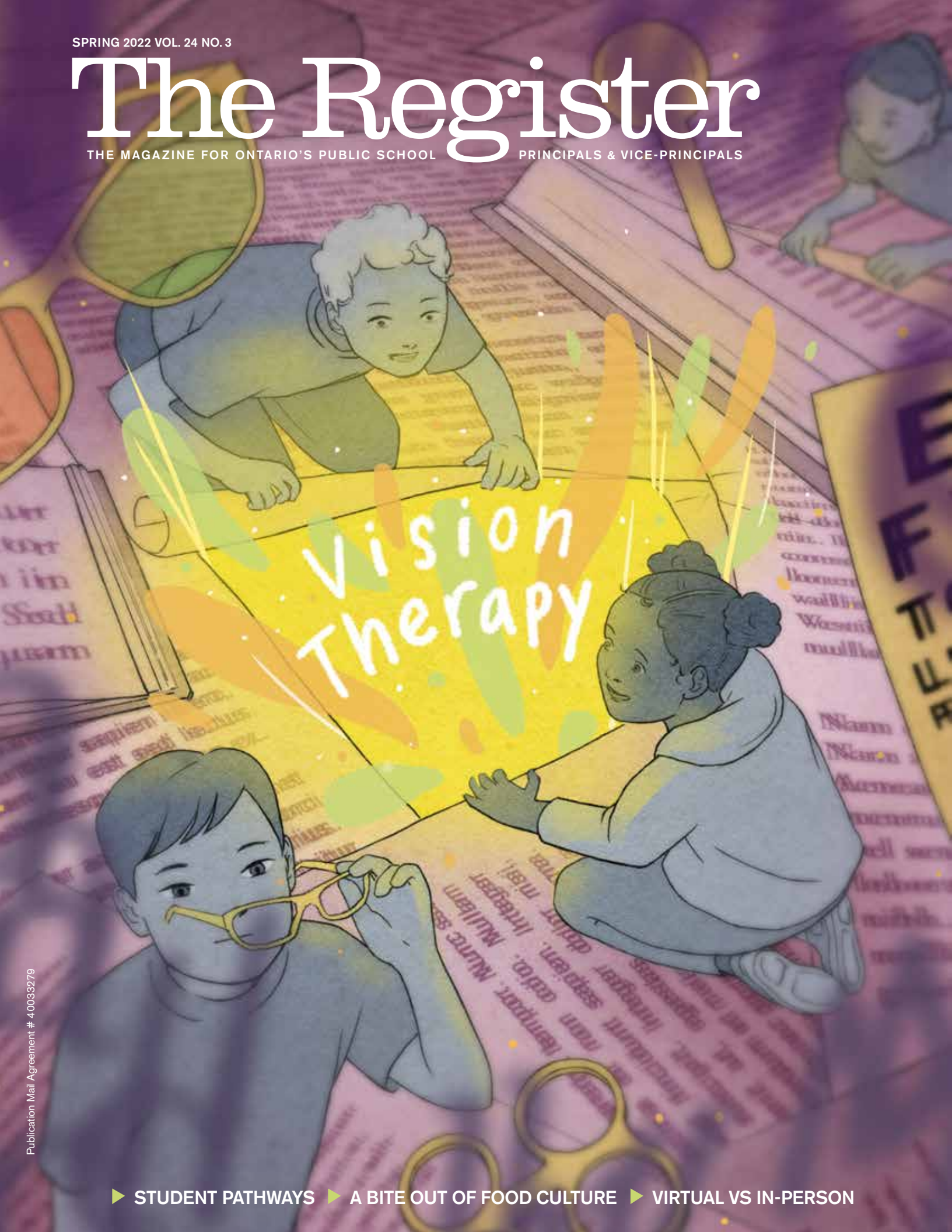


The Register

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Ongoing advocacy in the face of a pandemic



It is difficult to believe that my term as the OPC's president for 2021–22 is quickly coming to an end. This year has been the most rewarding learning journey in my education career. I have learned so much and am extremely grateful for the amazing opportunity. The connections I have made with Members and

stakeholders across the province and country have impacted me professionally and personally.

During my district visits to boards across Ontario as well as leadership conferences in British Columbia and Alberta, I had the opportunity to visit many different schools and connect with principals and vice-principals. I witnessed their many accomplishments and saw their frustrations as they worked through a number of challenges in their roles and throughout the pandemic.

The impact that staff shortages have had on your schools has been overwhelming. As school leaders you begin

your days checking staff absences and then spend a great deal of time trying to cover the classes and the supervision to ensure that the safety of students and staff is always prioritized. The pandemic has intensified your workload to the point that it is barely sustainable. I am deeply concerned for your mental well-being. In your roles, you spend your days taking care of others and helping students, staff and families solve problems. Then you go home to do the same with your own families.

I have been a school leader for more than 12 years, and every year our workload continues to increase.

There appears to be no end in sight to the number of operational tasks and responsibilities. Of course, the pandemic has contributed to an even heavier workload, with the additional management tasks and communication involved with the school community. There is worry about the future of education as we work to support students and staff as they return to in-person learning after having pivoted back and forth between virtual and in-person learning several times over the last two years.

More than ever, we are concerned about the mental well-being and social development of students. I have had parents share with me that their young children have forgotten how to behave in public. They've spent so much time alone with their immediate families during the pandemic that they no longer understand how to act in public places and how to self-regulate their emotions. As we consider how we can support students with their mental well-being and social development, I know this will require a team effort between your school teams and families in order for students to learn, succeed and feel truly supported.

When I reflect on the past year, I am proud of the advocacy work we have done to share the many challenges school leaders deal with on a daily basis. In March, we held our annual Advocacy Week at Queen's Park (virtually this year, due to the pandemic). The Executive met with 39 MPPs over

the course of the week. Our meetings were very positive. We shared our [pre-election policy paper](#) with them, and had meaningful discussions about staff shortages and suggested solutions, the proposed revisions to PPMs 81 and 167, EQAO testing, and the growing workload shouldered by principals and vice-principals, which has been intensified due to the many COVID-19 management tasks. I look forward to continuing our advocacy work for the remainder of my term, and to doing my best to ensure your role as a school leader is understood and respected.

Thank you for all the hard work you do every day to support your school communities. ▲



Lisa Collins

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🐦 [@PresidentOPC](https://twitter.com/PresidentOPC)



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 Our editorial team would like to hear from you.
 Deadlines for submissions are listed below.
 Go to the OPC website under *The Register* for further submission and writing guidelines and considerations.
 Send your articles, reviews, thoughts and ideas to lromanese@principals.ca.
 All submissions are subject to review and selection by the editorial committee.

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

The Register is the proud recipient of the following awards:



Happenings at the OPC ...



In March, we brought together our Provincial Council, Local Leaders and District EDI reps for a multi-day hybrid meeting.

At our March Awards Dinner, we bestowed Honorary Life Memberships on General Counsel Sarah Colman, who retired after 20 years (right); OPC Provincial 2019-20 Past President Nancy Brady (below); and OPC Provincial 2020-21 Past President Ann Pace (below right).



This year we honoured seven Difference Makers, chosen from alternating school boards each year. They exemplify the professionalism of all school leaders across Ontario. Left to right: Tracy Sacco, Scott Purvis, Karen Murray, Troy Mackenzie, Tom Lazarou, Lesley Fisher, Chad Brownlee



Leading Forward Together

Re-engage in allyship

We are in the final preparations for our [Leading Forward Together Conference](#), being held in partnership with the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) on Thursday, August 18, 2022, at the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Toronto. We look forward to this in-person event, which will bring together more than 200 principals and vice-principals from across Ontario. Through a series of events, participants will explore two sub-themes – fostering allyship with traditionally underserved communities, and restructuring versus de-structuring.

We invite and encourage you to join us at this milestone event, as [registration](#) is still open. Hear from [Sheila Watt-Cloutier](#), Inuit Nobel Peace Prize nominee, on the topic of Re-imagining a New Way Forward with Intention. Following her

keynote, participants can self-select a parallel session from various workshop options or participate in the Ignite sessions. A networking lunch will take place on-site, followed by presentations from school districts about incorporating student voices in their local equity work.

Leading Forward Together will provide a space where principals and vice-principals can reflect on practice, engage in collaborative learning opportunities and discuss new approaches as you continue the work of moving beyond theory to action for anti-oppressive and anti-colonial schools and classrooms.

This conference is part of our continued commitment to supporting our Members creating anti-oppressive and anti-colonial learning environments for students and staff. To further support your needs, we are also offering all principals and vice-principals the

opportunity to participate in [learning opportunities](#) taking place in July, including the two-part Leading Change with Purpose In Complex Times session with Dr. Karen Edge and Dr. Ann Lopez on July 12 and 14.

As we plan for the 2022–23 school year, we are working toward a variety of opportunities for individuals at different career stages and with varying needs, supports and experiences.

Consult our [Professional Learning \(PL\) landing page](#) for upcoming offerings. If you have any questions or suggestions about professional learning format and/or content, send them to us at learning@principals.ca. If you do not yet receive our weekly PL Bulletin, which features upcoming learning opportunities, you can sign up to get it on our [website](#). ▲

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Vision Therapy

Why Some Children Struggle to Read, and How You Can Help Them

Guiding education leaders in the age of concussions and IEPs

By Dr. Patrick T. Quaid and Jenny Lee Fountain

Illustration by Taryn Gee

Why do so many bright and articulate children struggle to read?

W.B. Yeats famously stated, “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” Teachers and administrators understand that the development of strong literacy skills is necessary for all students. The ability to read and decode is a foundational skill for all subjects and disciplines. Education stakeholders continue to invest heavily in reading. We want our students to be confident and fluent decoders of the printed word. That is why school boards continue to invest financial resources in professional development opportunities for staff, while dedicated teaching professionals and administrators spend endless hours honing their craft with the latest research-based pedagogy and effective practices.





“Our brain’s neural machinery dedicates a full 40 to 50 per cent to visual processing alone.”

In the elementary years, primary and junior teachers are typically the first to notice that a student may struggle to concentrate and participate at grade level. When that happens, there is the usual checklist to consider. Do they need glasses? How is their hearing? Are they eating well? How is life at home? Are they making friends? We associate the challenges of reading with the need for glasses. Yet, some children may still despair when trying to read, even with their specs. How can this be? After all, we’ve corrected their eyesight.

We think of learning occurring by various combinations of seeing, hearing and doing. While our auditory and kinetic learning channels are certainly vital, our brain’s neural machinery dedicates a full [40 to 50 per cent to visual processing alone](#). That means, to process visual information, we need not only eyesight, but vision. Visual skills are more than just 20/20 vision. A student may have 20/20 vision, or wear glasses to successfully see a board or screen far away, or a book up close. But they still may not be able to read.

So, what is missing? Vision is a much more complex function in the body than most of us realize. It involves at least 17 visual skills that allow the brain to correctly interpret what it sees. One of these critical skills gives our eyes the ability to work together to focus on something up close and also to focus out to see at a distance. This process of our eyes moving together is called “eye teaming.” When eye teaming works, a student can read words on a page consistently and clearly. The brain then processes the information successfully, remembers it, and can recall it. When eyes do not synchronize well, the words may appear blurry or double, or even look as if they are jumping around.

All this may seem normal to children who are just learning to read. After all, how would they know words should not be blurry or appear to jump around the page? They may conclude that reading is hard, frustrating and even painful. It then becomes a task that they try to avoid. The joy of reading changes into the dread of words. Classroom reading and homework become a pitched battle. Children may become agitated and distracted, and their self-esteem tanks.

Eye Exam Ages

- At six months of age, children should have their first eye exam.
- Between ages two and five (at a minimum), children should have a second eye exam and ideally annually after their first six-month exam.
- After the exam at age five, a registered Doctor of Optometry should check the child annually thereafter to ensure good eye health and appropriate developmental progress.
- Referral for an in-depth visual skills assessment and visual processing assessment can be made to a Doctor of Optometry with advanced training in Optometric Vision Therapy (i.e., FCOVD designation) at any age by the child’s regular eye doctor.
- FCOVD Fellowship-trained doctors can also be found directly by parents or educators through a search at covd.org.
- Similar to occupational therapy or physiotherapy, optometric vision therapy is not covered by OHIP, but it may be covered by private insurance; parents or guardians should check with their insurance plan.



Supporting all Students and Families in Eye Care

- To find a general optometrist in your area, visit the [College of Optometrists](#) website and search by postal code.
- For more in-depth assessment and support for eye teaming and eye focusing, go to [COVD.org](#) and use the “Locate A Doctor” link (ensure you select the “board certified” check box).
- In Ontario, [OHIP](#) covers yearly eye exams for patients under 20 years of age, and major eye examinations for patients with medical conditions that affect the eye, such as diabetes.
- Students may take part in a vision screening program at some schools, but a routine eye exam done by a licensed Doctor of Optometry is recommended as a starting point.
- Parents and educators can review *Effectiveness of Vision Screening Programs for Children Aged One to Six Years*, published by Public Health Ontario.
- A study on [Canadian IEPs](#) speaks to how eye teaming and focusing issues are connected to reading difficulties.
- *Learning to See = Seeing to Learn*, a book written by both doctors and educators, discusses visual skills and how they pertain to reading success in children.



“Doctors show the child how to use their eyes properly as a team, helping them with tools such as lenses and prisms where appropriate, and reinforcing this program with home-based therapy.”

At this point, a child may be labelled with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or [attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#). But take away the books, and many of these children may impress you with what they know on an oral test. Thankfully, with differentiated instruction, teachers are aware of the individual differences between students. The educator may even attribute the child’s challenges to developing a dominant auditory or kinetic learning channel over the visual pathway.

So, how can schools help? We know that one answer has been to create an individual education plan (IEP) for the student. An IEP process identifies the child’s strengths and challenges, then makes individualized accommodations or modifications to learning expectations to encourage success. But what if, rather than only developing an IEP, that child could successfully learn to use their visual learning channel as well? Over their lifetime, how would that child – and society – benefit if they could reach their full potential by reading well? How would that change their self-confidence and life journey?

To answer that, we begin with some of the causes. First, why do some children lack the visual skills that others seem to master quite quickly? What causes our eyes not to “team” well?

Among some of the possibilities are developmental risk factors, including prematurity over three weeks, or a [birth weight lower than five pounds five ounces](#), which is typically associated with gross motor, fine motor and/or other developmental delays. However, [research shows](#) that in children between ages six and 16 who have IEPs, up to half have no identifiable developmental risk factors but instead



have a history of at least [one significant reported concussion](#), and that [pediatric concussions](#) are chronically under-detected overall.

As a result, what may appear to be a drop in grades or a more frustrated child in the classroom may actually be a child struggling with a brain injury. As an example, children (and adults) who experience a concussion may lose that eye teaming skill. Following a stroke, individuals may need to relearn skills such as walking or fine motor activities. Likewise, when concussed, a person may need to relearn the skill co-ordinating their eyes as a team so they can read comfortably and successfully.

Educators familiar with training about concussions may already be aware that these may occur even if the individual does not lose consciousness. While some concussions are dismissed as mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI), this does not mean that there is no injury. Mild means “no obvious positive findings on conventional neuroimaging” (for example, CT/MRI). This “normal result” does not measure the severity of potential neurological functional consequences of concussion. One can have significant functional problems such as ringing in the ears, double vision, blurred vision, neck pain and sleep disturbances, yet have a “clear MRI.” While superficial bruising on the skin is not usually a debilitating condition, the bruised brain tissue in any concussion can be devastating.

Assessing if a student needs glasses is critical, but it is not enough. Measuring a student’s visual acuity (eyesight) has been shown in research to be a poor predictive visual metric of academic performance. [Ontario-specific research](#) shows that testing dynamic visual skills (such as eye movements and eye focusing) is more predictive of academic performance. Since 82 per cent of IEPs are primarily for reading, it is essential that any eye teaming problem is resolved.

Testing is available to identify children heading for academic issues as early as Senior Kindergarten to Grade 1 in the form of a visual skills assessment (both an oculomotor and visual processing assessment). It would be helpful to add to the educator’s toolbox the recommendation for a visual skills assessment. These tests benefit students who consistently struggle with reading and writing, and can be done by optometry professionals certified by the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) who carry an FCOVD accreditation. More information can be found at [covid.org](#).

In eye care, optometrists use both subjective and objective tools that, when used properly, can be powerfully effective. One objective test observes how the child’s eyes move inward toward the nose (converging), a skill vital for all nearsighted tasks, including reading. Try taking a pen and ask a child to follow it toward their nose. This



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“Just as air, heat and fuel are vital for a fire to burn bright, the senses of hearing, speech and vision are building block components in education.”

exam can often show very quickly that the child’s eyes cannot team together. When reading, we should be able to comfortably move the eyes inward to within about three inches (eight centimetres) from the bridge of our nose (about the length of a credit card from the bridge of the nose). [This example](#) is one of some 15 different objective tests that can be done.

How Do We Train, or Retrain, the Eyes to Team Together?

Optometric neuro-visual rehabilitation, also known as “vision therapy” or VT, trains developing brains how to use eyes properly by using tools such as lenses, prisms and optometric biofeedback techniques using a variety of exciting approaches. This is explained more fully by a pediatric eye doctor in [Learning to See = Seeing to Learn](#) and by a pediatrician in [Vision and Learning](#). The main goal of VT is essentially to give control of the visual system back to the child. After all, concussion affects the brain, and if approximately half of the brain’s neural machinery is visual, it makes sense that there would be a “top-down” effect. In essence, the brain can lose the ability to control eye teaming and focusing in a manner that glasses cannot fix.

The saying “nerves that fire together wire together,” by Dr. Donald Hebb, a Canadian psychologist, is the primary underpinning of vision therapy. Doctors show the child how to use their

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eyes properly as a team, helping them with tools such as lenses and prisms where appropriate, and reinforcing this program with home-based therapy. Over time and using repetition with home therapy reinforcement, the child can reach the goal of becoming independent of the therapist/doctor. As the visual skills come online and improve, this usually moves the child's visual abilities and confidence in a positive direction – in fact, [studies funded by the National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#) have already shown this to be the case.

When executed by an appropriate team, VT can be highly effective, setting a child on a positive learning trajectory. A 2002 report funded by the [Learning Disabilities Association of Canada](#), written and researched by the Roeher Institute, estimated that in 2013, one in 10 students in Ontario would have an IEP in place, and this has now risen to about two in 10 – likely still a very conservative estimate. The report further estimated that children with IEPs will earn on average \$1.98 million less than their peers over their working careers, and that each IEP carries a cost to the family and the system of over \$500,000 from Grade 1 to the end of high school. Given these observations and the immense personal impact on the child, uncovering and solving any potential neurosensory issues underpinning IEP cases is an issue that deserves attention, regardless of the underlying cause.

W.B. Yeats was right; education is indeed the “lighting of a fire” – but we must ensure that all barriers to lighting this fire are removed. Just as air, heat and fuel are vital for a fire to burn bright, the senses of hearing, speech and vision are building block components in education. As such, for children with sight, we must ensure that vision – a significant sense – is thoroughly checked in terms of visual skills and visual processing abilities in children with IEPs. “Equality is everyone having shoes; equity is everyone having shoes that fit.” This same approach to vision is not only common sense, but highly justified, given the 2013 peer-reviewed [research by Quaid and Simpson](#) showing that at least 83 per cent of children ages 6 to 16 years old with IEPs, and at least [69 per cent of adolescents who have experienced concussions](#), have at least one central area of deficiency in visual skills abilities. The importance of vision in reading is further reinforced by the January 2022 Ontario Human Rights report entitled [The Right to Read](#), which states clearly that vision (not eyesight) must be assessed properly, a point which is often overlooked in the arena of visual skills and visual processing deficits. If you ask me, it is time to “see beyond 20/20” when it comes to education. ▲

Optometrist Dr. Patrick T. Quaid (FCOVD, PhD) is founder and director of Optometric Services, VUE-Cubed Vision Therapy (Guelph and Toronto); immediate past-president, College of Optometrists of Ontario; and board director for the Optometry Examining Board of Canada. He is also the author of *Learning to See = Seeing to Learn*.

Educator Jenny Lee Fountain is a vice-principal with the Greater Essex County DSB.



Family/Student Support Programs for Eyeglasses

The [Eye See...Eye Learn® Program](#) provides one pair of glasses per child in any Junior or Senior Kindergarten program, courtesy of participating optometrists as well as corporate partners Essilor Vision Foundation Canada and Modern Optical Canada.

As a non-profit committed to eradicating the global vision care crisis, [OneSight](#) will provide free glasses through a voucher program, once a patient's visual and financial needs have been confirmed by a non-profit organization, such as a school.

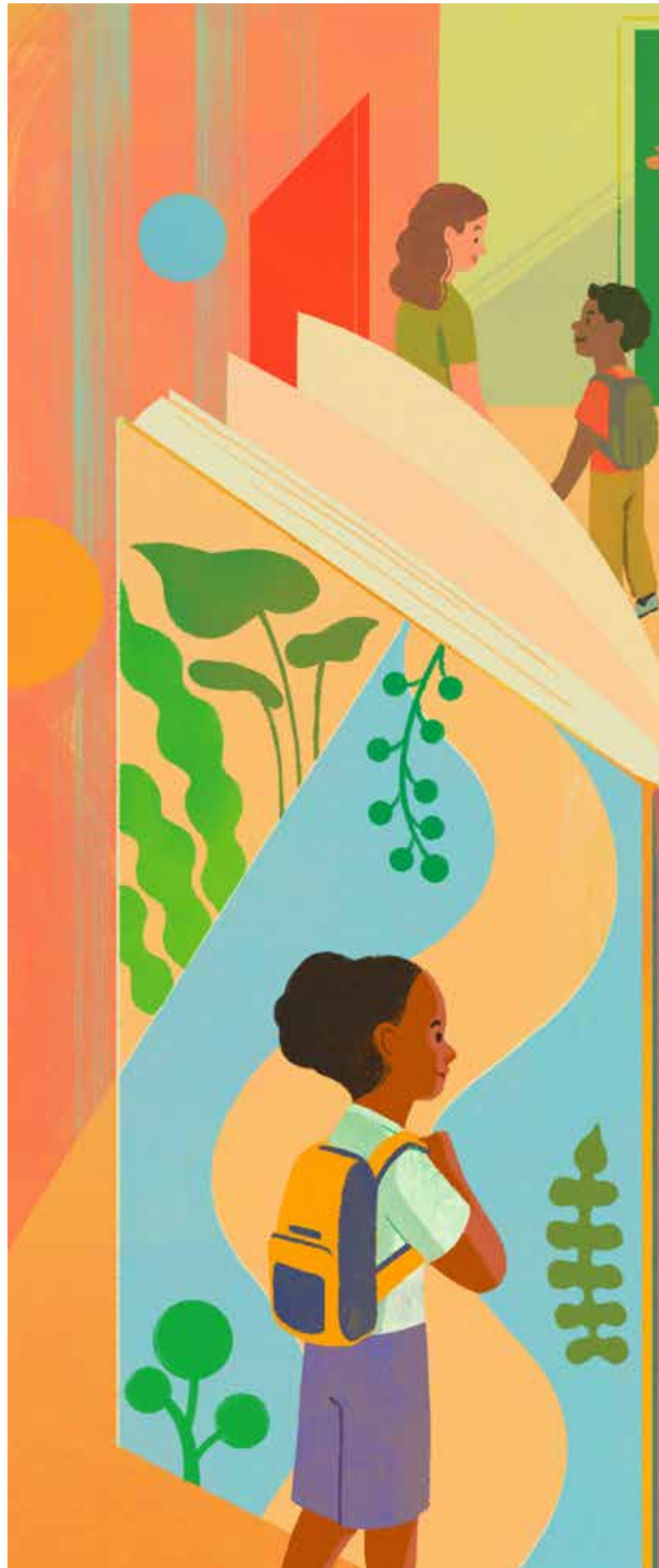
Those receiving income support from the Ontario Disability Support Program may be able to receive assistance with the cost of prescription glasses through the [Vision Care](#) benefit. The individual's support program office can provide a form for an optometrist or optician to fill in when the individual gets glasses, frames or repairs.

Directing a Path

Predetermining student pathways
in elementary school (and what
we can do to change pathways)

By Kelly Kawabe

Illustration by Cornelia Li





Strategic placement of students in elementary schools through class building is a process that I have been a part of throughout my career both as a teacher and as an administrator. The intent of this process is to create balance within classes to create positive outcomes for all students. I personally believe, however, that this traditional practice is an example of what I refer to as a “kind mistake”: one that exacerbates inequities, maintains the status quo and serves to stream students into pathways of schooling at a very early age.

The practice of strategic selection of class composition for a coming school year is longstanding. In the late spring of each year, teachers contribute their input as to where students should be placed for the following year. In some schools I have been in, as an example, teachers are given a placement card to complete for every student in their current classroom. Often, the cards are printed on pink and blue paper to give the team a visual as to the percentage of boys and girls being placed. On each card, the teacher writes the student's name, whether they are high, medium or low academically, whether they receive Special Education or English as a Second Language (ESL) support, and if they have difficulties with self-regulation. From there, some classes would have clusters of students who would receive outside support from In School Support Personal (ISSP) or ESL teachers.

As school leaders, we need to start looking at these class placement procedures through a critical anti-oppression lens, as these practices can operationalize bias and lead to systemic marginalization of whole groups of students.

Bias, in its most basic definition, is a tendency or a preference toward the familiar. Biases are linked to personal values and are grounded within belief systems. As such, they can be conscious or subconscious. When preconceptions exist, there is a possibility that decision-making may be influenced unfairly, leading to discriminatory practices. In *Identity, Belief, and Bias*, [Geoffrey Cohen of Stanford University](#) states that “the tendency to evaluate new information through the prism of pre-existing beliefs, known as assimilation bias, is robust and pervasive.” Maintaining the status quo by continuing with current classroom placement practice allows for these systemic inequities to persist. In his *Report on Race Relations in Ontario* (1992), Stephen Lewis identified that there is a prevalence of “Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, [and] it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping-out.” Maintaining these placement meetings means racial inequities are perpetuated through our institutional practices and become embedded in system structures.

As we have started this process in my school again, I find myself reflecting on and re-evaluating what “has always been done.” The typical practice is that a teacher supports the placement of their current students for the following year. Students who struggle with self-regulation are carefully placed, and administrators then make changes based on their own knowledge of issues. For ISSP support, students are clustered so that they can be withdrawn at the same time. Generally, Kindergarten teachers keep their Junior Kindergarten students as they move forward into Senior Kindergarten. An additional complication in this process is that sometimes teachers are also moving into a new grade level above their current year. Essentially, this can contribute to staff potentially hand-picking their own classes.

It should be noted that classroom placement is not traditionally examined from a racial stance. This continued “colour-blind” approach is disadvantaging marginalized students. I have begun to wonder why we have worried about having a balance of boys and girls in the classroom, but have not examined this crucial aspect of our placement practices.

Let's look at an example of a school that has a Grade 3/4 class, a straight 4 class and a 4/5 class. I have noticed that students who had been assessed as lower academically will be placed in the 3/4, and those Grade 4 students who were assessed as higher academically would be placed in the 4/5. It is also common practice for teachers to select highly independent students to be placed in split classes. As a result, one of these classes – likely the straight Grade 4 class – would then have clusters of students receiving outside support from ISSP or ESL teachers. The rationale for this is that the split grade teacher is teaching two grade levels; therefore, students will need to be able to work more independently.

I find it interesting that we have chosen to remedy this teaching situation by shifting our students and not our practices as teachers – supporting staff in the management of incorporating two curricula. Perhaps we should instead realign schedules so students may be removed from multiple classes for support?



“As school leaders, we need to start looking at these class placement procedures through a critical anti-oppression lens, as these practices can operationalize bias and lead to systemic marginalization of whole groups of students.”



We already attempt to schedule for common planning times at each grade level. What if we also aligned the core subject areas so that teachers at the same grade level taught the core subjects at the same time? In this way, students could either be withdrawn from the same class subject without missing out on information in other subject areas, or extra support could be offered within the classroom. I also question the practice of withdrawing students for additional support, as it means that they are constantly missing information from their own classrooms.

I believe that identifying select students as “behavioural” also needs to be re-examined. In my experience, I have noticed teachers

making inappropriate comments on this topic – such as “this student is high” or “this student is weak” – during the placement process. Feedback educators need to reframe this conversation away from seeing “behaviours” and toward an understanding that some students simply require additional support with self-regulation.

What is considered a “behaviour problem” in one class may not be considered an issue with another teacher. Perhaps as educators we should reflect on classroom management abilities as opposed to labelling our students? Gloria Ladson-Billings, in *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, argues that grounding our work in culturally respon-

sive and relevant pedagogy allows for more authentic relationships to be built with our students. Often when genuine relationships develop, behaviours disappear.

Last year, my school looked at class placement through a racial lens. To be honest, it felt very uncomfortable. Our discussions centred on whether it would be better to place small clusters of Black students together, providing a supportive student group, or whether it was better to spread students out so classes were not largely made up of any one dominant culture and all classes had more of a balance.

Personally, I see the point of giving a like-cultured support system to Black students, but it made me feel like we are streaming,



I have also begun to wonder about the benefits/deficits of ensuring a balance of boys and girls in each class. Why do we do this? What about students who identify as neither or as both? Throughout this process, we certainly didn't feel as though we had all of the answers, but staff felt that having these conversations moved us further toward understanding how systemic practices can perpetuate inequities.

I have also begun to wonder how we can involve parents and/or students in this process. This change to our practices would give students some control over who they are with, give them autonomy over their own education and, it is hoped, help to reduce their stress. However, I am currently in the initial stages of thinking this out, as I see this as being logistically difficult. What if all parents request the same teacher? What if you cannot honour all requests? I am unclear as to how this could be done without creating a very chaotic process.

Based on my own observations, I strongly believe that students should not be placed by ability level. In 1968, [Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobsen](#) conducted research published in *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, illustrating that teacher bias impacts student outcomes. Their research focused on an experiment carried out in an elementary classroom where students were given intelligence pre-tests prior to the beginning of the school year. They identified 20 per cent of the students who were showing potential for extreme academic growth, dubbing them "late bloomers." These students were, in fact, identified randomly. When students were tested eight months later, those who the teachers thought would bloom later scored significantly high-

er than those who had not been so identified. When interviewing Rosenthal, Rhem theorized that teachers who have lower expectations for their students may be inclined to teach simpler versions of materials, focus on drills and give more simplistic assignments.

This experiment leads me to question our current practices even further. As the whole concept of placement embeds these ideas of "strong" and "weak" into our classroom culture, it creates a fixed mindset for teachers regarding student abilities. Perhaps random placement, such as occurs in high school, is a better solution – removing judgment from the decision-making process. As educators, we created a class placement process with the intention of positively impacting student outcomes. However, I believe clustering students by ability level negatively impacts the educational path of many marginalized students.

The class placement process, with all its inequities, in effect streams students from a very early age, and may ultimately limit their futures. While we may do this with the best of intentions, it is the epitome of streaming students. We don't currently have all of the answers, but the process of questioning and reflecting on these issues can help to dismantle racial inequities within our current system. Frank, open conversations and a clear vision of how to improve things are required to make changes for students. How we address these practices will make an enormous difference for many. We should consider what each of us can do to impact change for our students. ▲

Kelly Kawabe is a principal with the Peel DSB.

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An illustration of a virtual classroom. In the center, a woman with dark hair, wearing a red blazer, stands behind a laptop screen, holding a book and pointing upwards. The laptop screen shows a blue background. To the left of the laptop is a desk with a green pen holder containing blue and red pens, and a stack of books. To the right is a globe on a stand. Surrounding the central scene are four smaller video call windows. The top-left window shows a woman with dark curly hair and a yellow headband. The top-right window shows a woman with brown hair wearing a headset. The bottom-left window shows a man with short dark hair waving. The bottom-right window shows a man with short dark hair. Various icons are scattered around: a pink speech bubble with three dots, a yellow speech bubble with three dots, a purple speech bubble with three dots, a blue speech bubble with three dots, a lightbulb icon, a document icon, and a question mark icon. The background consists of large, overlapping blue and dark blue shapes.

A Constructive

By Sharlene McHolm

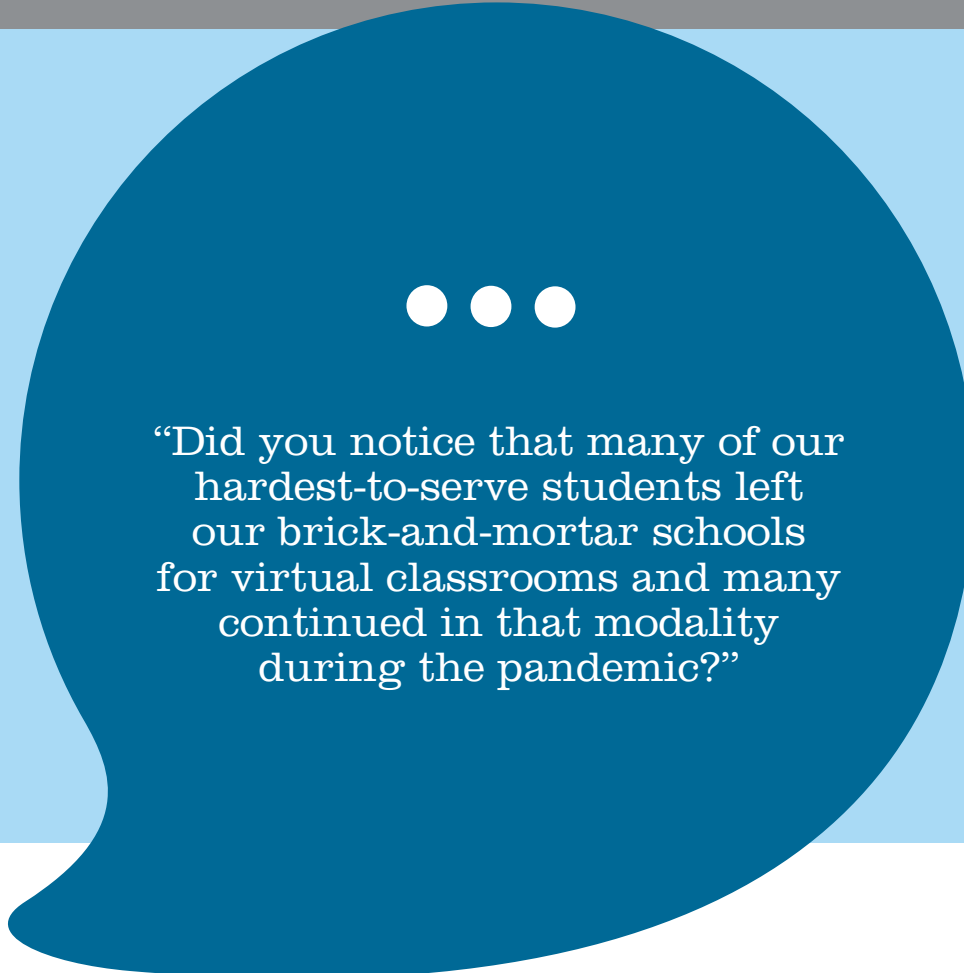
Online or in-person – who benefits and at what cost?

If you are like me, you have been in a deep reflective state considering the systemic barriers that our public schools propagate. Too often we have been, and remain, unsure about how to adapt our education system to become more equitable and inclusive. Understanding that my social location affords me so much privilege, I worried that I have been blindly upholding harmful practices. Then the pandemic hit. Our world stopped. And with that, some of the most chasmic shifts, both culturally and educationally, occurred.

Suddenly, for the first time families were afforded a choice – send their children to in- person learning or enrol them in remote learning. Many weighed those options carefully, unsure of possible impacts and outcomes.

An illustration of a classroom scene set on a tilted white plane against a background of grey and blue waves. A male teacher in an orange sweater and glasses stands on the left, holding a blue folder and pointing towards the right. Three female students are seated at desks on the right. The first student, in a white shirt and yellow skirt, is writing in a notebook. The second student, in a yellow shirt and blue pants, has her right hand raised. The third student, in a blue shirt and orange pants, is looking thoughtful with her hand to her chin. Each desk has a backpack and books. The word "Crisis" is written in large, bold, yellow letters along the bottom edge of the tilted plane.

Crisis



“Did you notice that many of our hardest-to-serve students left our brick-and-mortar schools for virtual classrooms and many continued in that modality during the pandemic?”

Did you notice that many of our hardest-to-serve students left our brick-and-mortar schools for virtual classrooms and many continued in that modality during the pandemic? Who else left in-person learning in droves? I observed that our equity-deserving communities also seemed to be disproportionately choosing virtual classrooms. But why?

During this time, I watched my school become “whiter” and “more neurotypical,” and I kept thinking about why. What was missing in our in-person learning environment that made so many choose to learn differently? Was it merely that families were also working from home and could keep their kids home? Were multi-generational homes (with higher severe outcomes for elderly family members should they become infected) accounting for this decision? Whatever the reasons, the additional burden placed on families has been immense. We witnessed parents or guardians acting as educational assistants for students who desperately needed refocusing, and sitting “in” on our virtual classrooms. Many of them offered tech support and invested in a way that few of us could have imagined.

Fast-forward two years. A large proportion of adults and teens are vaccinated, and some of our youngest learners also have the opportunity to do so. As a sector, we struggled to provide support to

students and staff, and ourselves, through this challenging time. We’ve developed new habits. Students have learned to see smiles through our eyes. We laughed through our masks and shared tips for de-fogging lenses. Many of the procedures that initially overwhelmed some staff and students simply became habituated to the extent that they became largely unnoticed. Despite our newfound comfort, seeing some faces without masks reminds us that COVID-19 can morph quickly – so too can our realities of a “back to normal” life. I think it is fair to say that everyone is tired of these “unprecedented times” and is anxious to settle back into school and life without restrictions or health-based anxieties.

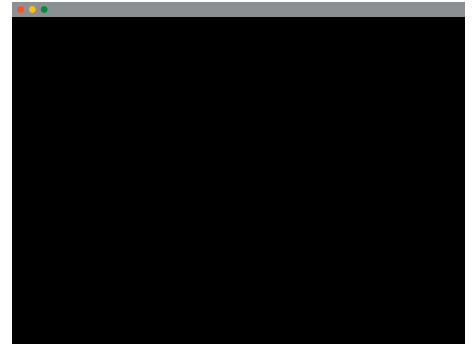
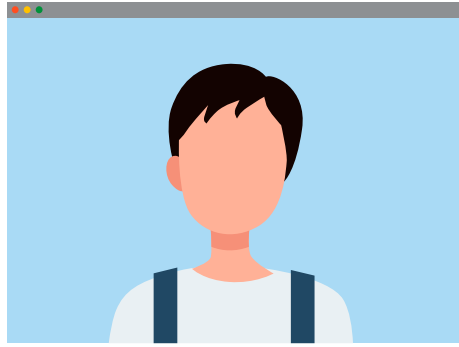
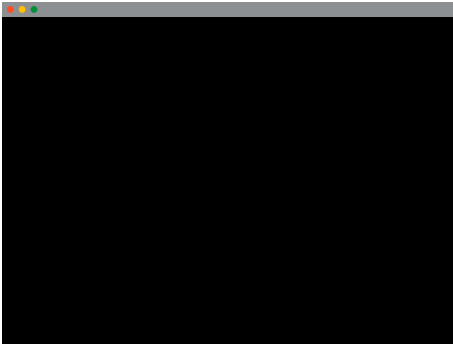
But what about those students continuing to learn online? If this were simply a question of health concerns, then most of our virtual students would have returned to in-person learning. And we need to acknowledge that some have not.

Families in the most financially disadvantaged households seem to be sending their children back to in-person schools, as the parents/guardians likely need to work in-person. Other tired parents or guardians have admitted they could no longer keep their kids at home, as they recognized increased levels of anxiety and individualistic tendencies in their children. We know that some students were not doing well

Tips to Collect Community Feedback

- If you are doing something formal, check first with your board's central office (a research department if there is one) to ensure you have vetted the questions and followed the board's processes.
- Ensure there is an opportunity for respondents to expand on answers. Yes/no questions are a good warm-up, but open-ended questions can provide the most information.
- Understand that your social location will impact how questions are received.
- Choose a modality that people can access. Allow feedback to be collected anonymously.
- If using a questionnaire, ensure that your translations are accurate (general built-in browser translations can make mistakes).
- If doing your interviews in person, try to have an interviewer who identifies with the person you are talking to and who does not report to you directly.
- Seek out locations other than the school/district to gather this information.





“This year, two-thirds of our distance learning students returned to in-person learning. Still, our in-person student bodies seem a little less diverse.”

and many educators scrambled to cobble together the unprecedented mental health supports our students needed.

“Back to basics” in 2021 meant talking about how to interact with peers, how to play and how to share. Our Kindergarten students are learning from a toddler’s standpoint, our primary children are playing like preschool students, and so on up the line. Grade 9 students, having leapt from Grade 6 to high school during the shutdown, are struggling with the unbridled freedom of adolescence and navigating the social/emotional skills of a tween.

Let me circle back to who did not come back. Many of my students did return. This year, two-thirds of our distance learning students returned to in-person learning. Still, our in-person student bodies seem a little less diverse. Staffing shortages and compassion fatigue have educators struggling to dig even deeper. Many of us are “book studied out” and exhausted. What does redressing system barriers look like in an already 65-plus hour workweek? Our broader conversations about systemic change seem to be halted by discomfort, workload overload and personal concerns of well-being. But I believe that there is hope.

This is a Great Opportunity, If We Take It

One of the things that has made this pandemic so challenging is physical distance, which is a very different concept than socially distant. Yet we have used the terms interchangeably, without recognizing the harm. Children took the literal definition early in the pandemic

to mean staying socially distant from friends and family. In a society that continues to move away from collectivism to individualism, this only furthers the divide. We have been telling children not to be close physically, but many believe that means socially as well. The great opportunity now lies in talking about family and community structures that can support social connections. In our schools, we can explicitly teach and value connecting with one another. No longer is it a question of “does it fit into the curriculum?” This is truly a gift that our primary teachers have long enjoyed, but we are now valuing this work right up to Grade 12.

As a parent of distinctively neurodivergent children, I look at the tools and context of virtual learning as potentially being a great equalizer. Differentiation and intensive support can be offered with privacy and dignity. Coaching and pre-teaching can take place before class instruction. Children who struggle with navigating the social landscape can focus on learning rather than worrying about nutrition breaks and isolation. Valuable time is not lost to classroom evacuations or COVID-19 protocols.

This can be the new reality for students, but only if there is adequate staffing support for our exceptional learners. Some families who could provide ongoing direct support saw their children thrive. However, we know that many, in the absence of that 1:1 support, were struggling and disengaged, and need to return to in-person schools.

For our equity-deserving communities, we have a great opportunity to equalize. We should be taking time to talk openly about what we need to do to make our brick-and-mortar schools as inviting and supportive as our successful virtual classrooms. Let's consider why this virtual learning space was considered superior to the in-person setting. How can we transfer those positives into our community-based schools? As leaders, we need to listen and act.

In some districts, teachers were placed in virtual learning classrooms, and in others, they volunteered. In both cases, we saw higher rates of diversity in those teachers as well. Did this cultural "matching" between students and teachers enhance the connection for students in the virtual space? If our diverse teaching staff selected virtual learning classrooms, then let's study and find out why.

I believe that online learning can be enriching. It can work for self-motivated people with a sufficient reading level, and synchronous online learning done well can create community and connection. But there are still some adjustments and considerations to be made. We know that students should learn with other people to become more flexible and tolerant adults. Children need to learn how to play with each other. This organic learning through play has yet to be replicated in the virtual classroom. As well, the physical well-being of our children, with endemic obesity numbers, cannot be addressed sitting at a computer all day. The same can be said for concerns about children's eyesight and distorted circadian rhythms.

With two years of a pandemic under our belts, I think that families will continue to demand virtual learning options for their children. Neighbourhood schools may become smaller and our school buildings may change over time.

So, how do we move forward? We know that our current system is not working for all students. We know that online learning – although it comes with some positive aspects – does not actually redress the broken system. We have to be careful that we do not create a de facto segregation. We should be

asking what we can do to make our schools more inclusive.

Personally, it has been a journey toward finding ways to invite diversity into our school. Our staff, although more diverse than in the past, is still predominantly white. But our students need more diversity now in order to feel represented in our school. My approach is two-fold: I need to know more about the patterns I am seeing, and I need to find a way to address concerns both in the short term and long term.

What Can You Do?

Start by asking the right questions. Determine what you specifically want to find out, which can feel daunting. If you have too big an idea, you may not have the time to follow through, so set a realistic goal. For example, I want to develop connections with my racialized families. To do that, I want to engage many different people in the school's life. I might wonder: "What can we do to engage equity-deserving communities on our school council?" That might be a goal that requires smaller goals first. What special talents do parents/families have that they might be willing to share with their child's classroom, or grade?

Could I encourage diversity through family or community mentored reading initiatives? If so, how can I facilitate training so the mentors feel confident? Am I being culturally sensitive to the things that I am asking of them? If I don't know, then I need to find someone in my board who does. Most districts now have equity branches, so educators can be directed to resources to guide them through this process.

I am truly excited about the possibilities that lie ahead. As we begin to piece our lives back together, we have an amazing opportunity, one where we can learn about the needs of our community. So much has changed over the past two years, and although we don't want to stay in this pandemic/endemic limbo, we cannot go back to the way things used to be. We have the opportunity to be brave and to fight for a better education system for all. It starts with one person asking another, and then just listening ... truly listening. ▲

Sharlene McHolm has been a public school administrator for 17 years across southern Ontario.

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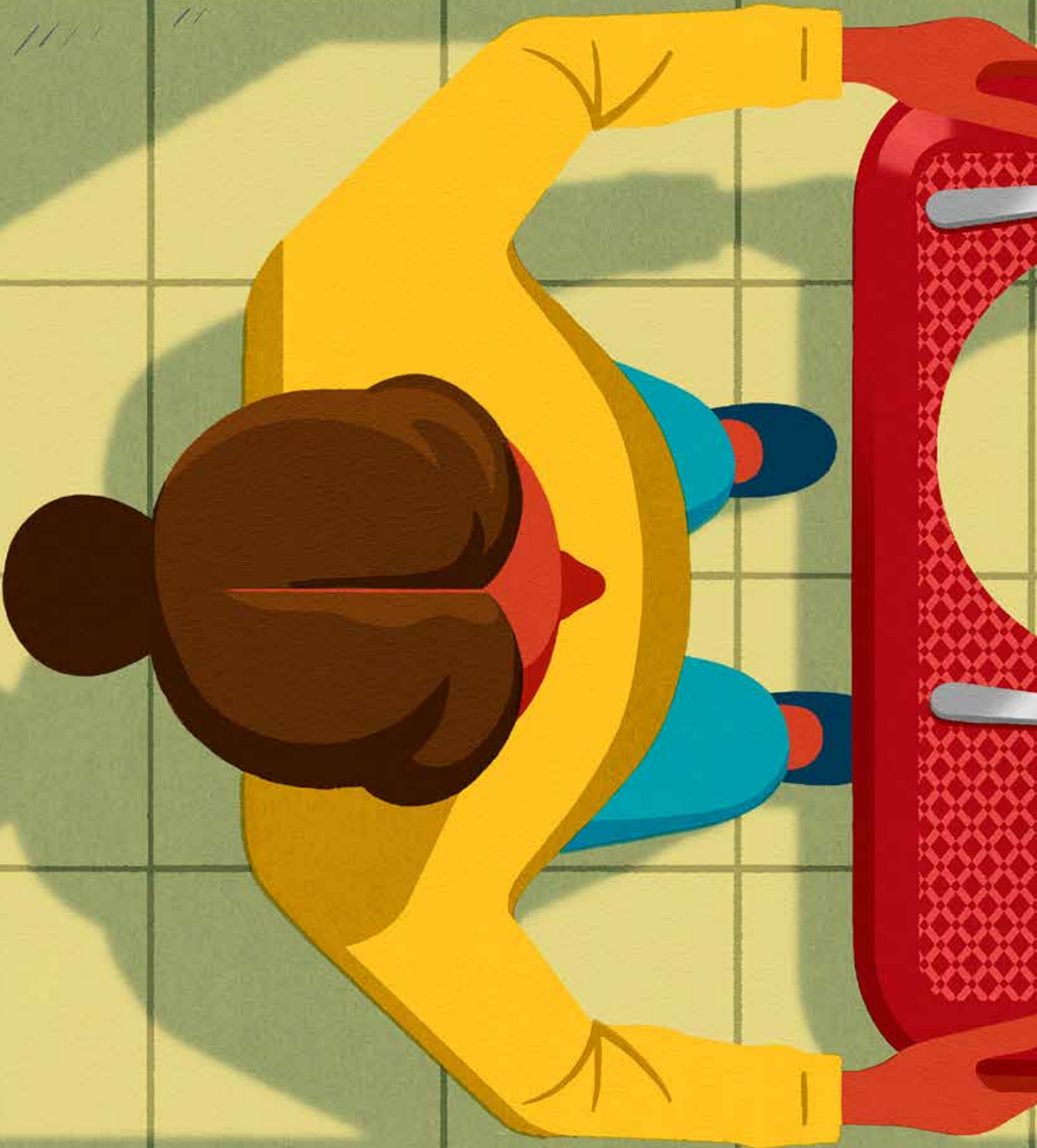
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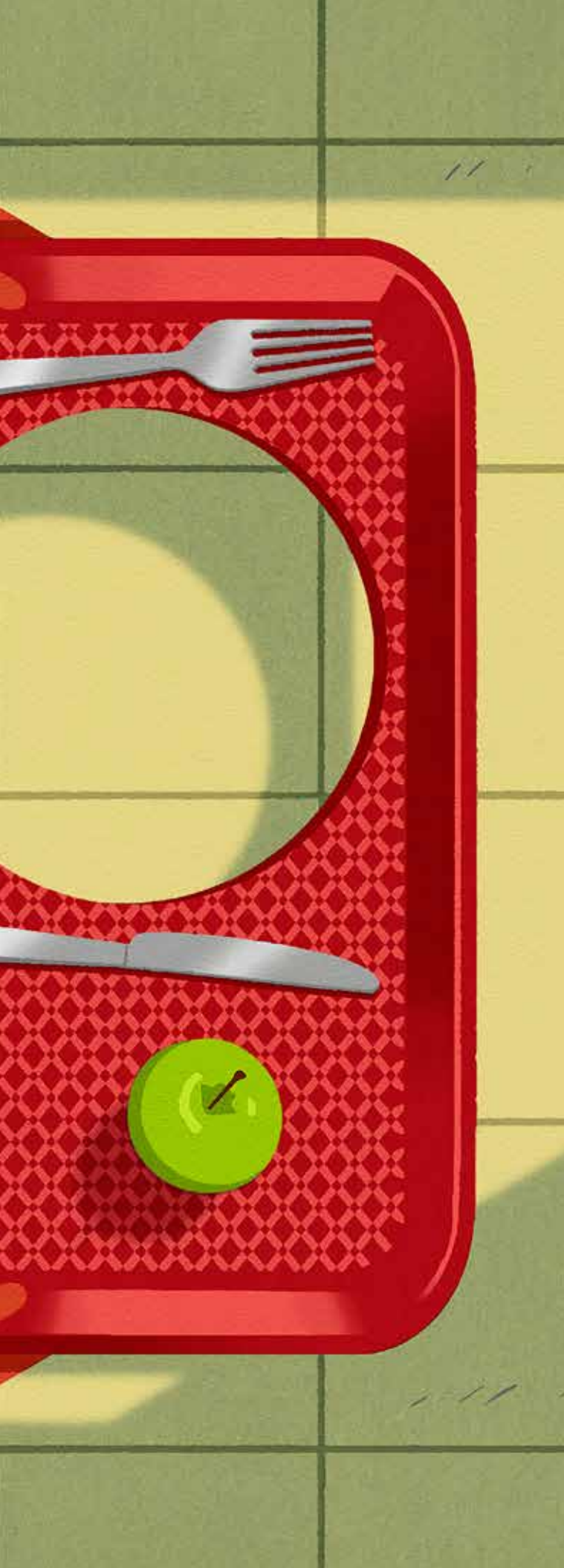
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* Warning: This article contains references to eating disorders, which could be triggering to some people and/or for trauma survivors. Consent was received from all parties for the sharing of this personal story.

Food is Medicine

Taking a bite out of food culture and eating disorders in schools

By Dave Gervais

Illustration by Pete Ryan

On December 5, 2021, I walked out of Hamilton Health Sciences McMaster Children's Hospital (MCH), having spent most of the night in the ICU with my 17-year-old daughter. Her body, to preserve itself, had used up so much of its energy stores that it was now turning to muscle for fuel. Her heart, an essential muscle for survival, was beating at a critically low resting rate – below 45 beats per minute. Her once long strawberry blond hair had completely fallen out. She was perpetually cold and dizzy, and struggled to lift her once athletic runner's build into her ICU bed.



Educating students and supporting them in their use of social media in relation to body image and mental health is one area where our schools must continue our focus.

In the months leading up to this day, I had watched my daughter starve herself as we, as a family, waited for the much-needed intervention from public health support. Now, as I left her behind in the hospital, I was aware that in less than four hours, I would need to look forward and welcome hundreds of other children to the start of a new school day.

My name is Dave Gervais, and like many of you, I am a parent, currently of teenage daughters.

I am also a veteran elementary school principal. Many would say that school is my playground. I love what I do, and feel fortunate that as principals we can impact and change students' lives.

In the days that followed my daughter's admission to the hospital, my wife and I took turns visiting her at McMaster's Eating Disorders Unit (EDU). This is an incredibly tough place to be as a parent or guardian, but we were also relieved that our daughter would now receive the life-saving intervention she so desperately needed.

More unsettling was that in this same unit was the daughter of a co-worker, whom I had confided to just weeks earlier about the struggles my daughter was having. These concerns would be officially diagnosed as anorexia nervosa combined with restrictive eating and purging. My co-worker and I now chatted over a hospital coffee, discussing the odds that both our daughters were sharing the same EDU care. We both acknowledged that even though we were both responsible for the well-being of other children, we were lost as to how best to help our own.

While it is still not clear what causes eating disorders (ED), they are an extremely serious illness, according to James Lock and Daniel Le Grange, both renowned professors of Psychiatry and Pediatrics and both directors of eating disorder programs. By nature, these disorders are self-perpetuating and "insidious." They have the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disease, and require a team of

professionals and specialized treatments to help patients recover.

Children with such a disorder battle themselves. In essence, the traits that make my daughter successful in life are the same traits that made her "successful" in her ED. Someone with ED recently shared with me that "we look at not eating as 'success.'" The same drive, control and level of self-discipline that led our daughter to achieve high honours, place at various track meets and essentially take care of herself were refocused on excelling at not eating and meeting an unfathomably low weight goal.

In coming to terms with my daughter's ED, I began sharing our family's story – with my daughter's knowledge and permission – and soon found that everyone I shared it with either knew of someone who had this disorder, or has struggled with it themselves. Shortly after, another colleague reached out to me looking for resources because their son was struggling with ED. Following that, another co-worker shared their life-long battle with ED, stating, "Dave, we need to do something about the language we use around food at our school."

It seemed that both my personal and professional lives were highlighting the depth and breadth of the most fatal mental health disorder out there, and that educating ourselves and supporting our students' well-being in this area was something we needed to do.

An [article published](#) this January from [Hamilton Health Sciences](#) examining the complexities of eating disorder diagnosis stated, "Referrals and admissions have exploded, up 90 per cent and 50 per cent respectively above pre-pandemic levels." So what can we, as school leaders, do? The sooner warning signs of this disorder are recognized and addressed in children, the greater the chances that it will not develop into full-blown ED – and this is where schools come in.

For most students, Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok are part and parcel of their daily digital interactions and consumption. The documentary [The Social Dilemma](#) on Net-



Dave, seen here with his teenage daughter, hopes educators will examine the culture around food within our schools.

flix depicts how media filters on social media platforms create a distorted image of oneself, leading to self-esteem and self-image challenges in young girls. Ask most students from Grade 4 up, and they will tell you that their main communication tool is Snapchat.

Snapchat is not only a cursed word for school principals in dealing with cyberbullying; it has also been identified as a cause of “unrealistic ideals of physical appearance” in a [February 15, 2021, research study](#) by Kaitlyn Burnell, Allycen Kurup and Marion Underwood. They found that “taking selfies with Snapchat lenses [filters], in general, was associated with body image concerns.” Similarly, an investigative report from January 16, 2022, by Global News reporters Saba Aziz and Leslie Young entitled “[Instagram vs Reality: The perils of social media on body image,](#)” depicts how one young Instagram user “manipulated photos by using body contouring apps and filters on Instagram to slim her face, give herself bigger lips or a more narrow and pointed nose”; another user said the most challenging part for him when using this platform was “seeing ordinary people, his peers and sometimes his friends, who seemed to have the perfect body and the perfect life.”

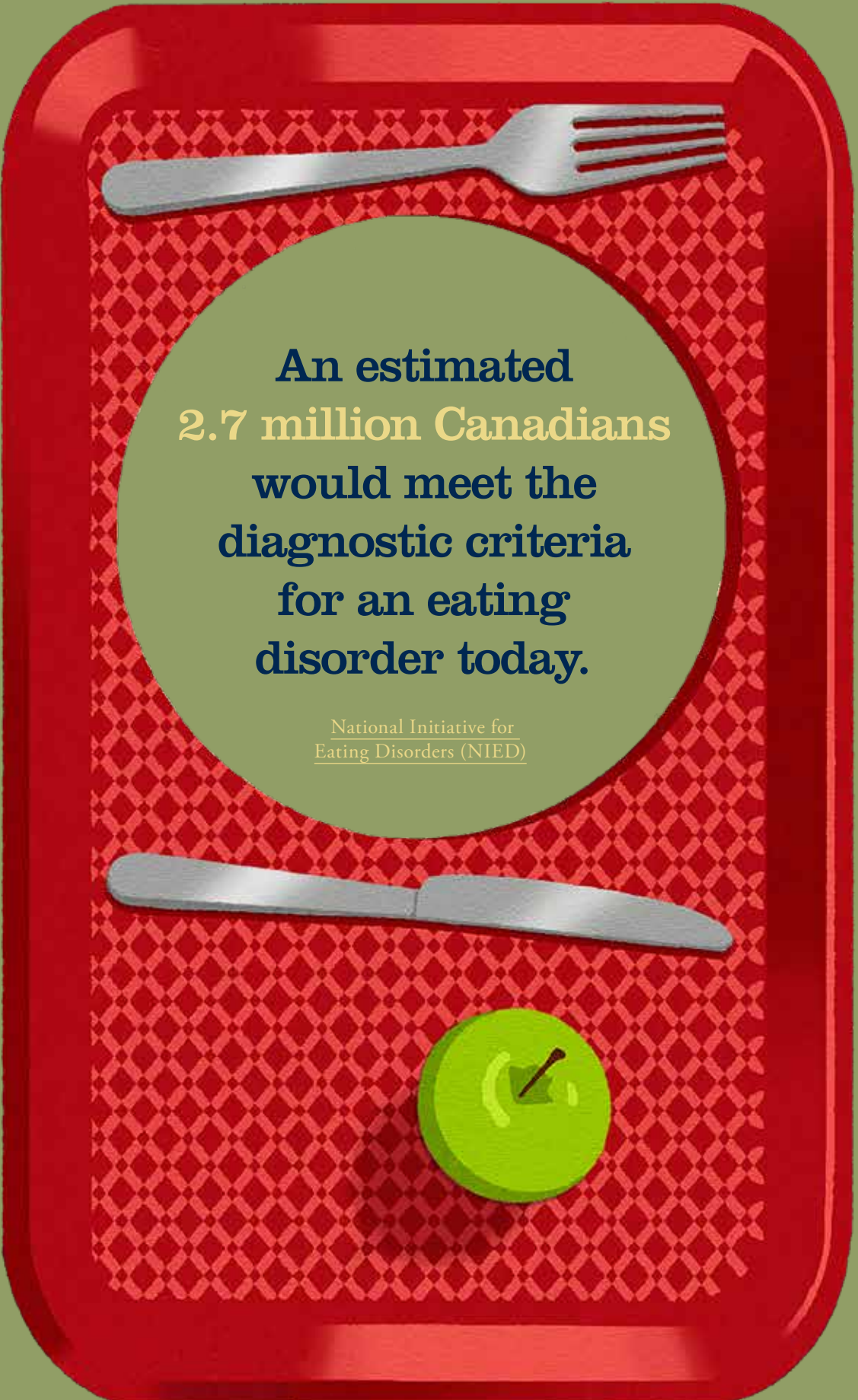
Changing one’s appearance is only one piece of this puzzle. My daughter shared with us that TikTok became a source of reinforcement for her disorder. She found herself following a community of teens and “influencers” who shared their progress toward extreme weight loss and outlined methods to do so, which included the use of laxatives, food restriction methods, purging and reporting daily weigh-ins to followers. Educating students and supporting them in their use of social media in relation to body image and mental health is one area where our schools must continue our focus.

I’ll circle back to the conversation I had with my co-worker, the teacher who shared that she wrestles with ED and wants to see a change in the language used around food. She commented that

Helpful Resources for Educators and Families

- National Eating Disorders Association, Educator Toolkit nationaleatingdisorders.org/sites/default/files/Toolkits/EducatorToolkit.pdf
- National Eating Disorder Information Centre, professional development tailored to educators and school support staff nedic.ca/community-education/educators
- Bulimia Anorexia Nervosa Association BANA magazine (includes articles and resources for educators) bana.ca/magazine
- National Eating Disorder Information Centre nedic.ca
- National Initiative for Eating Disorders nied.ca
- Hospital for Sick Children/Eating Disorders Program sickkids.ca/Psychiatry/What-we-do/Clinica-care/Eating-disorders-program
- Western University/Child Adolescent Mental Hospital Care Eating Disorders Program uwo.ca; phone: 519-667-6640
- Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario/Eating Disorders Program cheo.on.ca
- Bellwood Health Services Inc. bellwood.ca
- Hamilton Health Sciences McMaster Children’s Hospital hamiltonhealthsciences.ca; phone: 905-521-2100 ext. 73497





**An estimated
2.7 million Canadians
would meet the
diagnostic criteria
for an eating
disorder today.**

National Initiative for
Eating Disorders (NIED)

some co-workers use certain terms around food like “healthy,” “bad for you” and “junk food.” She believes that this, coupled with the people around her commenting on how good she looked as she lost weight, was why her disorder first took root. Our conversation led to a robust dialogue identifying further areas where we could draw awareness around our daily practice.

For example, why during “nutrition time” do educators sometimes encourage students to eat certain foods first? How do we respond when we see a student bringing cookies and cheese strings most days for lunch? Are we presenting the Canada Food Guide to students in a way that promotes all foods from all backgrounds, or inadvertently identifies some foods as “unhealthy” or “not good for you,” unintentionally promoting inequality and ill feelings in students? My daughter and the medical practitioners at the McMaster clinic will tell you, “Food is medicine.” This mantra certainly points to the fact that all food is fuel for our body, perhaps we need to internalize this mantra to fuel new language awareness in our schools as we strive to create a food-neutral environment.

My journey highlighted that for most educators, not much is known about eating disorders. My wife and I did not receive a call from our daughter’s school indicating that she was not eating, nor would we have expected this. As parents, we had little knowledge about this illness ourselves, and for the longest time assumed our daughter would move past this “phase.” It took us many months of advocating for care before our daughter finally received a diagnosis of ED, and by then it had taken hold.

My daughter estimates that from the time her disorder started until the time she was admitted to hospital, 1.5 years had passed: that’s a terribly long time to fight this disease alone. I’ve often wondered if her journey would have been different if we had some sense of early warning or some awareness ourselves.

Identifying or picking up on ED behaviours in a school setting may be challenging, but adding this knowledge to our repertoire of skills can lead to conversations with students

and parents/caregivers that, in a very real sense, can save lives.

There are many resources to support awareness in this area. The incredible healthcare team at MCH provided us with many reading resources; [Help Your Teenager Beat an Eating Disorder](#) was one of the most valuable in helping us understand and take steps to support our daughter in her recovery. It is one that I continue to pass along.

There are some early warning signs in the development of an eating disorder and it is important for all school personnel to be alert for these signs. Dr. Lock and Dr. LeGrange, as mentioned earlier, encourage educators to be aware of new behaviours such as, but not limited to,

- a new interest in diet books
- evidence of visiting pro-anorexia or eating disorder websites
- dieting behaviour
- the sudden decision to become a vegetarian
- increased picky eating, especially eating only “healthy foods”
- always going to the bathroom immediately after eating and
- an unusual number of stomach flu episodes.

The National Eating Disorder Information Centre shares that other symptoms to look for in a school setting can include

- skipping meals
- abnormal weight loss or gain
- chest pain
- constantly feeling cold
- dizziness or fainting
- frequent stomach aches and
- avoiding eating with others.

In my experience with my daughter, I would also add two other warning signs: a change in wardrobe, such as wearing oversized clothing, and hair loss.

My daughter’s recovery is promising, and she has become an influencer in her own right. She removed TikTok from her phone and has since assisted several peers in finding help for their restrictive food behaviours.

The memory of helping her into an ICU bed will stick with me for the rest of my life. If things happen for a reason, it is this: to inspire change in our schools.

It is with my daughter’s permission, and that of my colleagues, that I share our personal journey with you. My hope is that as educators, we will examine the culture around food within our schools, re-evaluate how we foster or discuss positive self-image in our learners, and bring this disease to the forefront of our thinking when supporting the well-being of students and colleagues.

Food is medicine, but education can be a cure. If you or someone you know is or may be struggling with an eating disorder, there are ways to get help. The resources in this article may help you, a friend, student or family in need. ▲

As an educator for 24 years, Dave has worked in private, public, elementary, secondary and international schools. For 10 years, he has worked as an administrator with the Grand Erie DSB. He celebrates life with his family, friends, colleagues and students, and balances this with a love of the outdoors and a good serving of hot wings.

🐦 [@Dave Gervais](#)

✉ david.gervais@granderie.ca

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4

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5-6

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7-8

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Part One & Two

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8

Managing Escalated Interactions
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10-16

SOQP Summer Session
Register by June 5

12 & 14

Leading Change with Purpose In
Complex Times (Online)

August

18

Leading Forward Together Conference

September

28

PQP Fall Session
Register by September 14

October

1

ELQP Fall Session
Register by September 17

3

PDC Module 1 & 3
Register by September 19

November

7

PDC Module 10 & 12
Register by October 24

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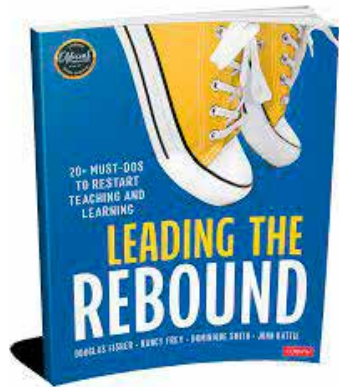
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Leading the Rebound: 20+ Must-dos to restart teaching and learning

By Dominique Smith, Douglas B. Fisher, Nancy Frey and John Hattie
Corwin Press

ISBN 9781071851449

Reviewed by Stefano Fornazzari San Martín

The authors of *Leading the Rebound: 20+ Must-dos to restart teaching and learning* argue that schools are

currently at a pivotal moment to revitalize teaching and learning in the face of challenges posed by the return to in-person classes after multiple shutdowns and reopenings due to COVID-19. Written specifically for school administrators, the book serves as a practical guide to help principals and vice-principals lead the change and move forward from the pandemic.

The book is succinct and accessible, grounded in the research and experience of its four authors, Dominique Smith, Douglas B. Fisher, Nancy Frey and John Hattie. It features an array of tools such as useful organizational charts, easy-to-follow graphic features and ready-to-use templates of activities that are topic-specific with explanations on how they can be immediately adapted for staff professional learning. *Leading the Rebound* can be used by schools as a useful how-to manual to identify areas of need, and plan activities to address them.

Each of the 22 chapters consists of “must-dos” that constitute part of the rebound to restart teaching and learning as proposed by the authors. The book is organized by themes such as restoring wellness, re-establishing parent-teacher relationships, ensuring equitable and

restorative grading, hosting honest performance conversations and ensuring instructional excellence. It offers specific, constructive recommendations that administrators can use to facilitate professional learning.

Something that particularly resonated with me in the book was the authors’ claim that social and emotional learning should figure prominently in the reopening culture of schools. Online learning during the pandemic has reminded us of the importance of relational trust and socialization. As such, the authors emphasize that social and emotional learning needs to play a central role in daily programming, rather than being relegated to a secondary status such as a singular initiative or a classroom poster that is referred to only occasionally. Now more than ever, the authors contend, educators must “allow social and emotional issues to become a legitimate narrative across your school and commit to being the school’s best listener-detective.”

Having undergone almost two years of intermittent in-person instruction in Ontario, students would benefit from practical strategies to mediate social situations as part of social and emotional learning. *Leading the Rebound* maintains that de-

veloping a restorative culture in schools helps students learn, yet also holds them accountable for their behaviour. By using affective statements, impromptu conversations and class meetings, educators can strengthen relationships by honouring student voices and elevating empathy and connection among students. The authors assert that restorative practices allow students to learn how their behaviour has impacted others, how they can repair said relationships and how they can respond differently in the future.

Leading the Rebound is a valuable resource for K-12 administrators that offers practical strategies to leverage high-yield activities to restart teaching and learning during these challenging and unprecedented times. It is a timely and ambitious invitation to rethink our practices and redefine our shared understanding of what is most impactful to student learning. It is a call to action, encouraging us to strive toward a new instructional normal. As the authors state: “It’s time to leverage this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reboot teaching and learning as we know it so that we magnify the effective practices from the past while leveraging the many recent lessons learned.” ▲

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Become an Equity Leader

Here's what can happen when you set out to make a difference in the world around you

“Equity? How do you spell that?” This was the response I received many years back when I called our resource department requesting material to help me to teach the “isms.” Thankfully, the need to segregate marginalized

groups into “isms” has evolved into a deeper understanding of the need to support equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

My journey to becoming an equity leader began with a federation advertisement for an LGBT teacher focus group. Against the advice of my administrator, who cautioned that participation would be a career-limiting move, I faxed away my expression of interest and eagerly awaited a response in the mail. (You are, I am sure, correctly inferring that this experience took place many years ago.)

Following the focus group, I sat on and later chaired the federation’s LGBT Standing Committee, even gaining notoriety on the front page of the *Toronto Star* as an advocate for “gay books.” During this time, I was also writing a thesis on lesbian teachers in northern Ontario. Reflecting back, I am thankful to those

who felt safe enough to share their stories with me, because many people honestly, and perhaps justifiably, felt that their career trajectory would be jeopardized by participation in my research.

Since that time, I have moved into school administration, and continue to work to build an understanding of EDI at the school, local and provincial levels. As an elementary principal, I am committed to ensuring that we provide a safe space for students where diversity is represented in the books we read, the displays on the walls and the language we use. At the board level, I am an original and active member of the Equity and Inclusive Education Standing Committee. I am participating in several initiatives with the OPC as a member of the EDI Sub-Committee on professional learning and the EDI Roster, as a

course facilitator and as the local OPC EDI representative in my district.

I would be remiss if I did not offer context around the phone call that started my story. When I came out and was desperately seeking information, the only resources I could find were in the public library’s “deviance” section. As an equity leader, I am committed to ensuring that our education system embraces the obligation to build understanding and awareness of EDI so that no staff or student ever has to equate deviance with their reality. I am also hopeful that my story will serve as an example of what can happen when you set out on a path to make a difference in the world around you. While it may not be possible to have a system-level equity position in a smaller board, you will surprise yourself at the myriad opportunities to evoke authentic and sustainable change. ▲

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