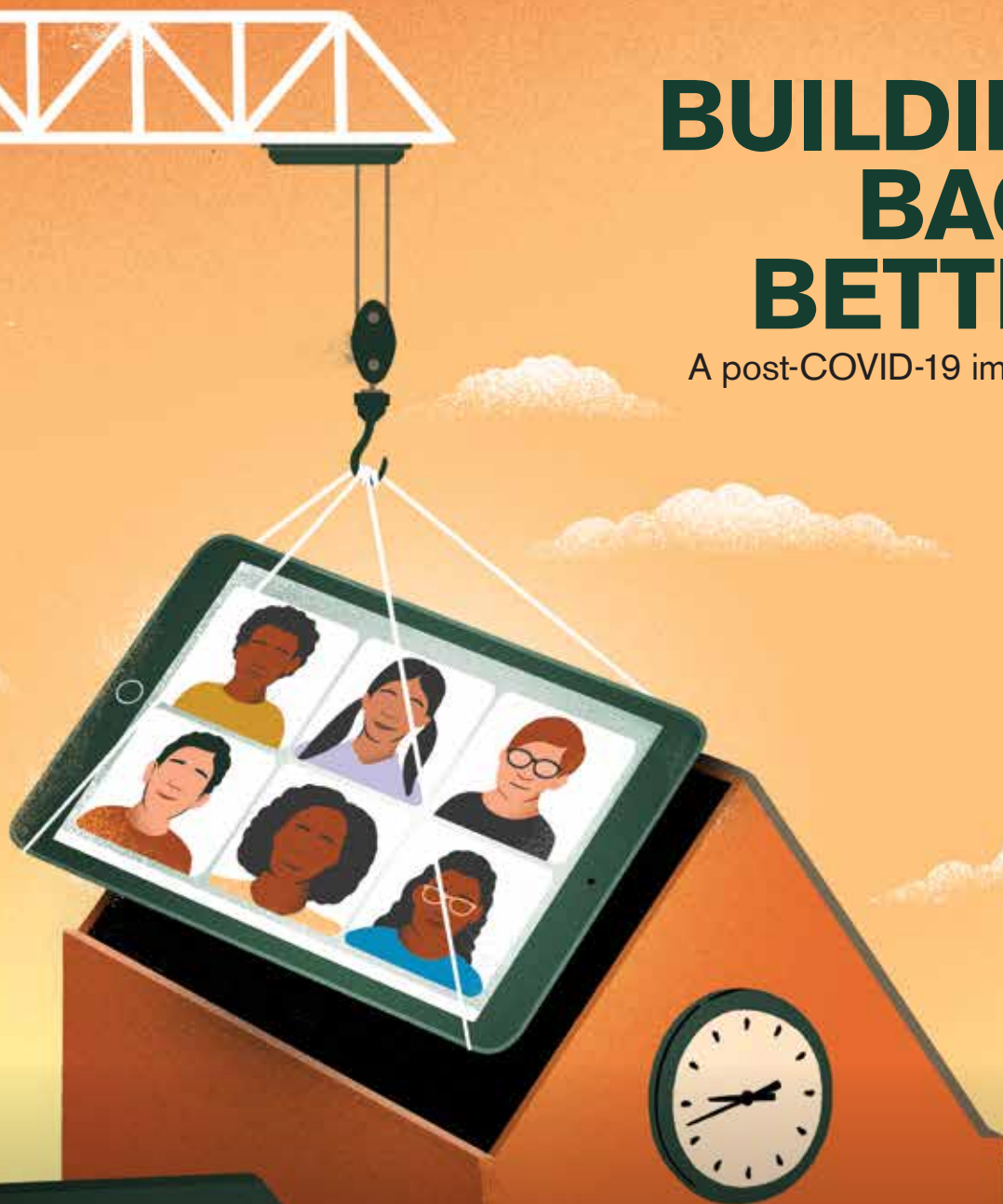
FALL 2021 VOL. 24 NO. 1

The Register

THE MAGAZINE FOR ONTARIO'S PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS & VICE-PRINCIPALS

BUILDING BACK BETTER

A post-COVID-19 imperative



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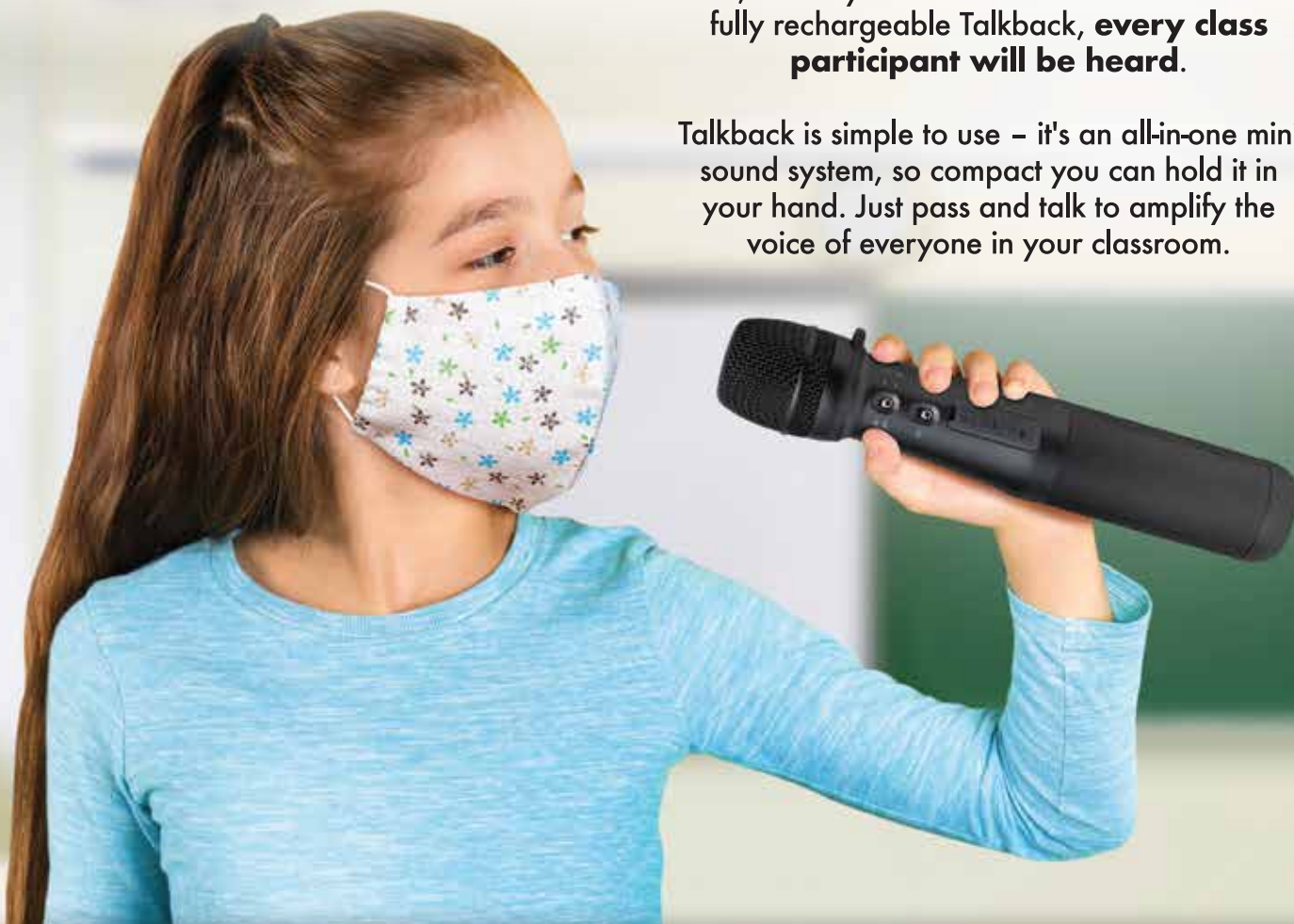
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Pivot, Stretch, Lead

Some new practices are here to stay



As you read this article, we will all have spent more than 18 months leading in a pandemic – leading schools, organizations, family units, even ourselves during trying and intensely uncertain circumstances. As human beings, it's inevitable that during, and even following difficult times, we tend to focus on

what we've lost, what's different. A perfect example of this has been the recent focus – we would say, much to the disadvantage of our students – on the “learning loss” or “learning gaps” caused by the pandemic. At the OPC, we've been consciously trying to change that conversation by disrupting the focus on the negatives and shifting our collective thinking to the positive. We've been creating space to talk about and celebrate the resiliency that's been forged in students, staff, our families and even ourselves during the pandemic.

Great leaders understand that crises are opportunities. Scott McLeod and Shelley Dulsky in their article, [Resilience, Reorien-](#)

[tation, and Reinvention: School Leadership During the Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), gathered data from school and system leaders, staff and students across 43 school organizations from around the world. Their conclusions make their article a worthwhile read, but one in particular stands out for me. When we ourselves and the schools and people we lead are in survival mode during a crisis, the inclination is to “minimize damage, alleviate the pain and restore order” ([Frontiers in Education, March 2021](#)). However, so many of you have continued to problem solve, disrupt and encourage staff and students to try new things. These new ideas are the foundation for growth, allowing us

to stretch, try something different and potentially create a better practice, approach or process.

Many of those interviewed by McLeod and Dulsky expressed a shared sentiment that there are “unexpected positive outcomes” emerging from the pandemic, including a new appreciation for the collective wisdom of the education community (consider for a moment the number of shared recommendations from Ontario's education stakeholders over the past year), new structures of family engagement (virtual School Council meetings and parent teacher interviews are increasing parental participation), the expansive integration of technology, the creation of new resources, and, most importantly, the new appreciation and recognition of student voice and self-directed agency. While the nature of these “silver linings” may not be universal, the fact they exist is. School leaders have the opportunity to re-think the way things have always been done and pool the collective wisdom acquired through this pandemic, to prioritize the new ideas and strategies that have emerged.

The OPC, too, is embracing this mindset. We are striving to do more than just survive the pandemic. We're exploring new ways to serve you on virtual platforms, fostering online connections, refocusing our professional learning offerings to meet your needs in a crisis, gathering real-time data that is immediately reinvested in advocacy efforts and conducting elections, Annual General Meetings and key governance meetings

in hybrid or wholly online formats. It's been a learning curve, and not all of our efforts have worked seamlessly. But we've learned, re-tooled and know that some of these practices are better than before. We are paying attention to these emergent silver linings and recognize that some are worth keeping. They are here to stay.

From our provincial vantage point, we see and hear about your resilience and courage every day. Your new approaches, ideas to support staff and students, the creative ways you are solving pandemic challenges – these become best practices that need to be shared across the province. They are game changers. What we need to do is take a breath and find the time to recognize these innovations, build on them and ensure they continue long after the pandemic settles down. This is what resiliency and leadership growth look like. ▲



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SUBMISSIONS & IDEAS

Would you like to contribute to *The Register*?

Do you have an article, feedback or ideas?

Our editorial team would like to hear from you.

Deadlines for submissions are listed below.

[Go to the OPC website under *The Register*](#) for further submission and writing guidelines and considerations.

Send your articles, reviews, thoughts and ideas to lromanese@principals.ca.

All submissions are subject to review and selection by the editorial committee.

Content Due	Edition Release
May 1	October
October 1	February
February 1	May

The Register is the proud recipient of the following awards:



Behind the Scenes

Welcome – or welcome back – to your professional magazine

Welcome to a new school year! By now you have completed the first busy month, and are already well into this first term. Opening schools this year, after a pandemic year of largely online learning, has been a herculean task for both students and staff.

We want to extend a particular welcome to new Members – those who have moved into a new role as principal or vice-principal this school year. The OPC is your professional association, with a mandate to provide you with professional learning, protective services, membership supports and advocacy. You can learn more about our organization on [our website](#).

One of the communications platforms we offer you is this magazine, [The Register](#). We publish three times per year: in October, February and May. A few years ago, we conducted a Member survey. A majority of you told us that you wanted a more eco-friendly magazine, so we decided to pilot a fully online version. Following a two-year pilot, we will now offer a print edition, along with a digital one, each fall (October) issue. Our Febru-

ary and May issues will be available online only.

In this way, we are endeavouring to be responsive to those of you who have expressed a desire for an online version and those who prefer a print one. [Previous issues of the magazine](#) are also available on our website.

This is your magazine – intended to provide a forum to share and learn. The most powerful and impactful articles are those written by school leaders for their colleagues. We welcome articles from practising principals and vice-principals. If you would like to contribute, please [review our submission guidelines](#), available on our website. A peer-sharing magazine is a relevant, timely and topical one for all our readers.

For those wondering what to write about, consider how you can contribute. Is there a new program you're trying? Have you experimented with an alternative learning method? What professional learning are you taking part in? How are recent policy or legislative changes impacting your school? What best practices can you share with your colleagues? How can you use your experiences to mentor others?

In addition to our magazine, there are a number of other platforms that we use to keep you up to date and informed about what's happening in our office, at Queen's Park, in the media and with our education stakeholder partners. Every week, Members receive a President's Message via email, providing a few topical pieces of information, media stories from the past week and a summary of what's happening at Queen's Park.

We maintain a website where you can find a plethora of information from all of our departments, a podcast called [The Principal Voice](#) and a blog called [Lead Learners](#).

We also maintain several social media accounts – [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#). These platforms are often the fastest way to keep up-to-date on what's happening. I encourage you to follow us and stay on top of all the relevant issues, news and reports.

We hope that *The Register* can provide you with support, ideas and resources to help you create a positive, safe and engaging learning environment for your school community. ▲

✉ psweeney@principals.ca

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A Juggling Act

By Peggy Sweeney

Photography by Stef + Ethan

Starting a year with many changes and challenges

On July 1, 2021, Lisa Collins started her role as the OPC's Provincial President. Each year, our Provincial Council elects the Provincial Executive for a one-year term. Lisa has been seconded from the Near North DSB until June 30, 2022, to take on this role.

Lisa can straddle the urban/rural divide. She grew up in Brampton and lived there until she completed Grade 11. A job change for her father then took the family – Lisa, her parents and two siblings – to North Bay, where she has remained ever since.

Starting Grade 12 in a smaller town was definitely a change. “It was quite a culture shock to me, at first,” she recalls, “to go from living in a big city like Brampton to North Bay. It was not as diverse as I was used to. It was a smaller city with smaller schools. I had been at one of the most overcrowded high schools in Brampton before we moved.”

After Grade 13, Lisa had planned to return to the south to continue her schooling. But she ended up staying in North Bay and attending Nipissing University. “I guess you could say that I ended up falling in love with the nature of North Bay. I’ve always



loved camping. Our family has a cottage not far from where we live right now, and we did lots of camping trips when I was young. I loved the nature and the many lakes in northern Ontario, so I ended up staying put in the north.”

In high school, Lisa started working with children with multiple disabilities, intellectual and physical. While pursuing her undergraduate degree, she worked as an educational assistant and a respite worker for families with children with disabilities. She also worked at the YMCA, running the after-school program. She learned to juggle a lot of responsibilities at once, which came in handy later in her career.

After graduating with a undergraduate degree in Psychology, Lisa realized she had an interest in teaching, beyond being an E.A. “I’ve always had a passion for Special Education. I grew up with two siblings with mental illnesses and realized I wanted to help students who struggle. So I stayed at Nipissing and went to Teacher’s College. My siblings have had a tremendous impact on my life and my career, to this day.”

Her first teaching job was at a dual-track French Immersion school, teaching everything from kindergarten to Grade 8. Fluently bilingual, she spent 11 years as a teacher, in both English and French programs.

While teaching, she realized she wanted to get involved in instructional leadership, and decided to pursue the administrative path. “I wanted to be able to reach more students, more staff and more families.” Five schools later, she has now been a principal for 11 years.

As a principal, she became the Provincial Councillor for her local OPC district, subsequently running to be a member of the Provincial Executive. “While being on Provincial Council, I became so interested in advocating for my colleagues, and I just wanted to do more. I felt that I could make a difference, and I also felt that there wasn’t enough representation from northern Ontario. To me, it was really important to have that northern perspective.

“Small and rural boards are a lot different than large urban ones. I really wanted to make sure that our perspective was heard at the provincial table. When I would share stories at Coun-

cil from our board, I noticed that a lot of my colleagues from across the province were often surprised by the contrasting way we do things. They were very intrigued by the differences and wanted to know more. That definitely contributed to my decision of wanting to pursue the role of president.”

Needless to say, Lisa is starting a term unlike any other. We’ve had a year of in-class, online and hybrid learning. Most schools have returned fully to in-school teaching, but some students remain at home, for various reasons. There has been a lot of talk about learning loss and how to ensure students can “catch up,” putting a lot of pressure and expectations on principals and vice-principals.

“We have a lot of work to do to support our students, particularly focusing on their mental well-being. What will ‘normal’ mean now, and what will it look like? I think it’s so important to disclose those gaps and focus on their learning, because there’s a big difference between face-to-face and remote learning. And I think that’s going to be difficult for everyone at first. It’s going to be a big adjustment. Supporting that transition is going to be really important to make sure we have all the proper supports in place for our students, staff and families as we embark upon this change, returning to face-to-face learning.”

Lisa will be in the Toronto office this year, and is bringing along first-hand experience about the past pandemic year. In 2020–21, she was a half-time principal in a K-6 French Immersion school, one of the largest schools in North Bay, and half-time as a system principal, responsible for student well-being. So she saw the year and the impact it had on students and staff from two angles.

“Like all my colleagues across the province, it was a tough year. The experience was always trying to make sure that we were available and had the proper supports in place for our families, students and staff, making sure that we were answering their questions, providing as much information as possible, trying to be proactive and getting that information out on a timely basis.

“It’s so important to disclose those gaps and focus on their learning, because there’s a big difference between face-to-face and remote learning.”

“More than any other year, we had to make sure that we were focusing on the well-being of everybody, doing lots of check-ins. And just going that extra mile, like delivering packages to homes, doing what we could to support families, finding resources for mental health supports and supports for our students with special needs. So I know what principals and vice-principals went through last year, because I lived it too. I understand the concerns, frustrations, anxieties and challenges. I know how flexible everyone had to be and how demanding the constant changes in policy and practice were.”

Last year was also different for the OPC as an organization. We issued more [public statements](#) than in any previous year about how to safely keep schools open, the conditions necessary for a return to school, learning recovery, Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments, vaccinations for students and teachers, taking unnecessary tasks off the plate and outdoor graduations. Sometimes we were asked for our input; other times we proactively provided it. Regular calls with Provincial Councillors allowed us to keep up to date on what was happening in schools every day, so that we could advocate for change when necessary.

“I think the advocacy that we did last year as an organization was very significant and necessary,” Lisa says. “We were able to share with the ministry exactly what was happening in schools. We offered constructive suggestions for improvement while advocating for kids and staff. And we kept our Members up to date with important information. The more consistent we can be in our messaging, the better. We want everyone to have the same information at the same time.

“Speaking out was a way of supporting our Members. Principals and vice-principals were – and still are – the ones in schools, managing the rapid changes and protocols. We see everything first-hand. It was crucial that we not only supported them, but that we ensured the government and other stakeholders knew exactly how their decisions were impacting schools. As an organization, we were in a position to offer feedback and recommendations, and we did that.”

Although happy that it appears students will be able to spend all of the upcoming year in school this year, Lisa acknowledges there is a lot of work ahead with the transition fully back to face-to-face learning, so that advocacy work will continue. “In my role, I’ll be able to share the perspective of a principal and what it’s like to have all the responsibilities and be a leader co-ordinating the decisions for the entire school community. One of the most impactful advantages of having a practising principal in this role for only one year is that we can bring that knowledge and expertise to the attention of the minister, the ministry and the government. It’s crucial that our input be sought.”

Outside of school, Lisa’s proudest role is as a mom. She has three children: 18-year-old Ethan has started his first year at Trent University, 15-year-old Ella is in Grade 10 and 12-year-old Jack is in Grade 7. “I love them immensely and am very proud of all of them. We love spending time outdoors, camping and going for walks. We have a beautiful trail close to our house that we often use.”

The love of nature from her childhood has stayed with her as an adult. “I love going to our family cottage, spending time at the lake, camp-

“It was crucial that we not only supported them, but that we ensured the government and other stakeholders knew exactly how their decisions were impacting schools.”

ing, being outdoors. I also love to read and have a passion for learning. I have not stopped taking courses since, well, forever! Even after my university years I have continued to seek out opportunities to learn more. So I definitely consider myself a lifelong learner. I also have a passion for travelling and would love to travel more.

“And I’m a runner. It’s part of the self-care that I do to take care of myself. That’s one of the ways I decompress, by running.”

For the OPC Members who have not yet met Lisa, she wants them to know this: “I’d like people to feel comfortable in me representing them, because I am confident that with all of the experiences I’ve had throughout my life and career, I have a very strong perspective on education and the role of an administrator, and what we need to feel supported in our roles so we can do our jobs. Growing up in southern Ontario and then living in northern Ontario has really helped support me.

“I also feel strongly that my background in Special Education has been a critical factor in understanding how best to support our struggling students. It has been at the heart of my personal and professional life, and I will always be a strong advocate.

“And I am particularly interested in the equity work we are doing as an organization. Some really great work has been done over the past year and I look forward to being a part of continuing that, specifically with our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion [EDI] Advisory Committee. There’s so much we still need to do, and that’s definitely going to be a focus for the year ahead as well.”

From managing multiple jobs in high school and university, to parenting three kids, to working as both an in-school principal and a centrally assigned one during the pandemic year, Lisa Collins knows what it takes to successfully juggle many responsibilities. It’s a key skill for any school leader, and one in which she clearly excels. ▲

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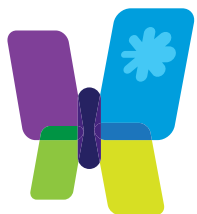


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Efficiency Doesn't Change the World, Education Does

Inspirational leader Richard Gerver shares his thoughts on global education

I am well aware that I am a lucky, lucky man, and my job means that I get to meet many amazing people. A few years ago, I met a man who has, quite literally, changed the world, and I have to confess that I was completely in awe.

I had been attending a conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on education and new technology. There was a fantastic lineup of speakers and more than 3,000 participants. It was a big deal, demonstrating just how seriously Saudi Arabia is taking the future of its education development.

I always love listening to other speakers. I learn so much from their insights, wisdom and experiences, and I was more than a little eager to hear the thoughts of this particular conference's opening speaker. It was even more exciting when I found myself sitting next to him in the speakers' room before the event began, and then to have time with him after the event as well, at the airport and on our flight to London.

Steve, as I like to call him, was the co-founder of Apple – not Jobs but the other one, the one who actually designed the computer.

[Steve Wozniak](#) is a relatively shy and unassuming man, a gentleman, actually. He is a man who, unless you knew him, would pass you by in the street unnoticed, with no show of

wealth or status, no bravado or pompous airs: just a normal guy who happened to change the world.

As a boy, he had two ambitions. One was to be an engineer like his father, because he knew that engineers can make the world a better place. The other was to be a teacher – because, well, teachers too can make the world a better place.

Of course, engineering won, and the rest, as they say, is history ... but only because of the unique partnership that was born when Steve met Steve.

What struck me most about Steve was his extraordinary generosity and humanitarian spirit. It was apparent from his earliest days as an inventor that he knew he was on to something when he started messing with valves, diodes and soldering



Richard Gerver (left) with Steve Wozniak (right)

irons. He recognized that it was something that could lead to amazing things for his fellow human beings, but he also knew that he wasn't very good at understanding the social impact of his inventions. So he would go to his local computer club and give away his ideas to people he knew would find uses for them. He just wanted to make stuff that made life better. It was only when Jobs became properly involved that Apple was born, and a business created.

Steve has always instinctively wanted to do good. I asked him what he did with his time now, and apart from still inventing, he said that he is in a very privileged place and is able to just try to do good. This included spending a number of years after leaving Apple working as a Grade 5 teacher in a state school near his home, thus fulfilling his second ambition. He loves teachers, saying they are “special, special people.” He also believes that “it is less important what you teach and more important how you learn. Learning must be a personal journey.”

The more I talked with Steve, the more I liked him and the more I thought about how much he demonstrates exactly what the future needs and what educators need to do to develop future educators.

One of the most provocative things he said to me was that as Apple expanded and he and Jobs hired more and more people, they created a mantra, a promise for the kind of people they wanted. Like so many things that Apple creates, the mantra is simple and elegant on the surface, but dig deeper and you can see the complexity of the challenge. “At Apple,” he said, “we will never employ anyone who needs managing.”

I thought this was an interesting way of framing a conversation with our educators ... how do we create those young people? Throughout my career, I have met so many enterprising, young entrepreneurs who have chosen to forgo the traditional routes of university and college to strike out on their own and create products that they believe can change the world.

This applies to education as well. The more I see, the more I am convinced that standardized systems and routes of learning will increasingly hamper our children's futures, and I have to say that I have far more faith in the lived wisdom of people like Steve, than that of the limited rhetoric of our politicians.

COVID-19 has underlined to us just how uncertain and fast-paced the world is becoming and, as a result, just how agile future generations are going to need to be. That means we need to move away from a system and society that prepares people for seeking out and protecting certainty – promising fixed routes that lead to fixed outcomes – to one that helps our young people thrive under new conditions.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2018, others who are changing the world met to discuss the future of education. Their views echoed and amplified what Steve believes. Research from the [McKinsey Global Institute](#) suggests that robots could replace 800 million jobs by 2030, while the [World Economic Forum](#) suggests a “skills revolution” could open up a raft of new opportunities.

[Jack Ma](#), founder of the Chinese multinational e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, said, “If we do not change the way we teach, 30 years from now we're going to be in trouble.” He suggested that “the knowledge-based approach of 200 years ago would fail our kids, who would never be able to compete with machines. Children should be taught soft skills like independent thinking, values and teamwork.”

Perhaps the most provocative speaker was [Minouche Shafik](#), director of the London School of Economics, who said, in a session on Saving Economic Globalization From Itself, “Anything that is routine or repetitive will be automated.” She also highlighted the importance of “the soft skills, creative skills, research skills, the ability to find information, synthesize it, make something of it.”

She went on to suggest that overhauling our education system will be essential to fixing the fractures in our societies and avoiding a tilt toward populism. “It's no accident that the people who voted for populist parties around the world are people with by-and-large low levels of education.

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It's not because they're stupid; it's because they're smart. They've figured out this system will not be in their favour."

[Fabiola Gianotti](#), a particle physicist and the director-general of CERN – the woman in charge of the Large Hadron Collider as well as other Big Science projects – said, "We need to break the cultural silos. Too often people put science and the humanities, or science and the arts, in different silos. They are the highest expression of the curiosity and creativity of humanity. For me, I was a very curious child; I wanted to answer the big questions of how the universe works. My humanities and my music studies have contributed to what I am today as a scientist as much as my physics studies."

Then there's [Barry Barish](#), the 2017 Nobel Prize-winning scientist, whom I was lucky enough to interview in 2018. He told me that when he was putting his research team together, he was looking for two very clear qualities. First, he wanted people with "rounded" experiences – in other words, not just scientists but people who also had the arts and humanities in their background – because, in his words, "single discipline people can't think expansively." The sec-

ond quality was that he only appointed people who had the ability to ask stupid questions. For me, that is one of the great catalyst questions we should all be asking to develop our students for the future. Do they leave us with the ability and confidence to ask stupid questions?

Finally, I had the life-defining honour of working with former US [President Barack Obama](#), who is very clear that the future of education has to be different. During our discussions, he told me that during his tenure in the White House, the most significant lesson he learned was that nearly all the problems that crossed his desk were ultimately not technical by nature, but human.

I would suggest that the same is true as we explore the future of education. We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by the technical, but start by asking far more fundamental, human questions. "What do we need our children to look like, as human beings, when they leave formal education?"

In times of such extraordinary challenge and change, and especially as we come to terms with the COVID-19 pandemic, we must take time to look up and ensure that we are not just focusing on making education more efficient. We need

Richard Gerver (left) with President Barack Obama (right)



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to heed the advice and perspectives of people like Obama, Shafik and Wozniak, who are working hard to make the world a better place, so that our students can pick up the baton and continue that legacy. We need to take a step back and find ways to connect the narratives between past, present and future.

Maybe we need to go back to the great old saying that “it takes a village to raise a child,” meaning we need to be more collegial and collaborative as we explore the future of education. In my last book, *Education: A manifesto for change*, I explore the idea of a lifelong journey in five phases, a legacy that perhaps we all need to contribute to.

Emergence: Before birth, we need to support young families so they can create nurturing environments that best prepare and provide for children in the first phases of life, and make the early links between the five phases.

Education: We must focus on how we use formal education to ensure that our emerging young citizens are prepared for the world they are going to inherit, and that their knowledge, skills, attributes and behaviours empower them and inspire them to head confidently into the next phase of life.

Activism: Organizations, educators, employers and institutions must work together to ensure that our young people feel that they have a place and a purpose as emerging adult citizens in society, so that they feel they have an opportunity to make their mark. Moving on, we need to help them understand their growing responsibility as they move on to the next phase: leadership.

Leadership: How do we ensure that the gained experience, vision and actions of their activism is not wasted and is instead used to take on leadership and responsibility for developing the phases further, and for evolving the narratives and sense of empowerment for the next generation?

Legacy: How do we ensure that our elders continue to thrive, to be supported and, most importantly, to feel valued? How do we capture and use their wisdom to inform and educate future cohorts?

There has never been a more pertinent time to take a pause from the endless pursuit of efficiency in education in order to interrogate the vision, the approach and the leadership that will define the future. The good news is that while efficiency will never provide the opportunities for a better, brighter tomorrow ... education can! ▲

Richard Gerver is an award-winning speaker, bestselling author and world-renowned thinker. He began his career in education, transforming a primary school into one of the most acclaimed learning environments in the world. He was celebrated by UNESCO and the UK government for the school's incredible turnaround.

Richard now uses his humour and style to deliver passionate, provocative and authentic speeches. He draws upon first-hand experiences and unique insights garnered from frontline education to explore the links between great leadership, human potential, change and innovation.

The three core principles underpinning Richard's philosophy are communication, empowerment and impact. His mantra is that systems and structures change nothing; people do.

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Taking Learning International

A global network to offer more opportunities to OPC Members

We are excited to share our new professional learning lineup planned for the 2021–22 school year. In anticipation of these new offerings, we will be partnering with the [Global Network of Professional Learning Leaders](#).

The Global Network is made up of professional learning leaders from the OPC, the [British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association \(BCPVPA\)](#), the [Queensland Association of State School Principals \(QA-SSP\)](#), the [Western Australian Primary Principals' Association \(WAPPA\)](#) and the [New South Wales Primary Principals' Association \(NSWPPA\)](#). Its purpose is to connect school leaders across the globe through shared learning and networking opportunities.

Our first webinar series, entitled “Leading Alone: Rural and Remote School Leaders”, started on October 16, 2021, and will be followed by sessions on February 24 and April 28, 2022.

Within that webinar series, our October discussion topic, “Nurturing

Educational Transformation Through Place-conscious Learning,” focused on maximizing educational outcomes for students in rural and geographically remote schools. It featured school leaders from Ontario and Queensland sharing some of their leadership stories about maximizing student outcomes in these areas. An opportunity for small-group networking followed. We then welcomed Dr. Leyton Schnellert, associate professor, and Eleanor Rix, professor in rural teacher education at the University of British Columbia, before engaging in more small-group discussions.

The next two webinars in the series will follow a similar format. Participants will hear from experts from Canada and Australia who will speak to different aspects of leadership in remote areas. The webinars will also feature stories from school leaders in Canada and Australia. Each 90-minute web session is planned such that there is an opportunity for participants to network in small groups.

We anticipate that education leaders from international remote or rural areas

will join the webinar participants, adding to a depth of perspectives within each session.

Topics being considered for February and April include schools as community hubs, staffing and disaster response (trauma informed). We are also interested in collecting ideas for additional topics of interest for those of you who work in remote/rural school leadership settings, through our [registration form](#).

As an organization, we are excited about developing new opportunities for our Members, and look forward to bringing you even more professional learning through the Global Network of Professional Learning Leaders partnership.

Stay informed about upcoming events by consulting our [Professional Learning](#) web page for fall and winter offerings. If you do not currently receive our weekly Professional Learning Bulletin, which features various opportunities, we encourage you to [sign up](#) today on our website. ▲

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Building Back BETTER

A post-COVID-19 imperative

By Beate Planche, Bernadette Smith
and Michelle Parrish

Illustration by Sébastien Thibault

The COVID-19 pandemic, in essence, created an uninvited social experiment that played out in school systems around the world. It amplified existing challenges, illuminated new ones and gave rise to transformative opportunities for teaching and learning.

Equity issues, such as access to high-quality instruction, varied from context to context. An uneven landscape of capacity to create effective, inclusive virtual learning environments resulted in a need for flexibility and innovation. Despite increased challenges, school leaders learned valuable lessons.

This article incorporates three different perspectives to this shared experience. Beate is a former principal and superintendent who now teaches as a sessional instructor for Western University in graduate education.

Bernadette served as regional coordinating principal of the elementary virtual school in a large central Ontario district. Michelle is a new administrator, but served as a consultant working with teachers and teacher leaders in a small northern board.

In all three settings, we shared the goal of using virtual learning effectively as a core platform to build communities of learners and develop professional capital.

During the 2020–21 school year, we have had the opportunity to participate in *Learning Forward Ontario* [discussions](#) and ensuing conversations comparing our experiences in diverse settings and learning cultures. Here are some common threads in our work that raise further questions for education leaders.

A Sense of Hope is Vital to Overall Health and Well-being

Change, and the anxiety that accompanies it, is inextricably tied to the human experience. It was clear across our contexts that the need to seek positive change is underpinned by a desire to be hopeful. Hope stems from the lens through which we navigate our roles as a reflection of our lived experiences, and the interconnections that are established with all stakeholders.

Working solely in virtual environments resulted in a sense of isolation for some students, which impacted learning. For some staff, the virtual environment raised stress levels due to limited day-to-day connection with colleagues and family members. Issues of well-being have impacted mental health and given rise to physical ailments including screen fatigue, headaches, and neck and shoulder pain. Several administrators of virtual schools conceded that feelings of isolation were less pronounced for themselves than for some of their staff.

We are left with the impression that leaders must advocate for student and staff mental and physical well-being through conscientious school management and triaged communication, clearly relaying the connection between hope, health and well-being; and growth and learning. Leaders themselves need to continue to nurture their own supportive networks, as has also been recommended by [Dr. Katina Pollock and Dr. Fei Wang](#). Their 2020 research with Ontario principals concluded that administrators can mitigate their isolation by spending time with “trusted individuals who can offer mental and emotional support, practical help/guidance, and alternative points of view.”

The importance of resilience, social connection and community have also been reinforced by our collective experience, as well as through our lives as Ontario residents. As noted in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’s [Trends Shaping Education Spotlight 21 \(2020\)](#), reinforcing safety and a sense of trust among school stakeholders is something that all communities identify as vital.

Our experiences have demonstrated that the ability to be resilient during difficult times has cognitive, social and academic ramifications. There will be a need for healing and a resurgence of hope this fall through affirmations that we have it within us to build back better.

The Impact of Privilege Needs to be Recognized and Mitigated as Needed

Our collective pandemic experiences further showed that many students were directly affected by significant economic hardship, instability, and housing and food insecurities, in addition to inconsistent access to digital tools and reliable, affordable Wi-Fi. Long-standing issues of poverty, discrimination and racism were amplified. Access to learning supports and resources varied significantly across communities including students with special needs, English-language learners and those living in remote communities.

As leaders, we must interrogate, reveal and confront how privilege manifests itself in our schools, and commit to learning about and dismantling exclusionary practices as we structure supports, and assign and train staff, to meet the needs of our historically underserved students. Intentional

efforts are needed to address disparities in programming and instruction that create disproportionate outcomes for Black, Indigenous, racialized and other marginalized students.

Dr. Bettina L. Love, in her book [We Want to Do More Than Survive](#), urges us to learn about and act in solidarity with communities to ensure students thrive. The pandemic caused monumental changes across systems, demonstrating that change is possible and that it can take place quickly. Through immersive learning embedded in anti-oppressive practices, we must affirm and embrace intersecting identities and the accompanying lived experiences of our students and families.

Advancing digital equity will require the upskilling of staff to meaningfully leverage digital tools, optimizing learning experiences that transition students from content consumers to content creators and fostering the development of global competencies that support the application and transference of new learning into multiple contexts. We are left to probe how we can translate this heightened awareness in our work, within our boards and education jurisdictions, to guarantee we’ve created and will sustain equitable learning environments.

Meeting Learners Where They Are Has Taken on New Urgency

Distance learning through virtual platforms did not result in similar learning experiences for our students or our staff. While many students were actively engaged, others were not. How will we re-engage learners who appear to have drifted away? That is a question to be addressed early this year. As we move forward, it will be paramount – for both our students and staff – that we begin with and remain rooted in a focus on mental health and well-being.

Planning for intentional and purposeful use of technologies that ignite learning is an important reflection in supporting teacher practice. In some schools, the streaming of diverse experts/guests and cross-class partnerships, including peer tutoring and collaborative projects, offered opportunities to widen perspectives and created real-world connections. In contrast, other schools were not able to offer such experiences, due to factors that included the lack of robust digital literacy skills and strong connectivity.

Additionally, while leaders supported their staff in distance learning, opportunities for co-planning, co-teaching and professional collaboration were hindered by pandemic circumstances (such as supply teacher shortage and cohorting).

We need to recognize that student and educator experiences were uneven both in depth and opportunity. Administrators and school boards must responsively plan for both student and staff learning, while at the same time removing the barriers that contribute to inequitable learning environments.

Building Bridges in Learning Includes Technology, But Is Not Dependent on It

While technology provided a bridge between educator and student, what stands out as important is not how complex a tool this was, but how it

furthered the learning and relationships between and among all learners.

Virtual schooling has exposed the reality that teaching and communicating effectively using digital tools is a required competency in our profession to build communities that are embracing and affirming of all students. It leaves us with the questions, “How can technology foster strong interdependence in our schools and classrooms as we strive to build back better?” and “How can technology best situate itself in inclusive and universal designs for learning?”

We must also ask ourselves, “What have we learned about facilitating collaborative learning through the use of technology that we will want to embed in next experiences?” For example, the use of a chat box and audio notes can be useful vehicles for allowing quieter voices to be recognized and for clarifying where reinforcement is needed. Using online breakout rooms opens the door to deep conversations between students, as it does among staff, when collaborating. Individual and small-group learning have their place in both online and face-to-face learning. High-impact strategies can be replicated in the virtual learning environment, but support is necessary to assist educators in developing proficiency in transitioning these strategies to online platforms.

Most promising is where we have witnessed shifts with how teachers are tailoring instruction and learning, by centring students’ voices, agency and expression through inquiry and experiential learning opportunities. It is important to recognize the advanced technology skills that many students and staff have now developed, and to ask how this capacity

might be captured in planning dynamic curricular delivery in a more intentional manner.

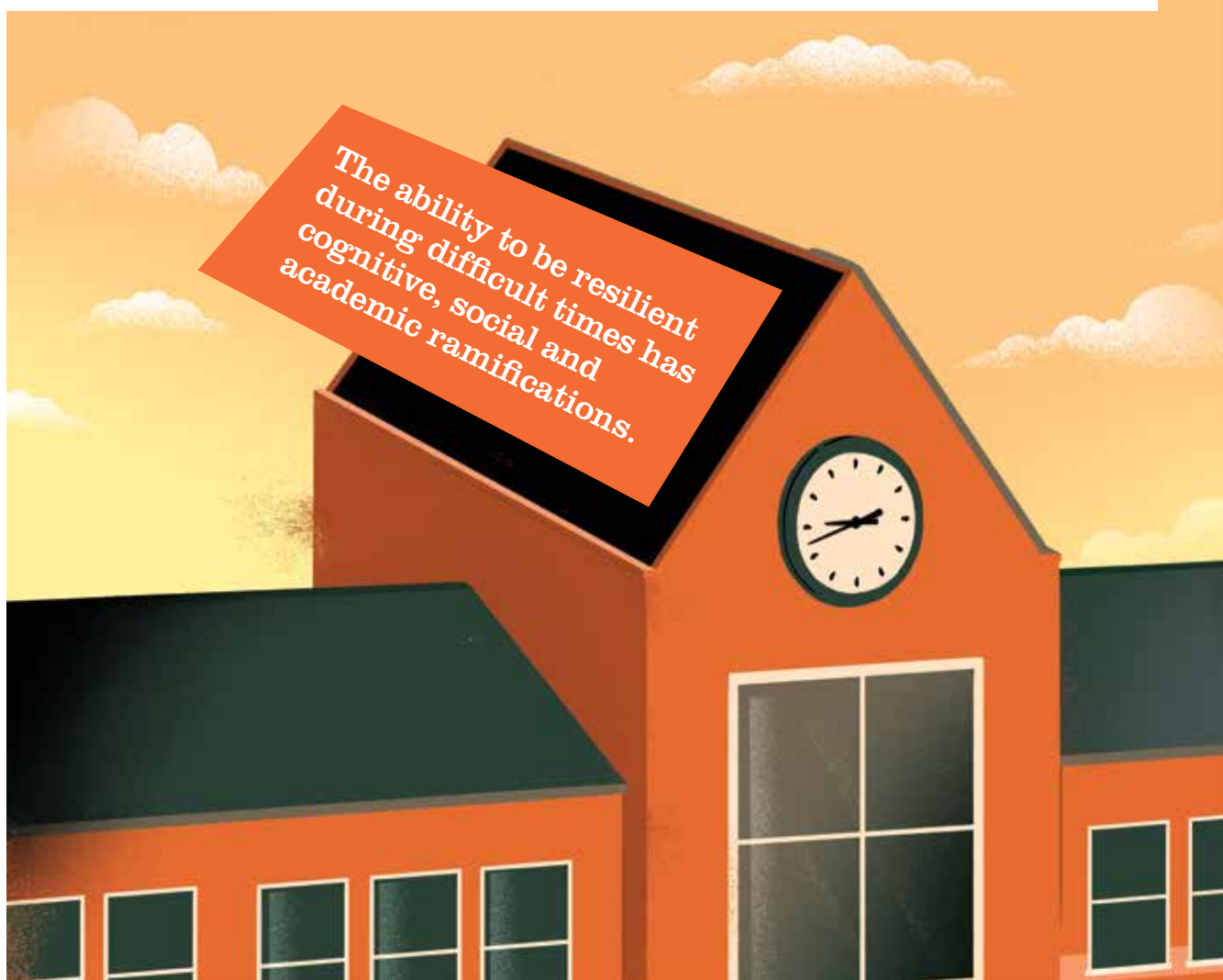
Valuing Social and Intellectual Capital is Vital

Whether we are working one-on-one with staff or students, or working interdepartmentally, the pandemic experience has reinforced that a new dilemma can also expedite innovation and flexibility in service delivery. Regardless of the authors’ various settings, the ingenuity of individual teachers influenced their peers’ learning.

Next steps will be considerate of educators who require further coaching and mentorship with strategic support from school staff, consultants and itinerant personnel. This model, supported by school leaders who also participated in their own pedagogy-enabled teaching and learning, reflects the pillars of the [Ontario Leadership Framework, specifically “Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices”](#) (2013).

Assessment Drives Effective Instruction

Becoming consciously skilled in the area of assessment practices develops through experience and a constant interrogation of one’s own biases, positionality, power and privilege. Developing teacher proficiency in this area stands out, especially in virtual environments. We all agree that staff now need strong digital literacy skills and a more robust understanding of a variety of assessment practices. Developing individual learning plans with staff can begin to address this in intentional ways. A question



for professional conversations is “What kind of differentiated assessment practices can help us track formative progress in efficient, equitable and inclusive ways?” At the same time, our collective virtual experience has raised issues about authenticity of submissions and the need to encourage different demonstrations of learning to reflect various forms of expression for our students.

There Have Been Many Leadership Lessons

Dr. [Andrew B. Campbell \(Dr. ABC\)](#) reminds us that belonging cannot be an afterthought. Belonging must be at the centre of creating a school. Hybrid and virtual environments are using non-evaluative virtual visits that offer opportunities for observations of the learner, the learning and the environment while building relationships between educators and administrators.

The social power yielded from frequent connection reinforces a sense of community and cannot be underestimated. Humanizing the learning experience is maximized through genuine connections and synergized through interactions across all stakeholders.

Intentional coordination by school leaders to enable co-planning and co-teaching sustains the value of collaborative professionalism to reinforce inclusion, mattering and belonging of staff and students. There is a need to make time and space for school leaders to work with their staff to build critical consciousness through dialogue, reflection and interrogation of biases when selecting resources and designing instruction that will challenge anti-oppression and white supremacy in our practices – the importance of this cannot be understated.

Two-way communication has always been encouraged between schools and parents, but extending this to be intentionally sensitive to issues of transparency and frequency has become even more important. The significance of listening has been heightened more than ever before. We need to learn from the partnerships that have been formed, and determine ways to continue to build and extend these bridges between home and school.

Bullying, hate, anti-Black racism and other inappropriate, harmful behaviours exist regardless of physical or online learning spaces. Traditional supports, such as a Code of Conduct and Technology Use Guidelines, need re-envisioning and revising in response to the increased access to and navigation within online learning platforms. As Christopher Chapman and Irene Bell highlighted in their 2020 [research](#) article, a sense of belonging and assurance of safety is vitally important to student well-being. We must reinforce that all students are our students regardless of their virtual, hybrid or face-to-face enrollment.

In closing, what does this all mean? It means that the pandemic has reminded us that dilemmas afford new opportunities for growth. We



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are left asking, “What needs to be adjusted in our processes; what needs to be reimagined or re-framed?” Every school leader must ask these questions as we lead in a manner that sparks vibrant and meaningful school experiences for both staff and students going forward. We have the capability to build our schools back better. ▲

Beate Planche is a former principal and superintendent with York Region DSB, now working with doctoral students as a sessional instructor in Western’s online Graduate Education program.

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Collaborative Leadership

Keys to building successful vice-principal
and principal relationships

By the Professional Services Team
Illustration by Matthew Billington

One of the issues the Protective Services Team deals with on a regular basis is principal/vice-principal conflict. Often at the root of these conflicts is a clash of leadership styles and differing interpretations of one another's roles, which can lead to communication issues and a subsequent breakdown of the relationship.

When this happens, it can become challenging to repair the relationship unless both sides are able to work through a process where they feel heard and understood, where they feel valued and where there is a willingness to find common ground.



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The key to securing a positive working relationship within the school administration team is working from a collaborative stance. Ideally, principals understand the vital role they play in coaching and mentoring so that the vice-principal can learn about the role of a school administrator, develop their leadership capacity and learn the operational issues that are involved in successfully running a school.

There is no doubt that the principal has the responsibility for ensuring that all duties under the Education Act are met, as well as the other initiatives/directives within the school board. The positional authority of the principal role is not to be downplayed, as leadership skills are needed to build a collective responsibility within the administration team, and the entire staff, that builds trust, respect, and capacity to achieve the goals of optimal experiences for students. The vice-principal's role is important to help share that responsibility and to build capacity so that the school administration team can be effective.

Considerations for the Principal

When a new school administration team is formed, it is important for the principal to set the tone of the relationship by making a point of welcoming the vice-principal to the team. To assist with this transition, it is advisable to meet in person and discuss the vice-principal's role and assigned duties. The tone of this conversation needs to be professional but friendly, and the principal needs to carefully consider the vice-principal's input.

If there is more than one vice-principal on the team, consideration should be given to balancing the roles, as well as matching strengths, experience and the desire to build capacity in areas identified by each vice-principal. Should the vice-principal work in two sites, this needs to be considered, in addition to the coordination required between the two vice-principals to ensure there is a balanced workload and an ability to attend important meetings such as School Council and staff meetings.

For principals who are new to the administration team, it is advisable for them to plan their entry carefully. They should meet with each member of the staff and acquire information about the school, the students and the school community. As well, they need to develop an understanding of how the school operates and the working styles of the vice-principals.

This would be a suitable time to observe and use a strategy such as "stop, start, continue" to develop a shared vision for leading the school. Providing opportunities for vice-principals to weigh in and offer meaningful input will develop a solid administrative team to lead this important work.

Principals hold positional authority within their role. This power imbalance between them and their vice-principals requires a responsibility to ensure that they are acting with care and integrity as they carry out their supervisory roles. To be an effective supervisor, it is important to develop a relationship where there is trust, support and mutual respect between the two parties. If that type of relationship is developed, it is more likely that any feedback or corrective direction that is given will be viewed as helpful and supportive, rather than punitive and negative.

Taking the time to develop a rapport, listening carefully to the vice-principal's perspective and asking for feedback regarding the principal's role are all critical to developing a positive and collaborative workplace environment. A necessary part of a successful collaborative leadership team is recognizing when to lead and when to follow. To demonstrate a commitment to shared leadership, the principal should be providing the vice-principal with opportunities to lead school improvement initiatives as well as operational duties. Again, this is a good opportunity for the principal to mentor and coach the vice-principal as they both work on their leadership skills.

A caution needs to be given here, as it is important to avoid the perception of micromanaging this work. Principals need to be engaged but should be careful that their feedback and involvement is not simply shifting to their own preferred management style – there are diverse ways of approaching these tasks. Before they intervene,

The key to securing a positive working relationship within the school administration team is working from a collaborative stance.



principals need to ask themselves if their own biases regarding the approach are in play.

A better strategy is to have regular meetings where work is discussed, and a metacognitive approach is taken in which the principal and vice-principal discuss strategies and the feedback received from their staff. If there are concerns regarding a vice-principal's performance, the principal should be providing constructive feedback on a regular basis that is helpful and supportive.

Considerations for the Vice-Principal

As a member of the school administrative team, vice-principals need to recognize the significant role they play in supporting student achievement as well as school operations. Instructional leadership certainly is important and plays a key role in supporting student achievement. Students need a safe, caring environment that is responsive to their learning needs.

Many vice-principals have gone through a promotion process where they have highlighted their skills in this area. However, there is a difference between demonstrating skills oneself and motivating, coaching and developing these skills in others. Being open to constructive feedback from the staff, including receiving advice from the principal, is helpful when transitioning to the role of vice-principal.

In terms of operational issues, vice-principals who are new to the role need to remember that adherence to school board policies and procedures is necessary to ensure the smooth operation of the school. Policies and procedures provide a cornerstone within the system to ensure consistency of practice within school communities, as well as ensuring that legal responsibilities and duties are fulfilled by the board. It is in essence "board direction" to employees regarding the way in which business is to be carried out. Every administrator needs to reference these policies and procedures when carrying out duties regarding budget, transportation, health and safety, and facilities.

Operational issues are often downplayed in the promotion process, yet they remain critical to providing a safe and equitable environment for students and staff. The Protective Services Team has been involved in many cases where Members

WE ASKED OUR MEMBERS WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM, AND HERE'S WHAT THEY TOLD US.



"In the eyes of the staff, both the principal and the vice-principal must be seen to share equally in the successes. When a decision requires 're-thinking,' both administrators must be perceived as having contributed to the earlier decision."

"Flatten the hierarchy between the two. You are co-administrators centring students' and families' needs and supports ... if you lead this way, the trusting relationship will grow."

"Remember our why ... support our collective growth as professionals, to support our staff and learners. Celebrate the individual strengths and the value we each bring to our communities. A strong team achieves greater heights than a group of individuals with discrete goals."

"Communicate! Make sure you are both always on the same page and share everything. Divide the workload evenly and play off each other's strengths."

"Every so often close your office door and laugh together, or cry together. Sharing your frustrations and moments of celebration is very important."

"Assume the best. Lead with the heart. Lead from behind. Listen more than you respond. Support each other like they are family. Mistakes lead to success. Be vulnerable."

"You need to be a team in every sense of the word. It is also important for the principal to share admin responsibilities with the vice-principal, but not just dump them on him or her. Working on them together helps to build the vice-principal's skills to prepare them for being a principal!"

"In my experience, the greatest impact is created when the vice-principal is empowered to be a co-principal. Giving positive support and making it clear that a decision by the vice-principal is a decision that will be supported by the principal."

To be an effective supervisor, it is important to develop a relationship where there is trust, support and mutual respect between the two parties.

have not adhered to operational procedures and have subsequently been disciplined for their negligence. It is vital to learn and remember the critical aspects of school operations and understand that the principal has much to offer in terms of a knowledge of these processes.

To be an effective member of any administrative team, vice-principals need to consider the role they play in supporting the team. Developing a positive relationship with the principal is necessary and requires an understanding that there is required learning for each team member. Acting with integrity and respect is important in the development of the relationship. Participating regularly in meetings, asking for feedback, giving feedback and meeting deadlines will all help demonstrate the vice-principal's commitment to the team.

When conflict does arise, it is important to recognize that this is an everyday part of the workplace. The key is managing conflict in an effective way that leaves both parties feeling heard and respected so that the relationship does not break down to a point of disrepair.

It is tricky when the conflict is with a supervisor; however, instead of harbouring resentment or feeling devalued, it is best to deal directly with the situation and voice the concern. Often, issues can be resolved by having a courageous conversation. Should there be a pattern of behaviour whereby the issues are not being resolved, our advice is to consult with the Protective Services Team for additional assistance.

An effective school administration team is characterized by a principal and vice-principal working together to support student achievement and efficient school operations. The development of a relationship in which integrity, respect, care and trust are cultivated leads to a workplace environment where there is a shared responsibility for leadership and decision making. It is less about hierarchy and more about supporting one another. Conflict will arise from time to time, but the ability to resolve differences is more likely when mutual respect and care have been established within the relationship. ▲

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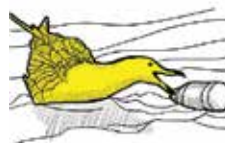
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20

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30

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Dec

8

IEL New Admin Webinar – George Couros

Jan

4

SEAQP (Online)

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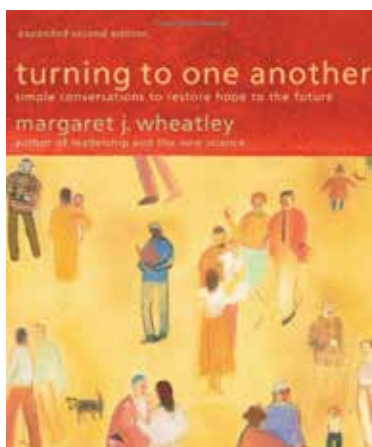
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Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future

By Margaret J. Wheatley
Berrett-Koehler Publishers
ISBN: 978-1-57675-764-2

Turning to One Another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future is a book that uplifts and empowers readers to play their part in bringing about positive change around them simply by starting a conversation.

Margaret J. Wheatley shares the power of simple conversations to change the world. She opines that despite the challenges around us in the form of aggression, poverty, pandemics, wars, natural disasters and violence, people want to live together in peace. To create a better future, we need to start having conversations and listening to each other: conversations where “we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well.”

Wheatley’s message is to listen to the people we agree with, but also to the ones with whom we don’t always agree. Most of the time people just want to be heard without interruptions – it heals them. We all have stories we want to share. The most powerful and beautiful part is that these conversations can bring positive changes in our personal lives and in the community at large.

The book is a very easy read, divided into three sections. The first focuses on the power of conversations and supportive conditions. The second is dedicated to personal reflections with images and quotes such as “It’s not the differences that divide us. It’s our judgments about each other that do.” The third highlights 12 Conversation Starters, outlined as brief essays. Each starts with a question and contains real stories, quotes and poems, along with the author’s comments. I found it helpful that the questions – such as “What am I willing to notice in my world?” – were geared toward the reader, as they benefitted my own reflections.

Turning to One Another is a useful read to help readers focus on the power of the simple conversations we have with our neighbours and colleagues. When you converse with others, this book will aid you in being mindful of

listening for what is different and what surprises you, a process that will help you learn something new and reflect on your current beliefs.

Conversations remind us that “we are part of a greater whole and allow us to find our collective wisdom.” I think readers will feel empowered by this book. Once you start reading, it’s hard to put it down. There are many valuable lessons and skills to learn about the art of simple, effective conversations that will benefit our personal and professional lives.

By having conversations with and turning to one another, we can help change our neighbourhoods, communities, countries and the world, with a goal of allowing everyone to live in peace and without fear – a much-needed goal in today’s world. I found this book an insightful read and would highly recommend it for every organization, educator and household. ▲

Gurmeet Gill is a principal at Fernforest Public School within the Peel DSB.

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Walking to Make a Difference

OPC's first director of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) Irfan Toor

I love to walk. Growing up in a small town with limited transportation options and in a lower-income family with limited

resources, walking was something I could always do to get where I needed to be.

As a school administrator, I was usually found walking around the building rather than sitting at my desk. What better way to see and hear what students were doing, and where they were doing it?

But Who Gets to Walk?

Recently, news reports have come to our attention of Muslim-identifying Canadians being subject to harm just for going for a walk. This isn't anything new. Throughout my life, I have faced violence when I've been walking, in the form of slurs, taunts, thrown garbage and close drive-bys. Children of different identities face these forms of violence as they walk to and inside our schools. How can they feel safe?

A young man in London, Ont., made the decision to murder almost an entire

family who were out for a walk, and we have to consider what led to that decision. What had he seen, heard and learned about different identities up to that point in his life that would justify that action to him? And what did we as an education system do, or not do, to help inform, or not inform, his thinking? School leaders play a role as advocates for the underserved, and have a responsibility to build equitable conditions within schools.

At the OPC, we want to support you on your path to becoming "equity champions." To support that, I have been hired by the OPC to be the first director of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This builds on my previous role as a system principal of equity at the Simcoe County DSB, a position I held for four years. In that role, I led the shift toward a more inclusive system through policy revision and creation, professional

learning, and supporting administrators as they navigated different challenges and built their own equitable leadership capacity. My role at the OPC will involve supporting the organization through structural and policy changes, helping with the implementation of strategic priorities and interacting directly with Members. As well, I will work with the EDI Committee and Subcommittees as they identify their action plans from the Member Census and its recommendations. I hope to provide guidance, support and mentorship as administrators reflect on their own identities and work to dismantle the structures and policies that sustain unequal outcomes.

When I walk now, I walk to claim my own space and to create a path for others.

"If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl, but by all means, keep moving."
— Martin Luther King Jr. ▲

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