

The Register

THE MAGAZINE FOR ONTARIO'S PRINCIPALS & VICE-PRINCIPALS

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Strategic Plan

Moving forward purposely



At the beginning of 2018, having just turned 20, we wanted to ask Members if we were still on course, determine our strategic priorities and then commit to the achievement of those goals.

We selected the Portage Group, an external expert company, to guide us through a strategic planning process, facilitate discussions with Members and connect us with data from other groups that had undergone the same process. We identified who we needed to hear from/talk with, the different ways to obtain this information, our key decision points during the process and our budget.

The Executive and Senior Staff oversaw the process over our 2018–2019 fiscal year, providing feedback and direction. Provincial Council was also a key directing mind shaping and directing the plan. Interviews were undertaken with District Presidents/Chairs, professional learning leaders. Members, external thought leaders from the media, government,

education stakeholders and our sister associations, seeking their views and perspectives. Finally, we received [survey data](#) from more than 1,100 Members. What we learned was both affirming and revealing, leading to the [final report](#).

Three factors driving change and trends in schools stood out, including:

- significant economic pressures associated with limited funding, aging school infrastructures and an education system working to serve students with complex learning and other needs
- work intensification in many areas including school safety and student mental health, negatively impacting school leaders' well-being and discouraging experienced educators from taking on school leadership positions and

- the rise of social media, emboldening many to provide commentary on system, school and student level decisions with parents, students and others expecting to be informed and involved in all areas of education.

When asked to share their views on overall satisfaction with the OPC, 82 per cent of Members gave us a five or higher on a seven-point scale. This ranking placed the OPC 3rd out of a group of 48 other professional associations the Portage Group has worked with.

Your top four reasons for belonging to the OPC include

- access to our Protective Services and supports
- advocacy for principals/vice-principals to government, public, media, stakeholders
- a voice representing principals/vice-principals to other groups in education and
- keeping abreast of what's happening in the profession and professional learning.

The big school issues you are grappling with include work intensification and mental health issues for students and staff.

The final plan outlines four pillars that will become our strategic priorities. All of our actions, going forward, will be aligned with one or more of these priorities and will become the focus of our human and financial resources.

Member Support: We will remain committed to and strive to enhance our support for Members facing employment

challenges. We will continue to work to improve provincial and local terms and conditions of employment to improve the quality and reduce the intensity of your daily work, so you can focus on student achievement and we can continue to attract and retain the brightest and best to school leadership.

Advocacy: We will develop informed, non-partisan positions on issues that affect students, staff, schools, public education and school leaders and make those views known publicly through a variety of channels.

Professional Learning: We must be responsive to your needs in substance and format, supporting ground-breaking research in school and system education leadership for Ontario, Canada and around the world.

Member Engagement: A core focus so that you feel a genuine sense of ownership, sharing information with and receiving information from the OPC through a variety of channels.

We hope that this plan will ensure a clearly defined and shared vision of strategic priorities. If all of our efforts are focused and aligned through the lens of this plan, we'll be able to better and more effectively meet your needs. ▲



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The Register is the proud recipient of the following awards:



Happenings at OPC ...



Dr. David Trantor addresses OPC Summer Learning workshop attendees about examining the emerging science that places relationships at the core of supporting mental health, well-being and achievement in education.



Left: Executive Director Allyson Otten (L) and Past-President Larry O'Malley (R) present a cheque for \$15,000 to Scott Sandison, Director, Community Engagement of Right To Play from funds raised through our Provincial Council Silent Auction, and a donation from the OPC.

Right: Leading a discussion on how to build foundational skills for leading successful school initiatives and having hard conversations, Jennifer Abrams offers up insights to administrators.



This summer our subsidiary group International School Leadership held a week-long session with leaders from the United Kingdom.



The Democratic Process of Voting

Engaging and encouraging student involvement

It's federal election month here, and if there is one thing elections can teach us, it's the power of the collective voice.

Elections provide an important opportunity to engage our students by demonstrating not only how governments work, but the importance of being aware, involved and engaged in the process.

Teaching students about the electoral process can provide valuable critical thinking skills, collaboration opportunities and an understanding of their own democratic value, including how their voice can affect the world around them. Whether it's researching candidates, parties and issues, voting in student-to-student elections, or recognizing the importance of taking part when they are old enough to vote, it's critical to get our students involved in the conversation.

Schools can take part in the election process by using various resources offered by the government and by third parties.

These resources include access to teaching tools, supporting documents and a student mock voting platform.

[Student Vote](#) is a parallel election platform that coincides with official election periods for students who are under the voting age. Schools register, receive materials, engage with campaigns and launch Student Vote Day. The campaign provides students with the opportunity to experience the democratic process and practice the habits of informed and engaged citizenship.

[Elections Canada](#) provides free educational resources and tools for supporting teaching and learning about Canadian elections and democracy.

[Employment Opportunities](#) are available through Elections Canada for students 16 years of age or older, who can work during advance voting

and on the day of the election at polling stations in various positions.

[The Ontario Register of Future Voters](#)

allows students who are currently 16 or 17 years old to register as future voters.

Young people who register will automatically be added to the voters' list when they turn 18, ensuring they are ready to vote as soon as the next election is called.

By helping our youth find their voice, we can help inspire a generation of informed, engaged, active students both within our schools and our communities. This is not a partisan process, advocating on behalf of particular candidates or political parties. Rather, it is an opportunity to teach our students about engagement, democracy and the rights and responsibilities of being a voter. It is an important lesson that will serve them over their lifetime. ▲

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POWER PLAY

Stepping up
to lead and
represent the
OPC team

By Peggy Sweeney
Photography by Stef + Ethan

Nancy Brady was born in Ottawa and grew up in Gatineau, Quebec. “My parents placed a very high value on education. My dad had to quit school when he was 13 to help support his family but went back later to get his diploma and college degree. My mom was always my greatest supporter and the most influential person in my life. To them, education was the way for us to reach our goals, so they pushed us to keep learning.”





Nancy pursued her parent's dream. Following high school, she attended Carleton University, obtaining her first undergraduate degree in psychology, combining her studies with being a member of the rowing team. She then caught the travel bug, spending a year in Australia, Asia and Europe before returning to Carleton for a second degree in English Literature.

That degree she completed part-time while working as an education assistant with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Her plan was to go to law school, but the time she spent in the school made her re-think that choice. "I fell in love with the concept of teaching. I met some very creative teachers who really pushed me to expand my horizons, telling me there were enough lawyers in the world, but there was a larger need for teachers. So instead of law school I went to Teacher's College at the University of Ottawa. It's a decision I have never regretted."

Combining her love of teaching with her desire to see more of the world, Nancy then taught in China for a year and continued to travel. Back in Canada, she worked in a Section 23 secondary school in Ottawa. "For five years I taught in a unit specifically for students who had mental health needs, schizophrenia, bipolar and other exceptional needs. My favourite part of teaching was the connection with the students. I loved teaching in special education, working with students who had mental health or fairly severe developmental delays. Little things a teacher did could have such an impact on those kids. That was always my passion."

After eight years teaching at the secondary level, Nancy moved into administration. Her first role was as a vice-principal in a 6-8 school. She found the move to be interesting and a nice way to segue into the elementary panel. A couple of years later she was promoted to principal, starting at a K-6 community school. "That was a great school to start my principal career. It was situated in one of the most challenging neighbourhoods in Ottawa, but it had an amazing staff who did everything they absolutely could to level the playing field for the students."

Three years later, the school went through an accommodation review consultation, resulting in the school being closed. "That was the most challenging and difficult thing that I ever had to do as an administrator, as a principal. The community was obviously devastated. I had to do everything I could to support them while still following the decisions made by the board. I learned a great deal about the importance of interpersonal skills, balancing opposing views and

just being there for your students and your community in whatever capacity you could be.”

Her next school was one receiving students from a closed school, putting her on the opposite end of the spectrum, welcoming new students. “We had to amalgamate two groups together. Because I had already been through the concept of closure, the board felt that I would be better able to understand the community’s concerns about coming into a new school. It was challenging in a different way, building a sense of belonging in a new school culture, but it was an interesting time. I learned a lot.”

Her next school was a K-8 in another underprivileged community. “That kind of school became my calling. All of my schools have been in those types of communities, exactly the community I like to work with. We had very caring and dedicated staff. We were one of the schools that received the first group of Syrian refugees that came to Ottawa. That really pushed our team in terms of differentiating teaching practices and professional collaboration.”

After a few more years, Nancy wanted to go back to the secondary level. She spent three years at Ridgemont High School before being seconded to the OPC.

Her OPC involvement began in 2008. The local Ottawa-Carleton Bytown association was putting together a Terms and Conditions team for upcoming negotiations. Nancy was approached by a number of elementary colleagues who asked her to take on a role. She sat in on local executive meetings, attended some training sessions in Toronto and developed a keen interest in the OPC both locally and at the provincial level.

She was then approached to take on the co-president role at the local level, moving on to become a Provincial Councillor and then being elected to the Provincial Executive. Again, she was approached by her colleagues to run for President. “I decided to run for the same reason I had taken on the local roles – to try to make a positive impact and a difference for my principal and vice-principal colleagues. I’ve never been afraid to stand up and share my knowledge and my opinions in an appropriate, diplomatic manner. This felt like an opportunity to take that bigger leap.”

In July, Nancy began her one-year role as President. Her goal in the role? “That’s a hard question to answer, because so much of what I will end up doing will depend on the year we’re going to have, which we never know in advance. I would like to work on the implementation of our strategic plan, working to achieve the goals our Members have set out for us.

“A big part of the role will also be working at the ground level for our people who are in the role. I want to be a strong voice not only articulating the challenges that my colleagues may face in their schools, but also advocating for the supports that they are going to require for what could potentially be a very difficult year.”

With teacher and support staff negotiations already underway, the difficult year that Nancy refers to is the potential for labour unrest. “We may see unrest or disruption. While we want to assume the best, you have to prepare for what could happen.

“Our political advocacy is a balancing act. We need to be non-partisan, professional and diplomatic. But we also have to stand up and be heard.”

“Based on past practice and having gone through it myself, we know that principals and vice-principals may face challenges in maintaining school operations, challenges from our stakeholders, students, parents, school boards and the ministry. It can be difficult to maintain a positive school climate in the midst of negotiations. To prepare, the OPC has already begun addressing potential issues by offering a labour relations workshop in many of our districts. We’re consulting with our Provincial Councillors and our local leadership teams.

“We will need to ensure that we’re obtaining clear and timely information from our Members if difficulties arise in regard to the labour disruption. We’ll need to work closely with our stakeholder partners to ensure administrators have the supports they need to run their schools and ensure student success.

“And a key component of this is also ensuring our own wellness. Many school leaders put themselves at the bottom of their ladder. They take care of everyone before themselves, and that becomes even more common in the midst of labour disruptions. So, that has to be at the forefront. In the past, when the disruptions have occurred, more demands were placed on principals and vice-principals. We take on additional roles, additional duties within our schools, trying to fill all the gaps. But we have to recognize that we can’t do everything. We’ll need help, resources and support.”

As the OPC continues its political advocacy, [there is a new Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce](#), with whom we will now be working. In July, Nancy met with the Minister and had the opportunity to talk about some of the issues on our radar. “It was nice to meet the Minister and introduce ourselves, our association and some of our concerns. He was very engaged and asked some good questions about our issues. But regardless of who the Minister is, we will continue to maintain a strong relationship with that office to ensure that principal and vice-principal voices are being heard and that we’re advocating for what is best for our students.

“Our political advocacy is a balancing act. We need to be non-partisan, professional and diplomatic. But we also have to stand up and be heard. That isn’t always easy to do but it’s essential for our organization. And it’s even more important considering the rocky year we may be heading into.

“We’ll continue to do this by developing and sharing position papers. We need to make sure we’re on important committees. School leaders have a great deal of expertise that the Minister can use to understand what’s going on in schools. Our job is to be an advocate about what our Members and our students need to be successful.”

Another role Nancy will take on this year is continuing to promote the OPC internationally. In August 2021, we will be hosting the International Confederation of Principals (ICP) World Convention. The last one we hosted in 2011 attracted over 2,000 delegates from 40 countries. “I’m looking forward to making new contacts and building on the international contacts we already have to encourage them to attend the ICP convention. We have a program committee underway to select workshops and keynote speakers and we’ll be promoting the event as well. It’ll be another great opportunity for our Members to undertake professional learning with colleagues from Ontario and Canada, but also from many countries around the world, sharing experiences, learning best practices and making new contacts.”

Nancy has remained in Ottawa near her father, sister, nephews and great niece and great nephews. She’s always been active in sports and still plays hockey, an activity that she says keeps her grounded.

“I also have a wonderful partner of 20 years, Marilyn, who pushes me daily to maintain balance in my life and reminds me what’s really important. I couldn’t have taken on the role of the president without her unwavering support.”

One of her favourite childhood spots was a family cottage in Prince Edward County, where Nancy has fond memories of family gatherings,

card games and lake swims. It’s her cottage now and she continues to use it as a special retreat. “It’s still my favorite place to be, where I can visit great wineries, artisan shops and beaches and spend time with family and friends. It’s truly an important part of my wellness.”

Despite being from Ottawa, Nancy is also a huge Toronto Maple Leafs fan, with many pieces of the team’s paraphernalia outfitting her office. “I was a Leafs fan before Ottawa had a team, and I stayed with them. I get a lot of grief for that in Ottawa.”

Always the educator, she laughingly uses a teacher analogy. “When a new kid arrives in the neighbourhood, do you leave your old friends? No. That’s not okay. That’s not what we teach kids.” The explanation may not satisfy Ottawa Senators fans, but at least she will get less grief during her year in Toronto.

While excited to take on the new role, Nancy is also anxious, acknowledging it will be a big responsibility. “I want all OPC Members to know that they will be my priority. I took on this role knowing that I was going to represent over 5,000 principals and vice-principals, and that is a big task. This role isn’t about me – it’s about our colleagues – the people who are standing there with me.” ▲

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Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education (OPASSE)

Formerly: The Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines



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- ✓ **Concussion protocols** to help prevent and identify suspected concussions and manage a student’s safe return to school and physical activity



safety.ophea.net



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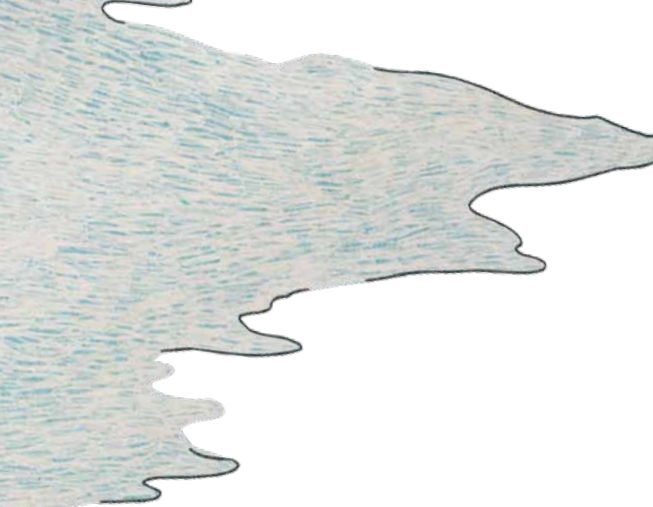
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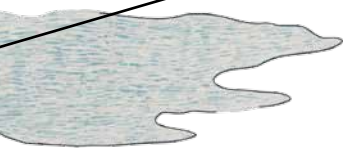
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The role of “Lead Learner” has been a key descriptor of school leaders for more than a decade. Education researchers Ken Leithwood and Michael Fullan have underscored the importance of the principal’s role in leading school improvement efforts. [*The Ontario Leadership Framework \(OLF\)*](#), developed in 2006 and revised in 2013, describes the work of school and system leaders in an effort to characterize best practices.

The core function of schools is to optimize outcomes for students – student achievement and student wellness. By focusing on these outcomes, Ontario’s public education system has become a top performer, with more students graduating and able to demonstrate their proficiency in literacy and math.

Challenging Times



Leading through labour uncertainty

By the OPC Protective Services Team
Illustration by Marco Cibola





This hard work in schools has been undertaken by teachers, support staff and school administrators alike, as they have worked collaboratively to engage students in a rigorous education curriculum. School teams have been supported by central staff who are working to ensure that the entire system is engaged in board improvement plan efforts.

When there is uncertainty in the education sector, school leaders should focus on the personal resource section of the OLF. Specifically, the cognitive, social and psychological resources described are particularly important when dealing with challenging times.

Unionized Environments within the Education Sector?

Over the years, our education system has become more unionized as employee groups have organized and represented a more diverse labour force. Unions have the right to represent their members and individual members have the right to consult with their union and bring forward concerns in the workplace.

As part of most collective agreements, there is an expectation for consultation regarding working conditions. We recognize the best practice is for union stewards and principals to meet and establish a respectful workplace relationship and to ensure that staff are represented in decision-making within the school.

During the past 20 years, there have been periods of labour unrest in our sector. Since the advent of provincial bargaining in 2004, unions representing teachers and support staff have used strike action during both the

Being able to manage your own emotions while understanding that this environment is not something you can directly influence are important parts of retaining a sense of optimism that

“we will work through this.”

What is a strike (job action)? School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014 s 35

In the education sector, a strike includes any action or activity by employees in combination or in accordance with a common understanding that is designed to have the effect of curtailing, restricting, limiting or interfering with,

- the normal activities of a school board or its employees,
- the operation or functioning of one or more of a school board's schools or of one or more of the programs in one or more schools of a school board, or
- the performance of the duties of teachers set out in the Education Act or the regulations under it,

including any withdrawal of services or work to rule by teachers acting in concert or with a common understanding.

provincial and local bargaining periods. The intention of strike action is to disrupt the normal activities within the school or the board, with principals and vice-principals directly feeling the impact.

Work-to-rule is a type of job action in which all employees in a bargaining unit withdraw certain services in order to cause

disruptions and frustration to the employer. Often, employees are instructed by their union to do the minimum required and to follow all safety or other regulations, but to refuse to perform other designated tasks that they would normally perform.

Individual employees do not have the right to withdraw services on their own initiative, nor can they choose to perform the work that the union has determined it will withdraw. If they do, they face fines and other penalties by the union. A work-to-rule is, by definition, concerted action by all employees in a bargaining unit.

Personal Leadership Resources At Work

We need to consider the application of the personal leadership resources as we work

TIPS

for Principals and Vice-Principals during Job Action

through the context of job action. It is important to remember that the members of the bargaining unit have the legal right to take collective action, including a strike. Being able to manage your own emotions while understanding that this environment is not something you can directly influence are important parts of retaining a sense of optimism that “we will work through this.” Furthermore, be mindful that the individual members are part of your staff. These are the people you have had a good working relationship with before the labour unrest period began and they are the people you will need to work with after the labour unrest has concluded. Bear in mind that the individual staff members are also under stress, and there will need to be a time for relationship restoration as they transition from job action to post job action.

In previous job action, school leaders were responsible for picking up many of the duties that other staff were refusing (collectively) to perform in order to minimize disruption for students and maintain safe and sanitary schools. This may mean that other non-essential duties should be suspended or removed during this time. Maintain close contact with your superintendent, as well as your administrator colleagues, to deal with any issues that may arise. Consistency of messaging and action across your district will help to manage expectations and minimize confusion.

The most important thing you can do to support your school during a work-to-rule campaign is to engage in frequent and clear communication, both to your school community and to the board. Having meetings with School or Student Councils early to make sure these communities have realistic expectations for the period of labour unrest can be helpful. In all messaging, seek clarity from the board and do your part to ensure consistency of the message with the rest of your district. Immediately communicate any health and safety concerns arising in the school to the board to ensure they can be addressed quickly. School board decision-making in reaction to the job action will depend on receiving an accurate picture of what is happening on the ground in schools.

District Support During Job Action

Recently, we conducted a Labour Relations workshop in more than half the boards in the province. These half-day sessions, involving our Members and board senior staff, were designed to deal with the anticipatory stress that comes from knowing that collective agreements expired at the end of August, and the uncertainty regarding how this will play out in school boards across the province. As part of these sessions, we brainstormed a number of key strategies that local districts could provide one another should job action occur. The themes that surfaced were communication, consistency of practice and wellness.

The OPC will also be communicating with school boards through the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association (OPSBA) and the Council of Directors of Education (CODE). From time-to-time, our Provincial Councillors may reach out to you to gather information about concerns you have regarding how the job action is impacting your school. This ongoing collection and dissemination of information can have a direct impact on decision-making province-wide, so we urge you to participate. We will have Tip Sheets available on our website as well as regular communications from our President. These supports are designed to provide you

TIPS

for Local Districts during Job Action

- Refrain from personalizing any of the actions by staff members.
 - Read the communications from the board office carefully each day so you know what to expect and how to respond to the current phase.
 - If you are unsure of how to respond to a staff member’s actions, check with your superintendent/human resources so that you act consistent with board direction.
 - Reach out to your administrator network as a way to stay in contact with your colleagues and combat feelings of isolation.
 - Check with your superintendent regarding the correct response to parent concerns.
 - Stay neutral with respect to your own response to job action. Don’t engage in political discussions either within the school community or in your own community.
-
- Establish a communication network to check in with colleagues, particularly new and single administrators.
 - During the check ins, collect data and report concerning issues that are arising in schools and communicate them to the Senior Team.
 - Communicate regularly with principal representatives who are part of the local central response committee, as well as the senior staff.
 - Discuss the strategy of deploying vice-principals and centrally assigned principals and vice-principals to support single administrator sites with the central response team and the senior staff.
 - Encourage principals and vice-principals to seek supports when they are experiencing wellness issues. The Starling Minds resource is available to Members and their families, with more information about this available on our website.

The Ontario Supervisory Officers' Association (OPSOA)

The Ontario Supervisory Officers' Association (OPSOA) recognizes that job action has the potential to create greater complexity for school leaders because it requires principals/vice-principals to maintain productive working relationships with staff who have been directed to withdraw their services by their union. This can be a challenging dynamic for school leaders to navigate successfully. The OPSOA acknowledges that the intensity of job action varies from school-to-school and district-to-district.

The variation in local conditions is one of the reasons that the relationship between principals and superintendents is pivotal during any strike situation. Superintendents have a responsibility to be responsive to the conditions in schools they serve by working closely with principals/vice-principals.

A trusting and productive working relationship will:

- support principals in determining appropriate responses to unique issues not covered in the district's contingency plans
- reduce feelings of isolation of newly appointed principals and single administrators by providing a system perspective
- provide strategies to ensure principals have timely access to information and superintendents understand the local impact of the job action to inform the director and the central team
- offer additional support, especially to newly appointed principals.

Remember that job action is temporary; therefore, it is essential as leaders to mitigate against any long-term adverse impact on local relationships and school culture. This article describes proactive strategies that will support new and experienced leaders in this regard.

The OPSOA values and respects the contributions of principals/vice-principals to the success of public education in Ontario. We believe that by working together, we can achieve our shared goals during any possible labour challenges and beyond.

In the end, school leaders need to be able to work with their staff in a *collaborative way* and restore the school workplace so that everyone can focus on our students.



with information that is timely and connects you to the provincial perspective.

It is important for all of us to understand the process of collective bargaining within our system and the implications when negotiations are underway. There will be a series of events that both the board and the bargaining unit will need to work through to bring negotiations to a close. In the end, school leaders need to be able to work with their staff in a collaborative way and restore the school workplace so that everyone can focus on our students.

We have gone through turbulent times before and we have learned many lessons. The

importance of building and maintaining positive relationships, communicating effectively and supporting one another will help us get back to our core work once job action is over. By drawing upon our personal resource skills, using our problem solving skills to maintain a respectful tone in our school sites, managing our own emotions when dealing with uncertainty and maintaining a sense of hope and optimism as we partner with our senior staff to work through these situations, we will persevere and further develop our own skills of resilience. ▲

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Lead to include

Fostering inclusive schools for students with special education needs

By Steve Sider Illustration by Cornelia Li

I have been involved with navigating the sometimes murky waters of special education as a student, teacher, consultant, administrator, parent and researcher. One common factor in these experiences has been the influential role of the school principal in fostering a welcoming and supportive class and school environment. In the vast majority of my personal experiences, I have benefited from principals who cared deeply for students with special education needs and for those who supported them at home and at school. For example, as a teacher of a congregated class of grade 7 and 8 students with

significant behavioural needs, I always remember, and appreciate, the principal who regularly stopped by my class to check in on the students (and me) with a high five and a comment like, “looking forward to hearing great things about your day.” As I have thought about that principal, and others, I have contemplated the question: How can principals foster inclusive schools for students with special education needs? This has led to multiple nationally funded research projects over the past 10 years that have taken me across Canada as I engaged with principals and those with whom they work.



The very ways in which school leaders support students with special needs often serve as a **key factor** in determining how teachers engage these same students in inclusive classrooms.

Inclusive education is a concept that has gained growing prominence in Canada over the last decade. In a 2008 report, the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada indicated that inclusive education is “quality education that aims at the full participation of all learners” (p. 2). Inclusive education is a reflection of a belief that all students, including those with special education needs such as learning disabilities and autism, are capable of learning, and that every student can make a valued contribution to a classroom and school. The very ways in which school leaders support students with special needs often serve as a key factor in determining how teachers engage these same students in inclusive classrooms.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS?

The reality is that there has been significant research in the area of inclusive education and how teachers develop their abilities in supporting students with special education needs. To illustrate, consider the work that Dr. Jacqueline Specht and others at the Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education at Western University have been doing to examine the ways in which new teachers build their knowledge, skills and efficacy in inclusive practices (Specht et al., 2016). What has been missing in the research literature has been a significant examination of how principals engage in the work of sup-

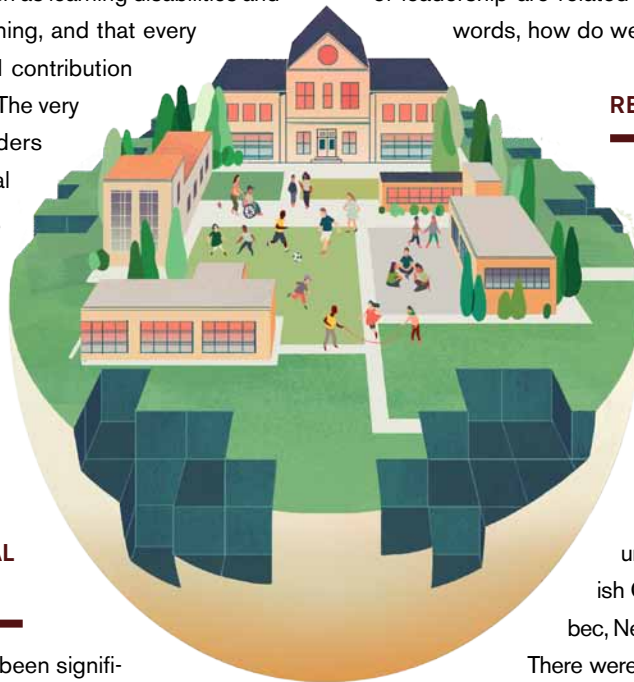
porting these students. One notable exception is Dr. Cam Cobb of the University of Windsor, who identified areas of work related to special education, which he termed “domains,” and the types of roles that principals engaged with in these domains (see Table 1). This is helpful in understanding what principals do, but we need to better understand what aspects of leadership are related to these experiences. In other words, how do we lead to include?

REVIEW OF RECENT STUDY

To better understand the ways in which principals support students with special education needs, and the associated lessons in leadership, we undertook a study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The study was conducted from 2016–2018 in urban and rural communities of British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland.

There were 285 principal and vice-principal participants, including male and female school leaders representing elementary and secondary publicly-funded schools. We examined the types of in-service training that school principals had taken to support students as well

as the type of experiences they had in meeting those needs. The study included in-depth interviews with 46 of these participants, from 26 different school systems across Canada, as we sought to better understand their leadership in relationship to special education. The key themes from this study are summarized in Figure 1.



Some of these themes will not surprise readers. First, we know that relationships are critically important. Our study found that principals invest significant time on the school site with students, parents/guardians, staff and community stakeholders to support a wide variety of student needs. Relationships are foundational to the special education supports that are put in place. Second, communication is a key leadership skill that principals need to employ in order to successfully support all students in the school. We found that principals invest a lot of time in communicating about a wide variety of issues related to supporting inclusive schools, including through formal and informal meetings and consultations with parents/guardians, students, staff and community members. Third, principals model the type of behaviour that they desire for the entire school community. They set the example in attitude, language and actions for students, teachers, support workers and parents/guardians. These findings align closely with the *Ontario Leadership Framework*, particularly setting direction and building relationships and developing people.

Two findings from our study did surprise us. First, we were amazed by the number of principals who indicated that they had not felt adequately prepared for the demands of the job, particularly in relation to the diverse and complex needs of students with disabilities and exceptionalities. We believe that,

as a result, principals felt that although they had access to resources such as support workers, specialists and assistive technologies, they did not have the same level of access to personal leadership resources – particularly social and psychological as outlined in the *Ontario Leadership Framework* – that they needed. Many principals shared their own stories of feeling isolated and ill-prepared for the significant demands of the job. They frequently reported that although surrounded by people who work with students with special education needs, they often work in isolation. There was a strong indication that the demands of the job, particularly with diverse and pronounced student needs, takes a heavy toll. Dr. Katina Pollock of Western University has been a leading researcher examining the work intensification of school principals and our study supports her work in this area.

In tandem with the sense of isolation and work intensification, our study also highlighted that principals' mental wellness is an area that needs greater attention. Although we have made significant inroads recognizing issues related to student and teacher mental health, further work needs to be done to understand, and support, principals' mental well-being. We need to be thinking much more significantly about this factor going forward.

A second surprise, and likely related to the first, were the variety of critical incidents that principals shared. Critical

TABLE 1
Domains and roles of principals in relationship to special education

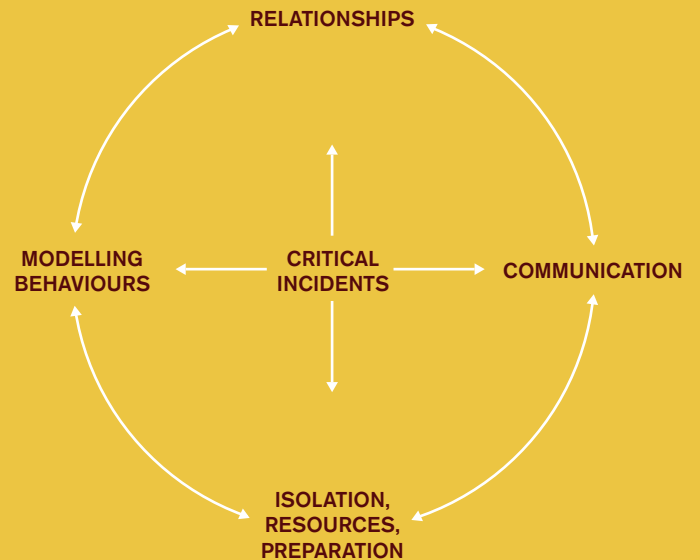
| DOMAINS | ROLES |
|----------------------------|---|
| Inclusive program delivery | Visionary, advocate, innovator, interpreter, organizer |
| Staff collaboration | Visionary, partner, coach, conflict resolver, organizer |
| Parental engagement | Partner, interpreter, organizer |

Source: Cobb (2015)





FIGURE 1 Key themes from the inclusive school leadership study



incidents are not necessarily negative or destructive situations. Rather, principals shared many examples of situations that may be considered inauspicious, but which significantly influenced their perception of inclusive schools and supporting students with special education needs. We determined that critical incidents are formational experiences in the leadership development of principals. Principals identified specific instances of interactions with students, teachers and parents/guardians that significantly influenced how they viewed and supported inclusive education. The identification of critical incidents, and reflecting upon them, can provide important professional learning opportunities for school leaders. A new study that our research team is embarking on is examining the types of critical incidents that principals experience and how these can be leveraged for professional learning.

SO, WHAT NOW?

Our 2016–2018 study has led to an important examination of how school leaders foster inclusive schools. It has also shone light on the challenges that principals experience, with a perceived lack of preparation for supporting students with complex and diverse needs, isolation in their work and an

initial identification of the types of critical incidents they are responding to and which are informing their perspectives.

One outcome from our study is a partnership with the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) to develop innovative, interactive, web-based case studies for principal preparation. These cases are in the process of being pilot tested in a Special Education for Administrators Additional Qualification course. The cases will be made freely available to the OPC and other principal associations across North America to support principal professional learning. We are optimistic that these cases will help address the gap that our study identified in the preparation of principals for supporting students.

A second outcome of the study has been meetings with principals' associations to further explore issues related to mental well-being and school leadership. Our research team has received SSHRC funding for a five-year national study that will include a focus on this issue. A further aspect of this new study is consideration for the concept of "collective leadership efficacy" and building professional networks that can support new principals in their work of fostering inclusive schools. We see these as important personal leadership resources, particularly psychological ones with a focus on optimism, self-efficacy and resilience.

Finally, a third outcome of the study was a recent conference that our research team convened in Vancouver for school leaders from across Canada that explored what we can learn from Indigenous Knowledge Keepers about inclusion and leadership. A focus on holistic, restorative and humanizing practices is key to an authentic response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Actions (particularly Call to Action 62 with its focus on schooling). School leaders need to be at the front of these practices and model the way. Our research team has identified this as an area of further exploration.

GOING FORWARD

Educators face unprecedented challenges in their educational practice, including increasing rates of reported stress, work intensification, verbal and physical violence and inclusion of diverse student needs (Wang, Pollock, & Hauseman, 2018; Winzer, 2017). Principals are confronted daily with significant challenges that require versatile and nuanced competencies. At this important juncture, school leaders have a clear need and a vital interest in evidence-based research insights. Our research team's work in the area of inclusion, special education and leadership is developing research outcomes that can support principals and their leadership of inclusive

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schools. Similar to my principal from 20 years ago who regularly stopped by my classroom, we, too are looking forward to hearing great things about how inclusive schools are being fostered by Ontario principals. ▲

Dr. Steve Sider is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. He has been involved in special education and school leadership at the elementary, secondary and university level and is currently engaged in four national and two international research projects examining school leadership and inclusion.
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The Recess Report

Connecting school engagement with academic success

The North American model of education was designed solely for teaching, learning and academic achievement. Traditionally, the personal, social and emotional needs of students were assumed to best be met at home or in social relationships outside of the school. Any non-instructional activities, such as recess, play and sport, were considered of limited importance and prioritized accordingly with respect to funding and accountability.

Over the last 20 years, however, we have learned the critical connection between school engagement and academic success – students achieve better in school when they are happier, healthier and feel connected.

“

Students cannot achieve academically if they do not feel safe or welcomed at school, if their well-being is at risk or if they lack the tools necessary to live active and healthy lifestyles, both at home and in the classroom”

(Ontario's Well-Being Strategy, 2016).

What do you like least about recess?

nothing to do

All of the fighting

What's your favourite part of recess?

going in.

While great strides are being made in Ontario schools to support well-being, our experience indicates that recess is often overlooked in overall school improvement efforts. We see this as fundamentally problematic. Here, along with highlighting our collective expertise, we aim to support the importance of recess as a critical opportunity to improve students' outcomes.

[The Recess Project](#) began as action research in Ontario in 2012 and has grown into a national collaboration among researchers, school administrators, educators, government organizations and, most importantly, students. The goal of the collective is to document the social and physical landscapes of recess, create the blueprints for a new path forward and mobilize systemic and lasting change.

Before the project began, available research revealed very little about the context of recess – particularly what **students** thought about recess – so this was the focus of our initial efforts. To fully understand the dynamic setting, it was necessary to learn **their** challenges, find out what **they** enjoyed and tap into **their** suggestions for change. The project captured the experiences of teachers, staff and administrators for comprehensive understanding, and reviewed relevant lit-

erature, policies, legislation and collective agreements. The research was then considered through different conceptual lenses – educational psychology, social neuroscience, anthropology, healthy schools, equity and inclusion, play, physical activity, risk, school climate, mental health, and so on.

And from all that a [very interesting story emerged](#).

The most critical lesson was that recess is a very important **social** space. From the students' perspective recess means much more than a break from class, or from teachers, or part of their daily physical activity. It is first and foremost about **friendships**. It is the only part of the school day where they have the opportunity to freely connect with their peers and do the things that kids are born to do: be silly, skip, run, play, imagine, tumble, negotiate, pretend, take chances, feel alive, test limits, laugh.

But these things have long been considered a trivial and irrelevant part of the North American school model. This low-priority approach to recess appears to be virtually unchanged since its inception. Minimal supervision, planning and accountability result in the all-too-familiar administrative fears of fighting, equipment management, safety and liability. It becomes an ongoing cycle. Equipment is withheld, environments are barren and rules are too strict.

Children are bored, sedentary and bursting at the seams – only to be told to “walk-and-talk only.” Social conflict, bullying, exclusion and rejection are becoming routine and normalized behaviours.

Social interactions can carry intense emotional and psychological weight, which is why recess influences well-being and mental health. Exclusion, strict rules and boredom undermine children’s efforts to engage in healthy play and connect meaningfully with each other.

When a child’s social needs go unmet, the result is often loneliness, isolation and self-doubt – feelings that can cumulatively lead to mental and physical illness that can undermine their capacity to learn and influence their long-term outcomes. What happens at recess, then, can influence not only children’s overall engagement with school, but their entire lifespan.

Conversely, students who feel connected and accepted by others, have less fear of rejection, shaming or alienation in the classroom. Feelings of belonging translate to a more positive orientation toward school, classmates, class work and teachers. In other words, students have a more positive attitude toward themselves and their classmates. They are more likely to be interested in, commit to and enjoy their classes. They will have higher expectations of their own success, be supportive of others, helpful, considerate, inclusive, show initiative and ask questions.

So, how can we make recess a time that supports children’s healthy development, growth and scholarship? The answer lies in creating supportive settings for healthy play.

After eight years, and through the collective efforts of our researchers, students, educators and administrators, our work has been translated into The Recess Project Change Manual. It is designed to provide a framework for a new way to organize recess. It is a

customizable plan that combines the most recent research with the tried-and-true strategies of many attempts at sustainable and meaningful change.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

A Recess Committee

Since we know recess can often be an afterthought, we encourage schools to create a **permanent** Recess Committee that meets regularly to plan and discuss the needs of recess, ensuring it is considered as part of larger school improvement efforts. Committee members should include administrators, teachers and students of all age groups. The goal of the committee is to devise and carry out a Recess Plan. Consider piggybacking this committee onto the Safe and Accepting Schools committee.

Evaluate Your Recess

Start by conducting an anonymous assessment for students and teachers to provide insights into challenges, needs, ideas, equipment, emotional states and activity preferences.

A Recess Plan

Develop a plan. Topics can include supervision ratios, training of duty supervisors, organization of the play spaces, timing and duration, equipment purchasing and management, landscape design, community partnerships and liaison with senior administration.

A Recess Coordinator

Have one individual lead the project. This role is necessary to ensure recess is sustainably integrated into the fabric of school-wide improvement efforts.



Physical and Health Education Canada

has recently published a National Discussion Paper and a National Position Statement on recess.



The Recess Project Change Manual

was recently endorsed by Physical and Health Education Canada.

What is your experience with The Recess Project?

It made a big difference because kids got along with some of their enemies and turned enemies into friends



The Right to Play

The need for healthy, meaningful play and social connection is so fundamental to children's development that the [United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) has established it as a basic right for every child.

Specifically, Article 31 was designed to ensure all children have meaningful opportunities for play and leisure, protected from the effects of social exclusion, discrimination, and social harm. In 2013, the UNCRC convened to assess the minimal attention given to Article 31. The document emerging from that meeting, [General Comment #17](#), articulates their concerns and details the school's role in protecting children's right to play as well as highlighting the specific groups requiring extra attention (children with disabilities, children living in poverty, and girls).

The coordinator should convene the committee, create and oversee the Junior Recess Leader Program (see below) and ensure school-wide awareness of what is happening. Consider supporting time for the coordinator by leveraging funds and grants targeted for professional development, mental health and well-being, healthy schools, equity and inclusion and/or physical activity.

Offer a Variety of Materials, Activities and Spaces

With the many ages and stages of children, recess can be scary and unnerving for many students, making it important to offer a variety of unstructured to structured options. This method of approaching recess is counter to society's current concerns with finding ways to increase physical activity. Though physically active play enhances well-being, in the context of recess children without friends are often the most sedentary. Physically active play happens more effortlessly when children feel connected and supported. It is about mindfully creating activities and situations that mediate new friendships. Consider offering a variety of materials and opportunities to suit children with different backgrounds and interests, remembering, these activities don't always need to be physical. Students themselves are the best source of ideas and recommendations. In our project collaborations, students suggested coding clubs, craft clubs, skipping areas, hip hop, juggling, magic, Pokémon, Zumba, yoga, martial arts and meditation. They proposed creating (and equipping) areas for free, creative and imaginative play. Try providing an array of 'loose parts' such as cardboard tubes, crates, tarps, pots and pans, boxes, tires and packaging. Building in natural materials such as logs, hills and ditches, where available, further supports this movement.

Engage and Train the Whole School Community

Everyone should be aware of the plan – teachers, parents, students, volunteers and custodians. They need to understand why this change is important and necessary. Welcome students and teachers to lead the change process and act as the change agents for the school. Have extensive conversations about the common concerns of injury and liability that result in barren settings and too-strict rules that undermine healthy play.

Leverage Role Models

Older peers are an important source of cultural knowledge for younger children, who look to the older students to observe, imitate and consolidate their own behaviours. We can ensure healthy changes take hold on the playground by explicitly training and empowering older students to act as role models. In our Recess Project model, cohorts of Junior Recess Leaders (JRLs) are carefully trained to create and maintain a playful recess setting – modeling empathy, inclusion, laughter and acceptance. With ongoing guidance, they learn how to support young children as they initiate play, negotiate social groups, sustain positive relationships and mediate conflict. The consistency, familiarity and daily interactions between older peers and younger children can contribute to a sustainable change in attitudes and behaviours. The JRLs also offer protective support for vulnerable or marginalized students.

Inject New Routines to Reinforce New Behaviours

While free, unstructured play is essential for healthy development, the social dynamics and barren play spaces of some recess settings can undermine children's capacity to feel safe, creative and playful. Students can benefit from an initial injection of optional activity spaces to 'scaffold' new behaviours and positive interactions that will pave the way for more spontaneous and unstructured play in the long-term. In The Recess Project model, Junior Recess Leaders are

assigned to an activity 'zone' (skipping, Frisbee, yoga, silly-dance, chalking). These zones act as levers for change by guiding students towards an 'activity space.' This activity space – designed by the children with help of the committee – gives children a framework that helps relieve the anxiety and uncertainty of “what to do.” Moreover, the ongoing presence of the zones reinforces new routines and expectations that are embedded within them (acceptance, inclusion, empathy). Junior Recess Leaders, in pairs, are then assigned to a zone to support those children and manage any equipment or play materials.

Join, or Host, a Full Day Recess Summit

Some school districts have started to host a full day of professional development focused solely on recess. Consider inviting The Recess Project, or leveraging our connections, to help you host a day devoted to learning all about the benefits of recess. These opportunities provide an avenue for staff to learn about the research and exemplary practices, including different sub-topics such as [Loose Parts](#) Play, Natural Playgrounds, Rethinking Risk, Accessible/Universal Play spaces and Generating Creative Solutions. Let's all work towards supporting the critical connections and create lasting change with recess to ensure compassionate, caring and inclusive societies by supporting children's relationships at school. ▲

Stickie Notes Credit

Feedback collected from students during action research. Images copyright L. McNamara, 2019.

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Self— reflection

A look at the Ontario
College of Teachers'
Independent Report on
Governance

By John Hamilton
with contributions from
Ontario College of
Teachers

Illustration by
Matthew Billington

FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

As an elected member of the Ontario College of Teachers' (OCT or College) Governing Council, my role is to help govern the teaching profession, while serving the public interest. I hold the position for all principals/vice-principals working in Ontario's public school system and am very aware of the unique role and responsibilities school administrators have. Previously, in my role on the executives of the Ontario Principals' Council and the International Confederation of Principals, my responsibility was to advocate for school leaders.

However, my current and former roles have very different functions – one protects the public while the other protects teachers.



ABOUT THE ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TEACHERS

Since its inception in 1997, the Ontario College of Teachers has been committed to fulfilling its mandate: protecting the public interest. For the teaching profession, the “public” are the students and their parents in Ontario’s publicly-funded elementary and secondary schools.

The College protects them by setting the high professional and ethical standards that all 235,000 Ontario Certified Teachers (OCTs) are expected to meet. Ontario’s teaching profession is self-regulated, meaning its governing Council includes those with specialized knowledge of teaching, or in short, teachers. It also includes appointed members to represent the public.

In addition to its mission, vision and values of protecting students while regulating the teaching profession with strong organizational values, the College’s work is also guided by a set of strategic priorities, including

1. strengthening transparency and accountability
2. managing risk more strategically and
3. improving stakeholder engagement.

The College has fulfilled all of these priorities with its independent governance report by conducting and releasing the results, and through ongoing discussions with all stakeholders, including the public, teachers and other players in education.

I reconcile both by recognizing that the College protects the public interest and advances the teaching profession by setting the bar that all professional educators must aspire to, while establishing the regulations and expectations Ontario educators must meet in their professional practice.

For educators, the College function is equivalent to that of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario for doctors. I sit on two of the College’s 14 committees. As Chair of the Discipline Committee, I confirm panel representation for all hearings, assuring peer review for principals and vice-principals and professional sensitivity for members defending themselves in the face of alleged professional misconduct.

As a member of the Governance Committee, I provide guidance to the College on issues of governance and risk management. This puts

the results of the College’s 2018 independent report on governance into my purview.

The review was approved and commissioned by the previous Council, with current Council receiving the independent report. It provides an in-depth and detailed look at every facet of governance, including the “good,” the “not-so-good” and areas that “need improvement.”

Through its review of the independent report, the Governance Committee worked carefully and thoughtfully to offer recommendations that honour a commitment to self-regulation, while ensuring a governance model that will meet the evolving demands of public protection.

As Ontario Certified Teachers (OCTs), it is our job to help students develop and succeed. We do this by providing formal and informal feedback and giving students and parents the opportunity for self-reflection and improvement. The College’s

independent governance report does the same, but for regulation. It provides both the teaching profession and the College with the opportunities to learn and grow.

Renowned Spanish scholar Baltasar Gracián once said, “self-reflection is the school of wisdom.” This most definitely applies in this case, for how can we become wise if we aren’t willing to look at ourselves honestly and critically?

In March 2018, the OCT commissioned Governance Solutions Inc. (GSI) to conduct an independent review of its governance structure and processes. The [results](#), released publicly in November 2018, provided 37 recommendations on the structure, size and scope of the College’s Council and its 14 committees.

The independent report is groundbreaking for a regulatory body, because it was commissioned by the College itself, while assigning GSI

with the responsibility to conduct a thorough and objective review.

“Regulation is our business and our way of doing business is a commitment to continuous self-improvement,” says Michael Salvatori, CEO and Registrar, Ontario College of Teachers. “Through self-reflection, we can identify opportunities for growth and mitigate areas of potential risk.”

And mitigating risk is key, especially with recent headlines related to other Canadian regulators, including, [“B.C. health minister gives dental college 30 days to deliver transparency plan,”](#) [“Nurse Wettlaufer lied on applications but regulator didn’t follow up, inquiry hears”](#) and [“A show-down consuming the Law Society of Ontario.”](#)

While the issues for each regulator differ, the general consensus is that when risk isn’t properly managed, it erodes public trust and takes away from the very reason regulators exist – to protect the public interest.

That is why the College’s 7th Governing Council supported the independent review. “Council’s role is to govern and make decisions in the public interest,” said Nicole van Woudenberg, Chair of Council, Ontario College of Teachers. “We are looking at how the teaching profession can improve the way it governs itself.”

The independent report was shared publicly in November 2018 and then referred to the Governance Committee for in-depth study in December 2018. The committee brought recommendations to Council’s March and May 2019 [meetings](#), where members debated and voted on which of the independent report’s recommendations to adopt.

Work has already begun on some of the proposed changes, but others will require amendments to both legislation and supporting regulation.

So, are the recommendations worth the time and effort the College has, and will continue to, put into implementing? “Absolutely,” says Salvatori. “We don’t rest on our laurels and we don’t take any chances when it comes to protecting Ontario’s students.”

The College continually looks at, and evaluates, the many different types of risk that could threaten its work of protecting the public and regulating

“

Self-reflection is the school of wisdom.

”

Baltasar Gracián

the teaching profession, including reputational, financial and operational.

It also looked at risk within a regulatory context. Many of Canada’s other regulators, including the College of Nurses of Ontario, the Law Society of Ontario, the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia and the Engineers and Geoscientists British Columbia have undertaken both formal and informal governance reviews to become nimbler, more efficient and better able to protect the public.

Mitigating risk through self-reflection has long been a part of the College’s culture. In 2011, the College commissioned former chief justice Patrick LeSage to look at its investigation and discipline practices. LeSage’s review generated a 76-page report with 49 recommendations, which asked for a concerted effort by the provincial government, district school boards and the College itself, to improve public protection. The report ultimately helped the College become more transparent and accountable in its daily operations.

The College also regularly conducts internal reviews of its own work. An example of this is its self-examination of fairness practices, which started well before the formation of Ontario’s Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC). Reviews are conducted on an annual basis and frequently result in improvements to the College’s application and registration processes.

When in-depth reviews are not self-initiated, they can be made compulsory by the government. In 2018, British Columbia’s Minister of Health appointed regulatory juggernaut Harry Cayton, former head of the U.K. Professional Standards Authority, to conduct an in-depth performance review of the College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia and an overall review of the *Health Professions Act*.

In his findings, Cayton reported a lack of public confidence in the ethics of health professionals, calling it “unacceptable.” “Patients I have spoken to do not have great confidence in the colleges or in health regulation generally. It should be a matter of concern to all colleges and health professionals that a patient who provided evidence to this inquiry concerning a regulatory complaint asked to remain anonymous because of fear of rejection or retaliation by other health professionals treating them in the future.”

And while it is highly unlikely that this type of inquiry would happen in Ontario, the College is being proactive to ensure that it doesn’t happen at all.

“By being proactive and looking at how we can do better, we ensure that we have a say in the way we conduct ourselves,” says van Woudenberg.

The College’s independent report provides the information needed for self-regulation to evolve. “It’s an honest look at what we’re doing well, what we can be doing better and most importantly, it helps us meet the evolving needs of public protection,” added van Woudenberg.

The College’s Council has, and continues to, consider changes to all aspects of College governance, including the formation of Council, Council structure and size and committee structure.

“Our goal is to make professional regulation in the public interest more effective and efficient,” says Salvatori. “The independent report provides Council with the framework to achieve those things.”

While the College was looking at ways to improve its governance structure and processes, the Ontario government was doing the same. Several months after the College commissioned the independent review, the government introduced Bill 48, *The Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act 2018*. The legislation addressed three main

REPORT METHODOLOGY

Governance Solutions Inc. used online surveys, in person and telephone interviews to canvas numerous stakeholders, in English and French, in these areas, including

- strengthening transparency and accountability
- managing risk more strategically and
- improving stakeholder engagement.

The full report and its methodology are [available online](#).

issues, including providing a broader definition of sexual abuse which would result in the mandatory revocation of a teacher's certification, a mandatory math test prior to initial certification and changes to the College's governance structure.

Since then, the Act has become law and the College has been working with the government to shape what the changes will ultimately look like.

Van Woudenberg stressed that the teaching profession has the opportunity to lead these changes. "A key aspect to self-regulation is having members of the profession serve in the public interest as Council members. This gives the profession a voice at the decision-making table."

To implement the changes as they are finalized, the College has created an internal workgroup, a think tank, consisting of staff from across the organization. The group is responsible for looking at these changes from different viewpoints, including for members, the public, its staff and even other regulators. "We want to ensure changes are made in a thoughtful and purposeful manner," says Salvatori.

And while the College has made governance reform a priority in its daily work, Salvatori says that for members, "it's business as usual." Ontario Certified Teachers still have to meet the high professional and ethical standards set out for them. From a high-level standpoint, "it means that we have the opportunity to better serve the public interest, to better protect Ontario's students."

While the College is certain that there will be a new governance structure, the exact model has yet to be determined. But for now, that's okay. The College and its Council are continuing to work with the government to determine

what works best for professional self-regulation, while maintaining public confidence and trust.

College's Council recognizes the enormity of this undertaking, but van Woudenberg firmly believes changes to enhance governance, transparency and accountability will result in increased public trust and confidence. "We encourage our members to use self-reflection as a tool towards improving their professional practice. The College is doing the same thing with governance. The results will be improved self-regulation, a strengthened teaching profession and, most importantly, greater protection for the public." ▲

John Hamilton has worked in many capacities in education in Ontario for 28 years, the past 14 as an elementary school Principal. Serving the profession through his work at the Ontario Principals' Council and currently at the Ontario College of Teachers is a privilege he says he undertakes with great care and enthusiasm.

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DISCLAIMER

We appreciate the contribution of this article by the College. The OPC is reserving judgment on the changes to the governance of the OCT until we better understand the impact on our membership.

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Enhancing Equity

Five strategies to build capacity and meet the needs of exceptional learners

Have you noticed that when the needs of exceptional students are well-served, and when staff feel confident in helping students meet their full potential, that the school feels calmer, more inclusive and the conditions are better for students to achieve at high levels? Administrators who put students with special needs at the centre of planning and decision-making have learned that this may be one of the most powerful moves to support all students. As you work through this school year, consider these five leadership strategies to deepen staff capacity in creating optimal conditions for special education learners.

Know your staff's professional learning needs

To build staff capacity, it is important to understand the learning needs of your teachers and support staff. Take time through individual conversations, staff surveys and walkthrough observations to determine the starting point for each of your staff members. What do educators in your school believe about inclusion, about the characteristics of each exceptionality and about their responsibility to be part of a team that addresses the needs of students?

Leading special education can be complex. [Special Education in Ontario](#) is a helpful tool for administrators when planning.

Create a shared vision

Once you have determined the learn-

ing needs and beliefs of staff, it is time to co-create a shared vision of how staff collectively take ownership for the success of exceptional students. This vision needs to be based on principles of equity, social justice and understanding the consequences of marginalizing students because of their unique learning needs.

Ontario's [Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy](#) stresses the importance of creating a shared vision.

Develop a year-long professional learning plan

Once you have developed a set of shared beliefs about exceptional learners, create a professional learning plan that is differentiated for the needs of staff. Key topics should include understanding the [Ministry's Categories of Exceptionalities](#), how to differentiate instruction and assessment and how to understand and prevent behaviours. One strategy that helps staff understand the needs of learners is to facilitate an equity walk where educators survey the school environment through the lens of learners with diverse needs.

[Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario](#) and [Learning for All](#) are excellent tools to support professional learning.

Deepen IEP ownership

For staff to understand the unique learning needs of students and have confidence in implementing programming for exceptional learners, school

leaders can create opportunities to develop Individual Education Plans (IEPs) where, in guided sessions, teachers examine each section of a student's IEP to deeply understand the student's learning profile, strengths, needs and personalized programming. Taking time to support teachers' ability to write meaningful IEPs will empower staff to take responsibility for the success of exceptional students and recognize that proactive work in developing a good IEP saves time later.

[The Teacher's Gateway to Special Education](#) is a practical resource when writing IEPs.

Shift mindsets

To build the capacity of staff, we need to help shift thinking about exceptional students from a deficit to an asset lens. While Ontario's structures for special education are built on a model that uses the deficits of students to determine exceptionality and interventions, it is critical that day-to-day programming and beliefs look at student capability. Programming in a way that aligns with human rights will engage students more effectively in their learning and reduce the marginalization that can occur in a deficit model.

Use this [Asset vs. Deficit](#) resource to learn more.

Take a moment to [learn more](#) about OPC's professional learning opportunities that address special education. ▲

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For more on inclusive schools, read [Lead to Include](#) on page 20.

SEEKING

Collaboration

The new Minister has lots of priorities on his plate

By Peggy Sweeney



Stephen Lecce was born in Vaughan, Ontario, to immigrant parents who came to Canada from southern Europe. “Their aim, which is very much the aspiration for many newcomers today, was to make sure their children could have a better life. They recognized that ... there weren’t many economic opportunities for them in that part of the world.

“So, they took a boat. And like many people arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax. And I’m the direct recipient of that struggle, that sacrifice of my parents.”

Lecce recalls his elementary school as “a wonderful community with a very hardworking, decent group of educators who created a family, a real culture of support for their students. I remember very fondly my kindergarten teacher, who really is the epitome of a nurturing soul, incredibly committed to her students. She treated us like her own and had a very positive relationship with the community and the parents. She inspired the kids to learn at a very young age and developed a real zest for learning, for reading, literacy and numeracy at an early age. I’m eternally grateful for the commitment that those educators made to the young people they educated and the communities that they served in.”

Following high school, Lecce attended Western University in London where he studied political science. He also took on his first elected political role there as the President of the University Student Council. After his graduation, he moved to Ottawa, where he became involved with the Canadian Alliance of Students Association. In that role, he attended a meeting with then Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The relationship was a positive one and the Prime Minister hired Lecce, who spent the next five years serving in the PMO, working his way up to the role of Director of Media Relations.

After the Harper government was defeated in 2015, Lecce returned to Vaughan and started his own private consulting firm. But he had been bitten by the political bug. In 2018, he was elected as the MPP for the riding of King-Vaughan. He was appointed as the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure and then took on the same role for the Premier. When the Cabinet was shuffled in June, 2019, Lecce was appointed as the Minister of Education, the youngest to serve in that role in Ontario’s history.

“I was extremely humbled by the prospect of having carriage for two million young people in the province of Ontario. One side of me recognized the vast challenges that exist within the ministry, within any ministry. But I also saw the incredible opportunities that lie in the horizon to transform this ministry, to give young people greater opportunities to achieve their potential. So, I was quite motivated then as I remain today.”

As he begins his first year in the role, Lecce has a number of initiatives that he wants to pursue. The first is STEM/STEAM. In July 2019, Lecce and the Alberta Minister of Education signed an agreement to enhance learning opportunities for students. “By increasing educational opportunities for our students in the STEM and skilled trade sectors, we are giving them the tools they need to be successful from the classroom, to the board room to the shop room.

“In Ontario, I believe we’ve got incredible capacities in the arts and their important economic driver. I’m a music student myself, so I value the arts. However, I recognize that from an area of improvement – and I say this constructively – from an area of professional development for the ministry, where we do better for parents and for their children is improving the science, technology, engineering and math elements.

“Those are the areas where I think there’s deficiency where we can do better. And with a greater emphasis in the curriculum, with more resources in the classroom and with a modernized review of those core competencies, I think we could better enrich young people to understand and apply that knowledge both in the classroom and in the workforce.”

Another initiative is financial literacy. “Our government announced a \$200 million, four-year math strategy. There is a new resource in the classroom to better support young people in their journey, learning the context of numeracy, which is so foundational in their lives.

“One side of me recognized the vast challenges that exist within the ministry ... But I also saw the incredible opportunities that lie in the horizon ...”



“I see our principals and vice-principals as critical partners to the success of our students and recognize that they work hard with increasing demands placed on them.”

students and the educators that we’ve designed the plan for, with the goal of trying to improve math outcomes and knowledge that is critical for science and critical for any other competencies.”

One of the concerns principals and vice-principals have expressed over the past year is the government’s autism strategy. Initially, the government

“Part of those dollars are to flow to educators to get the right professional development so they are better prepared, better able to educate and inspire young people in the competency of math. We are in the first year of that plan. I want to build upon that investment and make sure that it’s reaching the

announced changes that would provide funding for children with ASD based on family income and age. After many months of protests and concerns from families, caregivers and service providers, the government announced a revision back to providing funding based on need.

Whether some children will be spending more time in school as a result, instead of in community-based one-on-one programs, is still unknown. The OPC has asked the government to provide additional resources to schools, for trained professionals who can work with these children, if the time spent in school does increase. Currently, the specialized staff available in schools will not be able to meet the needs of additional students.

“I was very pleased to be part of the announcement with Children, Community and Social Services Minister Todd Smith about the collaborative approach across ministries to break down silos and create a seamless transition to a needs-based program for these young people. And that includes in the class and outside of the classroom effective this year, which will be very much supported this September. We have more than doubled the funding allotment for children with ASD. And we

have increased special education funding to the highest level in the province's history.

"Those are important metrics because we're putting money where it counts in the areas where we have the most vulnerability, to help these young people in their learning. And we recognize there's more to do. That's why we have an autism task force that has been commissioned to give us advice from experts on how we can build a plan that meets the needs in and outside the classroom. We expect a final report in the coming months. I will be leaning on them for their advice. I'll be leaning on educators who are in the classroom, who provide the perspective on how we can strengthen those supports and make sure they reach those that need them the most."

With negotiations underway with teacher and support staff unions, there is much anxiety in the sector about what the upcoming school year will look like, and if it will involve labour unrest. The Minister recognizes the angst but tries to downplay it. "My call for all the parties is to reach a deal as soon as possible. The impetus is for us to provide predictability and confidence to parents and educators and of course students themselves. I believe students deserve no less.

"And so, I'm committed to seeing children in the classroom this fall. I believe that is what will transpire. We continue to negotiate with all partners in education in good faith to reach that deal to ensure that they remain in the classroom this year. I'm not going to prejudice the process; I take this role very seriously."

He notes that his personal calls to and meetings with all union leaders within days of becoming Minister "speaks volumes about my determination to work together and to put these children first. That should be the critical focus of all parties and it's the spirit that I'm embracing at the table.

"My plan, my focus, is to land a deal. That is the priority of the ministry. That's my directive to my negotiators. And in good faith, I want to try to achieve that end as soon as humanly possible."

The Minister also has a message for school leaders. "I see our principals and vice-principals as critical partners to the success of our students and recognize that they work hard with increasing demands placed on them. And I will do everything I can within my authority to listen to their perspective and, more importantly, improve the student experience for the young people that we both serve.

"I value their contributions. I know that they care deeply about their staff, their students and the communities that they work in. A collaborative spirit will be in the best interest of our students. That's what I have brought to the ministry to date and will continue to deliver on over the coming weeks and months."

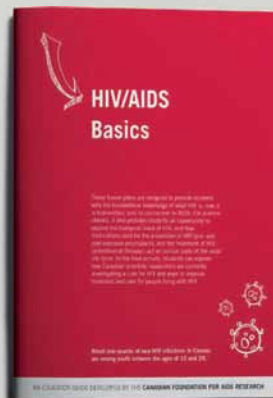
As a political but non-partisan association, [the OPC will continue to offer assistance, provide first-hand experiences](#) and offer suggestions where applicable to the Minister so we can all create the best learning environment for students. ▲



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PDF Module 17
November 18–December 22

What is Instructional Leadership?
ELDP Module 4
December 7–14

Leading Well-Being In your School
PDC Module 13
January 13–February 16

Leading Safe Schools
SOQP Module 5
January 11

For more information on the events and courses listed, visit www.principals.ca or email elc@principals.ca

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Top workday app recommendations from your peers

Are you always struggling to keep up with the latest app? Which ones are best for school leaders? What are your colleagues using? We asked principals and vice-principals what education and organization apps they use to be proactive and productive in their school and work. Here are a few of the responses.

Sway

Sway is a storyboard and presentation app from Microsoft Office that easily allows the user to create online interactive reports for links, videos, photos, text and more that can be presented and shared. The app does the design layout for you, so you just have to focus on the content.

“The projects are easy to create and can be duplicated and tweaked for efficient use of time. I like that it is free and accessible as an app or website. As a principal, I use it for presentations, staff meetings, meeting agendas and PA days. It models a platform for teachers to use with their students or to send newsletters home to families. Students use it for presentations to share their learning. You can work collaboratively on the same project and easily share via link or QR code, or export it as a PDF.”

Joanne Borges, Principal, Southview Public School, LDSB

Paperless: Lists and Checklists

A simple to-do and checklist app, it can remind you to do various tasks. The program is easy to use and can sync between various iOS devices via a free Dropbox account. You can also assign fun icons to each of your lists.

“On a busy day, taking 10 seconds to enter in some to do’s allows me to focus on the

important stuff and come back to the others. It helps me to organize my busy schedule and remember to do some tasks. It also helps plan my agendas for staff and department heads’ meetings.”

Mike Phillips, Principal, Oakridge Secondary School, TVDSB

Migraine Buddy

This app focuses less on the ‘educational’ side of our work and more on the ‘mental health and well-being’ side. If you are susceptible to migraine symptoms, it allows you to track headaches throughout the day, possible triggers, work limitations, duration, weather patterns and more. It then notes patterns and produces summaries that are easy to share with medical professionals.

“It has helped me in my work as many of my staff also use the app and it keeps us on track and aware of possible symptoms so we can better serve our students and community!”

Shawna Stanleigh, Principal, Sam Chapman Public School, YRDSB

Adobe Spark

Adobe Spark is a relatively new web-based software (also available for iOS and Android) that allows you to easily create your own graphics, videos or single web-

pages. There are many templates that can be used to create both online or offline graphics, using various layouts, colour palettes and type styles.

“I have used Spark to create social media posts for my school, posters to reinforce school improvement goals and signage for rooms. Videos can be created for staff meetings or professional development sessions to promote your latest task or goal, and to promote events for the school. Webpages can be created quickly for promotional purposes as well. I like that the interface is easy to use, it saves automatically and you can export in multiple file formats.”

Jamey Byers, Vice-principal, Northern Secondary School, NNDSB

Microsoft OneNote

This Microsoft program allows users to create scribble notes, tables, pictures or drawings with the ability to share them in a multi-user collaboration style. Users can collate the information into pages or organize it into sections within notebooks.

“I love the productivity and prioritizing. The annual month-to-month timeline approach works well with 4 Quadrants & Getting Things Done, by Covey. I like that I can email, export, import, use images and more.”

Lisa Neale, Principal, École Michaëlle Jean, HWDSB ▲

Do you have a question you’d like to ask of your principal/vice-principal colleagues? Submit it to romanese@principals.ca and we may use it in an upcoming issue of *The Register*.

Markless Math

How one classroom took a chance and changed the rules

For the last several years, teachers in the mathematics department at Richmond Hill High School have engaged in profes-

sional development to support deep learning in their classrooms and to foster intrinsic motivation in their students. Using principles learned through workshops on “building thinking classrooms” from the work of Dr. Peter Liljedahl of Simon Fraser University, staff learned to support students in mathematics using a collaborative approach, where flexible seating and vertical non-permanent surfaces support problem solving. As students embraced new approaches to learning, it became apparent to teacher Erin Marsella that her assessment practices needed to evolve to support the feedback cycle that was developing in her students’ new learning environment.

For the past year, Mrs. Marsella has developed and used a mastery approach in her grade 9 gifted classes, including a markless grading system, where a final grade is determined not by calculating a mark following summative assessments, but rather by evaluating and ranking learning expectations and tracking observations, conversations and products to determine whether students have achieved mastery. Both teacher and student track the learning, with expectations assessed, using a system of checkmarks (for mastery), dots (indicate minor format errors) and X marks (remediation needed). Students demonstrate their mastery in many ways, including student-led conferences where they meet with the teacher during class or at lunch.

Results for students, in both first and second semester classes, were better than Mrs. Marsella had hoped for in the first year of implementation. By the end of the semester, most students observed that compared with traditional marking, not only did they find the markless approach fair (93 per cent of students), but that they were able to clearly articulate their areas for improvement (83 per cent of students). Students valued the markless system because it allowed them to focus on their strengths and needs instead of focusing on a number.

Equally as encouraging was the impact this approach was having on building a growth mindset and reducing student anxiety. By the end of the semester, 71 per cent of students believed this markless system reduced their anxiety or improved their well-being. Students and parents alike valued this approach because it allowed students to focus further on the learning.

Open and transparent communication was imperative to the success of the markless classroom. Mrs. Marsella took time to establish the learning environment and regularly collected feedback to ensure students felt safe and supported. Parents and guardians received information at the beginning of the course, and were given the opportunity to attend a meeting to hear an explanation for the methodology. This allowed her to speak to the purpose of this change in practice,

inviting parents/guardians and the students themselves into the learning process. Another factor in the success of this approach was the support Mrs. Marsella received at both the school and board levels. The school administration, as well the board’s curriculum department, supported the work and were helpful in sharing this methodology.

Undoubtedly, Mrs. Marsella’s willingness to share her vulnerabilities in taking a risk and trying something new was crucial to her success. *Growing Success (2010)* states in Chapter 4 that, “assessment plays a critical role in teaching ... students [to be] independent and autonomous learners, ... assessment should ... inform instruction, guide next steps, and help teachers and students monitor students’ progress towards achieving learning goals” (p. 29). What it teaches us is that the authenticity of learning in a world where marks count and are paramount to post-secondary pathways can only be achieved when the teacher creates safety in the learning environment by challenging students to take risks, make mistakes and work collaboratively towards their learning success. ▲

Debbie Linkewich is an administrator with the York Region DSB, since 2006, and principal at Richmond Hill High School since 2017.

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Erin Marsella has been a secondary mathematics teacher with the York Region DSB for the last 19 years. [@math_mom13](#)

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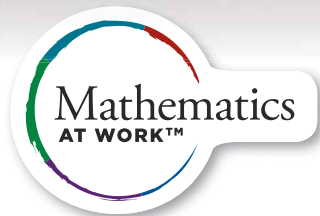
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