

SUMMER 2019 VOL. 21 NO. 2

OPC Register

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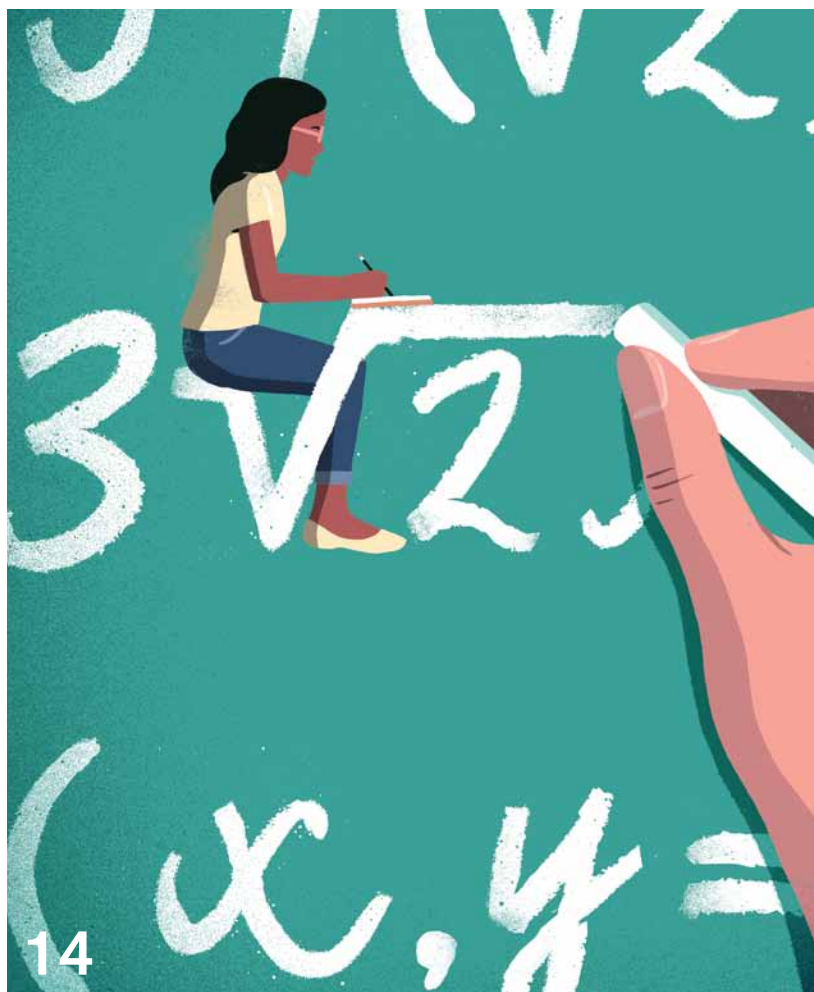
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Cover Illustration by Doug Panton

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The Year in Review

Consulting, planning and hosting



Each year on July 1, a new president takes office at the OPC. This is a unique opportunity for a practising principal to leave his/her board and

become the spokesperson for principals and vice-principals across the province. Despite a new person in the role each year, a number of things remain constant, or perhaps consistent is the better word. First, the full-time staff at the OPC office keep things running smoothly, ensuring excellent service for all our Members. I would like to say a personal thanks to all of the staff for their outstanding support of me this past year, helping to make sure that I was able to fulfill the role. Another consistency is that the term of office goes by very quickly. It seems like a whirlwind pace, just like a typical school year, and then it's time to return to our home school board. The final constant is that each President has a unique term of office, never knowing what that year will

entail when he/she is elected one year in advance. This was certainly a very unique year for education in the province as a new government took office just a few days before I became President. The transition was marked by a "pause" (except for changes to the elementary Health and Physical Education curriculum), and then a broad-based consultation process started.

Education Consultation

The consultations that took place in the fall of 2018, with submissions due mid-December, included seven areas. In February, we were invited to provide input on Class Sizes and Hiring Practices. The ministry then developed a consultation guide on those last two topics, inviting

further input by the end of May. For each of these consultations, we followed a similar process to gather input from Members. After the general information gathering and an initial draft was developed for each topic, our Provincial Council reviewed the data, providing further feedback. Finally, the Provincial Executive had the opportunity to suggest changes to the consultation documents prior to their submission to the ministry. To ensure our submissions reflected the role of all school leaders, we worked collaboratively with our provincial P/VP partners, ADFO and CPCO, on these submissions.

Strategic Plan

Over the past year, we have undertaken the development of a Strategic Plan that will direct the focus of the OPC. The Plan was developed through an extensive consultation process, including a province-wide survey of Members, which resulted in over 1,200 responses, as well as input from Provincial Council, the Executive and the Senior Staff. It went to Council for review and final approval in May. The four main areas of focus are Member Support, Advocacy, Professional Learning and Member Engagement.

Thank You

As I prepare to return to Halton, I want to say thank you to the Provincial Executive for all their help and support this past year. Thank you to the members of Provincial Council for all their efforts

gathering the information necessary for us to represent your voice to the ministry. And a special thanks to all the schools that generously welcomed me when I was on my District Visit. Getting to see the outstanding work of our colleagues in every region of the province was a very rewarding and satisfying experience. Thank you for sharing your ideas, expertise and passion for learning. I return to my board, having learned so much.

One Last Thought

In August, 2018, Allyson Otten and I attended the International Confederation of Principals (ICP) meeting, where we presented our bid to host the 2021 ICP World Conference. Some of you will remember that we hosted that event in Toronto in 2011. We were thrilled to learn in October that our bid was successful. I would like to invite you to join us in Toronto August 16–19, 2021, to help us showcase the excellence of Ontario's education system to the world. It will be a wonderful time for us to learn with and from the world. ▲



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The Register is the proud recipient of the following awards:



Happenings at OPC ...



Education Minister Lisa Thompson attended our February Council meeting where she heard from school leaders across the province.



This spring the International School Leadership (ISL) held workshop sessions with education leaders from China and Denmark.



We held another successful Silent Auction fundraiser in support of Right To Play Canada, an organization that uses the transformative power of play to educate and empower children facing adversity.



Student Voice

How to include it in decision-making

Often, educators say that the work they do is “for the kids.” And that is the goal! However, when making decisions that affect students and their learning environments, often the students themselves are not included.

Principals and vice-principals are key facilitators of student learning and achievement, but student inclusion can result in new ideas and practical lessons.

So, how can educators include students’ voices?

1. Create and implement projects that encourage students to improve the school

This is a way to see not only what they come up with, but how they come up with it. What are their main concerns? What can realistically be implemented? If possible, try implementing some of the projects in your school. For example, students may come up with a better recycling initiative. Can you make that happen? If you do, students will feel heard and appreciated.

2. Choose student representatives to participate in committee meetings

Having student representatives present is a way to encourage students to participate in the decision-making process. It can also generate some fresh new ideas and consider issues that you may not have thought of.

3. Have student representatives participate in staff meetings

While you wouldn’t ask students to attend an entire staff meeting, dedicating some time on the agenda to listen to their concerns can bring a new perspective and include their voice in school-based decisions.

4. Hold bi-monthly meetings with the leaders of the student groups in your school

Consider scheduling a meeting with all of the student leaders. Discuss school issues, community issues, student concerns and school budgets.

5. Set up a comment box

This is a simple and easy way to collect

feedback, and very effective if students truly believe that their comments are being read and taken into consideration. It is important to acknowledge the ideas and concerns that are suggested. Let the students know the ones you are considering and the ones you aren’t – and explain why you aren’t or can’t.

6. Have an open door policy

This is easier said than done due to an administrator’s busy schedule. Consider scheduling “open-door hours” during the week when students can drop by to chat, ask questions or offer ideas.

While not all these initiatives can be implemented in every school, including one or two can generate new ideas, a more invested student body and increased trust and engagement from your students. And while you may not meet with or hear from every student, if your student body is aware of your efforts to listen and include them in your initiatives, it will foster more open and trusting communication. ▲

Leading the

EQAO

CEO wants to ensure assessments remain relevant
and useful for schools

By Peggy Sweeney Photography by Stef + Ethan

In August 2017, Norah Marsh was appointed as the CEO of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). The agency creates and administers large-scale assessments to measure Ontario students' achievement in reading, writing and math in grades 3, 6, 9 and 10. The assessments evaluate student achievement in relation to a common provincial standard. While governments have argued that the agency is essential to ensure transparency and accountability in the sector, the assessments have been criticized by educators, students and parents, who consider them time-consuming, costly and unnecessary.

Why would anyone want to lead such a controversial agency?



Norah began her career as a secondary English teacher in the Limestone District School Board. She then became the department head of alternative programs. “I worked with students who were really disengaged in school and tried to create environments to support them around their academic skills, but also around their well-being. That experience has really shaped everything that I do, because I learned so much about them and their needs, and about how they landed where they did.”

As an administrator, Norah worked in three different school settings, each different in size, region and areas of focus. Her school experiences helped her when she moved into the superintendent role. “I was motivated by how we create cultures of hope for students and how we support implementation of policies that make sense for closing opportunity gaps.”

After seven years as a superintendent in Limestone, Norah moved to Ottawa where she spent three years as the associate director with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. The opportunity came up to lead the EQAO, and she pursued it, successfully.

“People have asked me why the move to EQAO. As a school administrator and district leader, I used EQAO data all the time in conjunction with other local data, and I found it really useful for supporting the conversations and the professional development that we used to make a difference for students.

“We were using the data and looking at where the student’s gaps were, and how we could use the data to really assess closing those gaps. I was a believer in the data. But I felt that over time, a lot of things were shifting in education, and I wanted EQAO to shift along with them.

“I wanted to focus on how we engage educators in using the data for evidence-informed decision-making more effectively, and how we could work more closely with stakeholders to alleviate some of the tensions around EQAO.”

And there have been tensions. [The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario](#) has expressed reservations with the provincial testing system and the necessity of it, saying “Over the past fifteen years, the amount of testing in our schools has increased. This is largely because successive governments have viewed large-scale assessments as tools to monitor a few select variables. Elementary teachers feel strongly that large-scale assessments such as the EQAO’s grade 3 and 6 tests do not give parents a true picture of their child’s progress.”

In a position paper, the [Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation](#) said that “the practice of standardized testing goes against modern, more progressive teaching methods of assessment and evaluation, and only serves to create social labels that can be harmful to many of our school communities. The financial resources dedicated

to EQAO would be better spent providing additional support and resources to students in the classroom.”

A common concern around EQAO has been its relevance. With all the assessments that take place in classrooms already, do we still need a provincial assessment model?

Norah is a strong believer that the answer is yes. “Absolutely, and that’s one of the reasons why I wanted to come here. This is the only source of independent data that is linked to the curriculum expectations, so we can gain an understanding of how students are demonstrating their understanding.

“It’s only one assessment, so it doesn’t tell the entire story. But in conjunction with other sources of data, it is a very valuable source of information to be part of the collaboration, the inquiries that we do. The reporting tool that EQAO provides to schools helps them see patterns around their students and the student learning. EQAO assesses reading, writing and math three times over the course of a child’s time in school. So, I don’t think it’s a heavy assessment program. And while its purpose is different from classroom assessment, I do think that there’s a place for both.”

Norah recognizes that there are criticisms about the office. To address them, she is working on a vision document to mitigate the concerns while still keeping the agency accountable and being more supportive around teacher practice and student learning. The document will look at a number of areas.

“How do we ensure that we’re a large-scale assessment, that we have a common success criteria across the province, but that we can still build in more flexibility? We’ve been talking about looking at providing choice in our assessments, making use of adaptive technology and potentially assessing at a different time of the year. Could we assess in the fall of grade four, rather than at the end of grade three, so that the information that we gather around student learning could be used more directly by the current classroom teacher?”





“

Every decision that we make, we look at through the lens of our equity inclusion strategy and what it will mean for students and schools.”

The OPC has developed two position papers on the EQAO in the past 15 years, highlighting a number of issues and offering recommendations to make the assessments more efficient for students and schools. One of the questions we've asked is whether EQAO still needs to collect results for every single student in the province. Instead, could the agency collect a sampling of student evaluations, assuming that a reasonable sample size would still equate to statistically valid province-wide results?

Norah doesn't support that idea. "If I were in a district, I'd be disappointed if that were to occur, because it would limit my potential use as far as resource allocation and the work around professional learning. In a sample model, you lose a lot of local information, and the process would become much more about accountability instead of about using

the data to determine the next best steps for learning. And, given the small size of the French language boards, it would create two systems of measuring within the province."

Another criticism of the assessment process is rankings. Despite the protestations from the government and EQAO that the results shouldn't be used to rank schools, it happens every year.

“
... students
who are in
vulnerable
situations
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the same
opportunities
to achieve at
high levels.”

The media, the Fraser Institute and even real estate agents continue to publicly use the provincial test scores to rank schools, thereby ranking students and school communities. And when private schools “outperform” public schools, despite not having the same student populations or obligations, those rankings are even more invalid. How do you release the results of provincial assessments without unfairly targeting the schools whose results are at the lower end?

“The government has, for a long time, had an open data by default philosophy, with the belief that there is data and it should be transparent and publicly available. We cannot control the use of the data once it is in the public sphere. However, we do not support the use of data to rank schools. The intended use of our data is to provide educators and parents with an independent and consistent measure. The goal for our data is for educators to have the opportunity to continue with effective practices, as well as develop new promising practices based on evidence.”

In response to concerns about students in modified programs or those receiving accommodations during the regular school day, Norah notes that EQAO has worked to try to increase the accommodations available for students and decrease the amount of paperwork required. “With the introduction of the expanded accommodations, we have seen a decrease in the number of Individual Education Plans, and this indicator will continue to be monitored and expanded as requests come in. We want to provide the opportunity for any child to participate in the assessment. But for those who are on an alternative curriculum or alternative report card, going forward we are suggesting removing them from the denominator. If a student isn't working towards that Ontario secondary school diploma and is on alternative curriculum, then including them in the denominator isn't a precise measurement.

“For students new to Ontario, we are planning to provide a two-year window of being enrolled in an Ontario school before being included in a school's denominator. This will give these students an opportunity to experience the curriculum before being part of the official results for a school.”

As the number and intensity of students who suffer from mental health issues increase, educators have become more concerned about the added stress EQAO testing places on them. Norah agrees this is an issue. “In 2015, the OECD conducted research on anxiety. In Canada, 64 per cent of students said that they feel highly stressed to write an in-class assessment that they feel well-prepared for. That's a staggering number.

“We created a Student Advisory this year and one of the questions we have asked them is what we can do to make the assessments feel less stressful. They told us that they like doing some practice so that they know what to expect as far as format. They've also reflected on practices in their school. One student spoke about the large assembly in the cafeteria where the principal talks about the OSSLT. That actually made them more nervous than just having their classroom teacher talk about it. That one was particularly interesting for me, because I used to hold those assemblies when I was a principal. I thought they would help.

“Another idea is providing more choice for writing sections, having teachers work with the class to select a sample from a portfolio that meets a particular criterion. We're listening to students, teachers and other educators as we look for ways to temper this stress.”

Speaking of stress, is it time to remove the OSSLT as a graduation requirement? Is that too stressful? “The decision for it to be a graduation requirement is a government one. Our mandate is to administer the test, not to decide on it as a graduation requirement. The OSSLT is a functional literacy assessment. It's not grounded in the same way as the other assessments as far as levels of achievement within the curriculum. We know that those who are literate will have healthier lives. How we determine that importance is really in the government's decision-making, not ours.”

There are a few other items on the to-do agenda for EQAO over the coming months. It is currently developing a series of videos for teachers on understanding student responses to multiple choice questions. It is also looking at a long-term vision to bring the assessments online. “We need to ensure that the IT infrastructure both here and within boards is reliable. We’re sensitive to the fact that not all schools have the same access to technology. We are interested in using technology as a tool to build more engaging and interactive assessments and garner greater insights into learners.”

The agency also developed an equity and inclusion strategy last year. “Every decision that we make, we look at through the lens of our equity inclusion strategy and what it will mean for students and schools. We want to understand the implications of our decisions so that if there are some unintended negative consequences, we can mitigate them.”

As a former principal, Norah understands the challenges that schools face around EQAO testing. But she believes that the agency’s work is relevant, critical and important for students and their teachers. “We want to be responsive and open to change. I’m hopeful that principals understand that and help us improve what we do for students.

“For me, it always goes back to the idea that students who are in vulnerable situations deserve the same opportunities to achieve at high levels. I am an advocate of public education and want to play a part in ensuring that as educators, we create a more equitable society. EQAO helped me as a practitioner ensure that we didn’t lower our expectations for those with gaps, but rather increased our supports. A strong publicly-funded system is key to that work.” ▲

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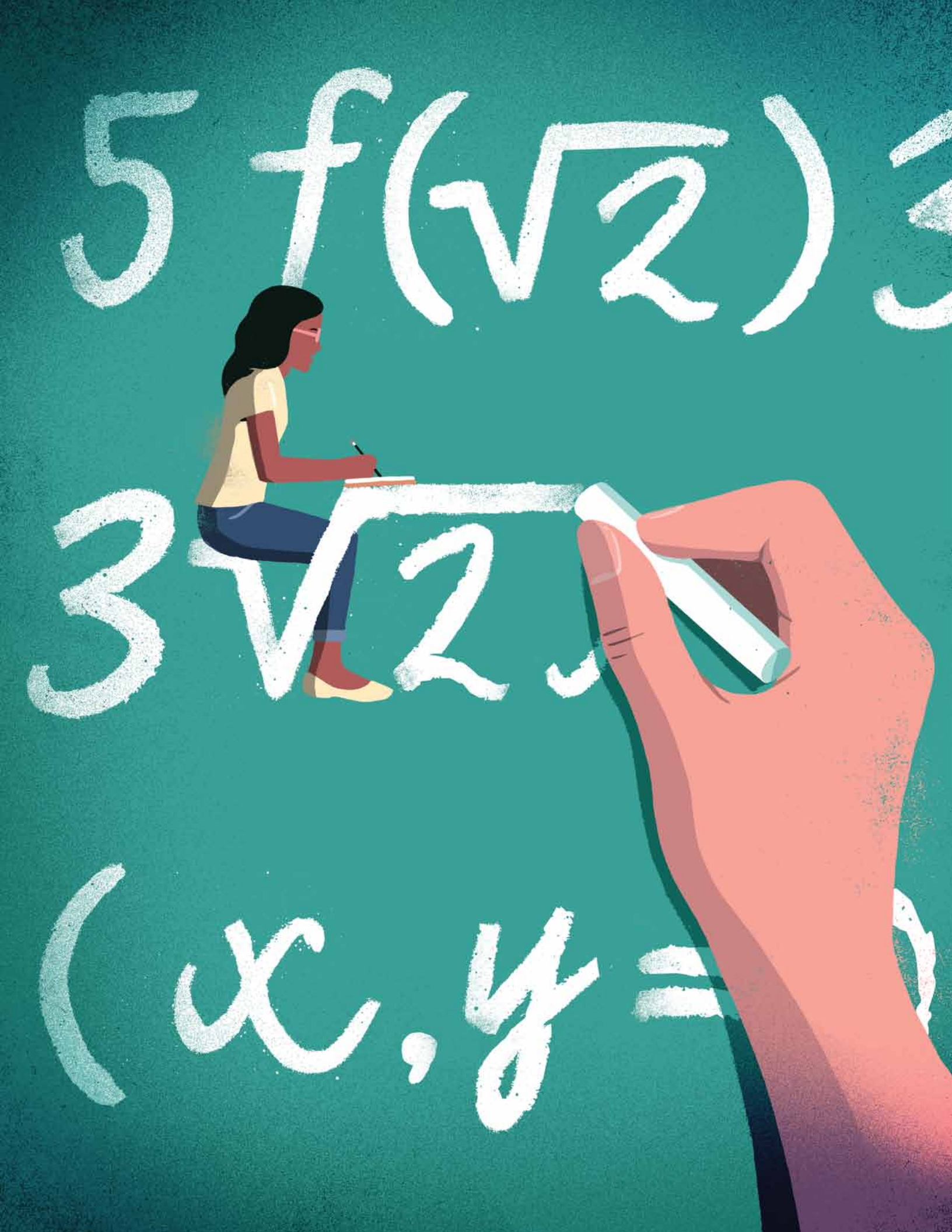
Scheduling Your **MATH CLASSES**

Do you need a math specialist for grade 9?

By Jeff Irvine

Illustration by Sébastien Thibault

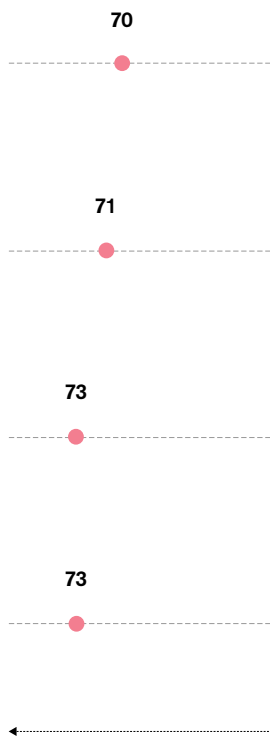
When preparing the staffing jigsaw puzzle, there are lots of factors to consider: fitting existing staff into the timetable as currently constructed; having no one declared surplus; staffing restricted subjects like French, tech and phys ed; and identifying timetables to post for new hires. Frequently, teachers may be deemed to be qualified for two sections of a grade 9 subject to help make all the pieces fit together. Sometimes, these deemed sections are grade 9 or grade 10 math. In my opinion, this is a staffing mistake.





... a large number of incoming college students were required to take remedial math courses, and still first year failure rates in some math-related college courses exceeded

80%



Mathematics is different from other subjects. For one thing, many students suffer from math anxiety, a fear they face every time they walk into a math classroom. A teacher must be knowledgeable about the characteristics of math anxiety, and be able to recognize and remediate it when a student displays symptoms. Also, mathematics has many open-ended problems. These are questions where there is a single correct answer, but multiple ways to get to that answer. A mathematics teacher has to be able to determine the validity of a student's solution, as well as be able to scaffold the student's learning to move them toward a solution that is valid in all cases. It is unreasonable to ask a non-math qualified teacher to address these issues.

How Do You Measure Success?

Initially, success might be determined to be a timetable that fits all the criteria listed above. But of course, there are other measures, such as low failure rates at the end of the semester, a small number of dropouts/

dropouts and few discipline issues during the semester. In grade 9 math, there is also the elephant in the room called EQAO. Whether or not these province-wide assessments are a valid measure of student success, there is no escaping the fact that EQAO results resonate with parents, senior administration and the general public. To date, grade 9 EQAO scores have been unimpressive. Over the last five years, scores in grade 9 academic math have been stagnant, and scores in grade 9 applied math have been abysmal. Figure 1 shows the results through 2016. How can we tolerate a grade 9 applied success rate of 34 per cent? We have to take action to improve the situation for these students.

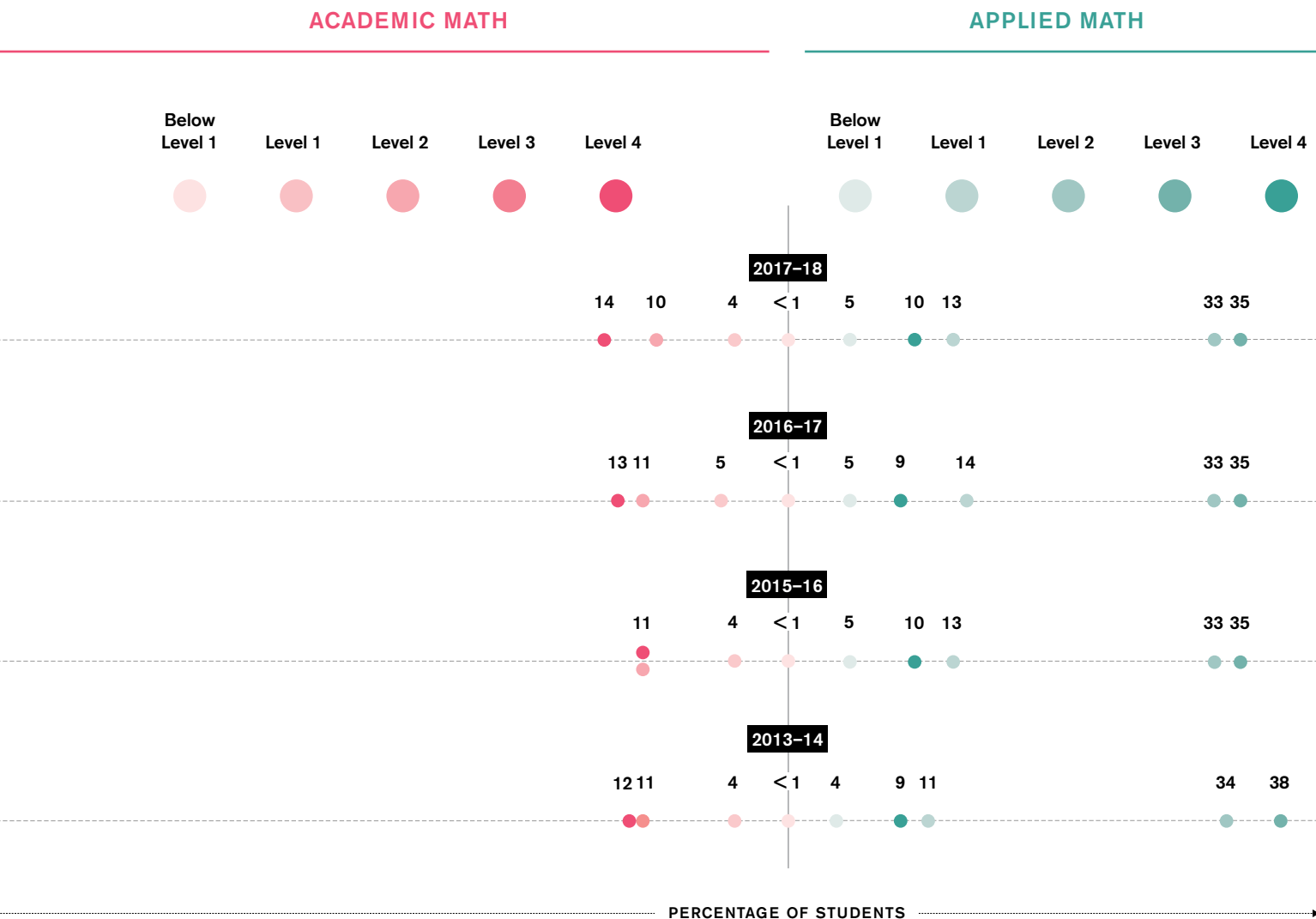
The College Math Project

The EQAO grade 9 results are also symptomatic of larger problems in high school mathematics. The College Math Project (CMP), a multi-year study of student success in community college programs requir-

FIG. 1

Grade 9 EQAO performance over the last five years*

*Note: Evaluation cancelled for 2014–2015



ing mathematics, has identified significant problems with students' math preparation for college. Conducted by researchers from York University and Seneca College, and funded jointly by the Ontario ministries of Education and Training, Colleges and Universities, the project surveyed every community college in Ontario and included students from all 72 school boards. It found a large number of incoming college students were required to take remedial math courses, and still first year failure rates in some math-related college courses exceeded 80 per cent.

The successor to the CMP, the College Student Achievement Project, continues to monitor college success rates in both math-related programs and other programs not requiring a math foundation. Each year the project makes recommendations for addressing the problems. Among the recommendations are to increase efforts through pre-service and in-service teacher education to support teachers' mathematics skills and understanding, as well as eradicating negative math stereotypes; develop sample instructional materials to support numeracy across the curriculum; and research the impact on student achievement of the current deployment of math-qualified teachers in Junior/Intermediate.

... a blend of instructional strategies, including **DIRECT INSTRUCTION** as well as **GUIDED DISCOVERY**, result in better student understanding, skill mastery, longer retention and better achievement.



I once had the privilege to be part of a mathematics department in a newly opened secondary school. The department head was an aeronautical engineer who had worked on the Avro Arrow. His philosophy was that the best teachers in the department should teach grade 9 and grade 12. Grade 9 students come with highly varied math backgrounds, both in content and attitude. Quality math teachers were tasked with “leveling the playing field” in content (closing gaps and remediating weaknesses) as well as instilling in students a positive attitude toward the study of mathematics. Teachers without math qualifications do not possess the mathematical content knowledge to remediate, especially using current pedagogies. In addition, they may not have a positive attitude towards mathematics, and so cannot reasonably expect to inculcate a positive attitude in their students.

The Math Content Debate

Premier Doug Ford's government has referred to “the failed experiment of discovery math.” Other news reports frequently refer to the debate between content mastery (often called “back to basics”) and concept development. Sometimes this debate is referred to as “The Math Wars.” In Ontario, there is no content debate. Students are expected to learn and know basic mathematical knowledge, skills and procedures. They are also expected to understand related math concepts. One reinforces the other.

There are two dimensions to mathematics learning: conceptual understanding and procedural fluency. Both are important. Various instructional strategies can be used to develop procedural fluency and conceptual understanding. Many of these strategies are based on a social constructivist theory of learning, in which students build on previous knowledge through problem solving, discussion and math-talk learning communities. While clearly the current curriculum is not perfect, it is important to recognize that a blend of instructional strategies, including direct instruction as well as guided discovery, result in better student understanding, skill mastery, longer retention and better achievement.

In March, the Ford government announced plans to significantly change elementary mathematics education over the next four years. These plans include discontinuing “discovery mathematics” and a return to more rote learning. There is also a requirement that all pre-service math teachers pass a content knowledge test prior to certification; funding for AQt for current grade 6 to 8 math teachers; the establishment of math leads and math facilitators, with a focus on low-performing schools; and a revised K to 8 math curricula with professional development for teachers. The emphasis on building a good foundation in middle school recognizes that teaching grade 9 mathematics is significantly different than teaching most other grade 9 courses.

Content Knowledge for Teaching Mathematics

Deborah Ball (2003) has done extensive research on the content knowledge necessary for teaching mathematics. She identified two different levels of knowledge needed. The first is the actual math content. I am confident that any secondary school teacher, no matter what their qualifications, would be able to understand the math content in a grade 9 math course. Whether they would feel confident about teaching the material is a different story.

Much more problematic is what Ball calls Content Knowledge for Teaching Mathematics (CKTM), or pedagogical content knowledge. She describes CKTM as bridging math content knowledge and the practice of teaching. This involves a deep understanding of the math content, which is required to recognize whether a student solution is always a valid method, only valid in this particular case or not valid at all. Strong CKTM enables math teachers to recognize and integrate the big ideas of mathematics into their daily practice, and to emphasize the seven mathematical processes in their teaching. A non-math qualified teacher would not (and probably could not) do this.

Attitudes Toward Mathematics

The relationship between math achievement and attitude toward mathematics is well documented. Changes in achievement influence changes in attitude and vice versa. For example, a longitudinal study of 110,389 students in grades 3, 6, and 9 (EQAO, 2014) found that students who did not meet the provincial standard in any of the three assessments had less positive attitudes about mathematics, had much less positive perceptions of their mathematics ability, liked mathematics much less after grade 3 and were less likely to connect new math concepts to previous knowledge. Low achievement leads to low motivation, and low motivation leads to low achievement, in a debilitating spiral.

The most extreme attitude toward mathematics is math anxiety. John Hattie (2009) demonstrated that it can reduce a student's achievement by three-quarters of a standard deviation, moving a student performing at the 50th percentile to the 24th percentile. In studies with Ontario adults, Cathy Bruce (2012), Dean of Education at Trent University, found that 80 per cent of adults are either math uncomfortable, math averse or math phobic. Non-math qualified teachers may fall into these categories, and teacher attitudes are typically communicated to their students, either verbally or non-verbally.

Studies have shown that student engagement is key to student achievement. Students need to see the relevance of the math they are learning to their own lives. In the innovative math department that I referenced earlier, we ensured that every math lesson began with a real-world problem, explaining why the math they were learning was important.

It is extremely unlikely that a non-math qualified teacher would be able to relate math lessons to real-world contexts.

Summary

Students frequently arrive in grade 9 mathematics with negative attitudes, learning gaps, lack of motivation and unclear focus on where they are going and how their destinations are related to mathematics. Grade 9 students, particularly in applied mathematics, need our support.

The research indicates that mathematics is significantly different than most other subjects. Short term success, like in the EQAO assessments, depends on deep learning rather than surface learning. Non-math qualified teachers cannot be expected to deliver deep learning for students. At best, they will provide surface learning, often teaching the way they were taught. But things have changed since your teachers were in high school math class.

We know so much more about how students learn, constructing their understanding by building on what they already know. The days of three-part mathematics lessons consisting of taking up homework, teacher providing some examples at the board, then students completing many similar questions with different numbers, are no longer sufficient nor acceptable.

There are also a lot of supports available for teaching grade 9 mathematics. The mathematics portion of the [EduGAINS website](#) has entire courses developed for grade 9 and 10 applied mathematics, including complete lessons for every expectation in the course, based on a social constructivist theory of learning.

Staffing Grade 9 Mathematics

So, what do you do to staff your grade 9 math sections? The Renewed Mathematics Strategy states that teachers of grade 9 need to hold qualifications in mathematics. There is a good argument that grade 9 math classes should get the best math teachers in your building, since they need so much help and support, especially if they are to develop positive attitudes and dispositions towards mathematics.

If it is impossible to staff with a math specialist, here are some other suggestions:

- do not staff with a teacher who has math anxiety
- staff with a teacher in a related subject area (science, technology, business) assuming that the teacher has a positive attitude towards mathematics
- use available supports such as the EduGAINS website
- support teachers to do a math AQ or Honours Specialist
- make use of board and Ministry of Education expertise
- advocate for board-wide strategies to address math anxiety as well as strategies to increase CKTM
- encourage teachers to take the grade 7/8 Mathematics AQ
- encourage a lesson study or book study in mathematics
- form a professional learning community (PLC) for mathematics
- use the professional expertise within your building to build math content knowledge for teaching mathematics among non-math staff who are or who might in the future be teaching grade 9 mathematics classes.

To develop lifelong learners, we need to start in grade 9 mathematics. This course is different, especially in attitudes and readiness, and needs to be recognized and addressed. These students need and deserve our support. The Ministry of Education says so. Extensive research says so. The status quo is not working, and we need to generate better solutions to the staffing problem. ▲

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The Factor of 2

Assessment literacy through precision in practice

By Lyn Sharratt

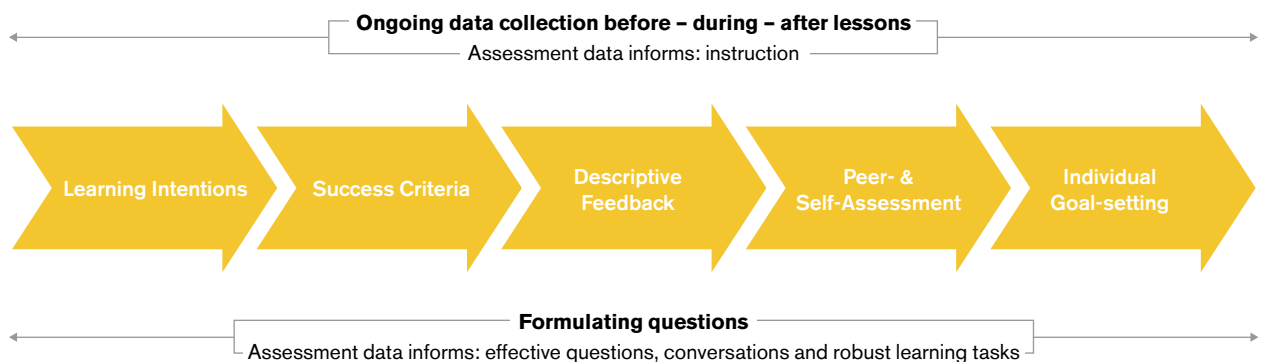
Professor John Hattie's landmark Visible Learning research (2009) concluded that effective (descriptive) feedback (DF), combined with effective instruction, improves the rate of learning by a factor of 2. Here, I support Hattie's findings but add that DF cannot be a stand-alone strategy. I make the case that to achieve 'The Factor of 2' impact, effective assessment and instruction must be defined as nesting within a robust Assessment Literacy Framework (See Figure 1).

It is within this Framework, when walking in classrooms and working *alongside* teachers, *not evaluating them*, that principals, vice-principals and teacher-leaders will witness their own impact on learning. Only by providing students with specific Descriptive Feedback against the elements of the Assessment Literacy Framework will learners know 'where they are at,' 'how they are doing,' 'where they are going' and 'how they are going to get there.' This is the power of 'The Factor of 2!'

THE 'ASSESSMENT FOR AND AS LEARNING' FRAMEWORK

Nothing else matters in teaching and learning as much as quality assessment; that is, data that informs and differentiates instruction for each learner in a never-ending cycle of inquiry to discover what works best (Sharratt, 2019). Ongoing 'assessment for and as learning' practices are the drivers

FIG. 1 Assessment For and As Learning Framework



Assessment **for** learning

involves teachers determining where students are in their learning through assessment of prior knowledge and using the information (data) collected from ongoing, daily assessments and observations of current learning to plan for differentiated instruction, thinking about the needs of the whole class, small groups and individual students.

VS.

Assessment **as** learning

involves students using clearly articulated, co-constructed Success Criteria (SC), visible classroom prompts and feedback from teachers and peers to articulate their next steps in learning. Importantly, in this process, students become reflective of their capabilities and learn to own their personal improvement. Ultimately, gradually increasing the autonomy of learners leads to self-regulation and metacognition or knowing how one learns best.

(Sharratt, 2019)

of change in every classroom; fair, equitable and clearly understood assessment practices should be at the very core of learning for students and of teaching for educators in every system and school. These practices ensure equity and excellence – the heart of educational improvement.

The 'waterfall' Assessment Framework in Figure 1 depicts all the components of 'assessment for and as learning.' No amount of instruction will work unless it is informed by transparent teacher and student self-assessment practices. Descriptive Feedback is but one, all-be-it a very important part of the 'assessment for and as learning framework.' Teachers and leaders need CLARITY in understanding how the following components of Figure 1 weave together to form robust classroom assessment practices.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

Learning Intentions (LIs) flow from conversations with students about the big ideas and essential questions of a unit of study. LIs are derived directly from state standards or provincial curriculum expectations and answer the question, "What are we learning?" and "Why?" The LI must make sense, be meaningful to students, be purposefully unpacked and then be communicated in student-friendly language. A LI is not what students are 'doing.' Further, for students to understand the why and the what they are learning in the unit of study, teachers must deconstruct the words with their students and put these prompts on charts that are visible for all students, to be used to support their thinking. Classrooms filled with anchor charts of prompts for students' use make the learning pathways visible.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Success Criteria (SC), or how students know what success looks like, flow from the LIs. SC must be clear, visible in classrooms and easily understood by students. Most importantly, SC must paint an accurate picture of what is truly the essential learning that will be assessed in the LI. When teachers co-construct SC collaboratively with students and add to them continuously as learning unfolds through the unit or exploration of a "wicked problem," students understand, in detail, how to be successful – with no surprises! Experiencing scaffolded instruction that supports attainment of the SC moves students from being engaged to being empowered to take charge of their own successful learning.

DESCRIPTIVE FEEDBACK

Descriptive Feedback that directly relates to the co-constructed Success Criteria provides students with practical, direct and useful insights that outline how to move their work forward to achieve the intended learning intention. Feedback can come from the classroom teacher, other teachers who provide support to students (e.g. special education resource teachers), leaders who walk in classes and self or peers. Descriptive Feedback

- focuses on the intended learning
- identifies specific strengths
- points to areas needing improvement
- suggests pathways that students can take to close the gap between where they are now and where they need to be to elevate their level of learning

FOUR FORMS OF FEEDBACK

- 1. ORAL FEEDBACK** is potentially the most powerful form of feedback when it is in-the-moment, on-the-spot, i.e. the teachable moment and is precisely tailored to the LIs and SCs. Teachers get the best feedback results from conversations with students, usually held privately, about a piece of student work. Teachers carry sticky notes, a clipboard or hand-held device when giving the feedback so that they can record anecdotal notes.
- 2. WRITTEN FEEDBACK** is effective when it is connected to the Learning Intention that aligns with curriculum expectations and uses terms from the Success Criteria. A rule of thumb is that written Descriptive Feedback includes one praise point and one or two instructional points, with examples, related to a curriculum expectation(s) being addressed, the SC and the student's intended learning goal.
- 3. DEMONSTRATIVE FEEDBACK** is most effective when teachers model the learning for individual or small groups of students. Effective examples include helping a kindergarten student hold a pencil correctly, showing a group of Junior students how to correct a volleyball serve, guiding a group of young writers by creating a series of opening sentences for paragraphs or providing on-the-spot feedback that assists students in refining their techniques (Sharratt, 2010).
- 4. COLLECTIVE FEEDBACK** occurs when teachers observe that all students need to go deeper into a text or in understanding a concept. Teachers literally and figuratively “share the pen” with students as they deconstruct and “think aloud” as they examine a piece of anonymous work. Together they note important aspects of the work and try to revise sections that they all feel need improvement, always referring to their co-constructed SC. Students most often need to see “what we’re talking about in their feedback” unfold explicitly in front of them. They discuss improvements to the writing with the teacher and with each other, often getting into academic controversy, which is where collective feedback makes collective learning happen!

These four forms of feedback guide students in being capable of self-assessing against the Success Criteria.

- chunks the amount of corrective feedback the student can handle at one time and
- models the kind of thinking with which students will engage when they self-assess (Sharratt, 2010).

It is essential that students receive feedback during the learning, and it's equally important that they are provided with sufficient time to process, establish a clear understanding of the comments provided and implement what they have learned from the feedback (Sharratt, 2010). These are critical steps in measurably enhancing student learning.

PEER- & SELF-ASSESSMENT

It is important to provide students with multiple opportunities to practice the feedback given. Students need time to improve and master concepts before new tasks with different criteria for success are introduced. There are four forms of Descriptive Feedback. It is critical to give examples alongside the feedback (Sharratt, 2010).

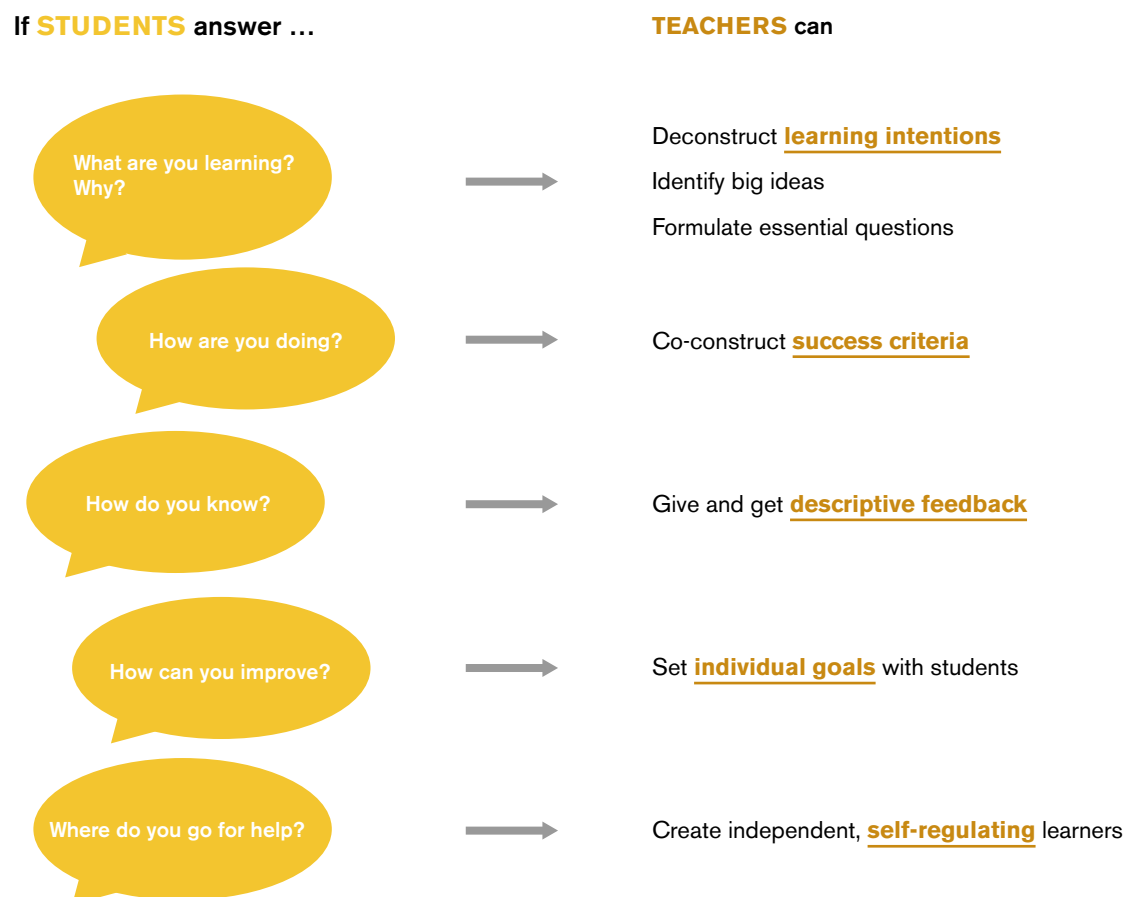
Self-assessment occurs when students gather feedback about and reflect on their own learning; that is, students own the assessment of their personal progress in knowledge, skills, processes and/or attitudes. Learning how to self-assess starts in kindergarten; the capacity to self-assess forms another basis point for self-regulation. The process demands that students use the feedback received previously against the SC as a reference when assessing their own work and the work of their peers. The internalized process leads to students' ability to reflect on, evaluate and set their own goals to improve their work (Sharratt, 2019).

INDIVIDUAL GOAL-SETTING

The ultimate destination in the ‘assessment for and as learning’ framework (Figure 1) is students' developing the capacity for individual goal-setting, in collaboration with other students, or with teachers and students conferencing together. When students achieve CLARITY from deconstructed LIs, co-constructed SC and targeted Descriptive Feedback to amend or revise their own work, there are no surprises for anyone when summative evaluation (assessment ‘of’ learning) takes place. Students and teachers can judge for themselves how well they have done.

Teachers must continuously ask, “Can my students apply what has been learned to new situations?” This can occur only when co-constructed SC are used so that students can assess their work or when they use the Descriptive Feedback received to self-assess and improve their work. When students

FIG. 2 Precision in Alignment of the 5 Questions and 'Assessment For and As Learning' Framework



know and can verbalize this total process they used in order to learn, they become their own teachers.

These critical components of assessment literacy must inform daily instructional approaches – never the other way around! Assessment drives instruction. Descriptive Feedback multiplies the impact when the SC are the correct ones.

PRECISION IN PRACTICE AS LEADERS IN CLASSROOMS

Undefined praise addressed to students is unlikely to be effective, because it carries little information that provides answers to any of the three questions: “Where am I going?,” “How am I going?” and, “Where to next?” and it too often deflects attention from the task (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). I encourage leaders to ask students five questions during their Learning Walks and Talks (LWTs)

(Sharratt 2008–2018). Answers enable Walkers to determine if students have CLARITY in their learning and to understand if students know how to use feedback provided to improve their learning (Sharratt, 2019). Walkers in LWTs select one or two students in each class to answer five questions:

1. What are you learning? Why?
2. How are you doing?
3. How do you know?
4. How can you improve?
5. Where do you go for help?

The five questions are not one-off conversation starters. Figure 2 shows the direct link between the five questions to ask students and the ‘Assessment for and as Learning’ Framework (Sharratt, 2019, pp.331-333). The students’ answers to the questions bring precision to assessment “for” and “as” learning and CLARITY to next step practices in classrooms. Walkers look to see that all

“It was only when I discovered that feedback was most powerful when it is from the ‘student to the teacher’ that I started to understand it better. When teachers seek, or at least are open to feedback from students as to what students know, what they understand, where they make errors, when they have misconceptions, when they are not engaged – then teaching and learning can be synchronized and powerful.”

(Hattie, 2009)

components of assessment “for” and “as” learning framework are explicitly in place in every classroom and that students can articulate each component of Figure 1 by accurately answering the questions in Figure 2. For leaders, the answers contribute to the data collection that forms the basis of Descriptive Feedback they can offer teachers, individually and collectively, and of the next steps needed in differentiating Professional Learning for staff.

IMPACT!

Many leaders acknowledge the power of the five questions nested within the components of the ‘assessment for and as learning’ framework and incorporate them in their daily Learning Walks and Talks. One highly-accomplished instructional leader, Jill Maar, Principal in York Region District School Board, walks in her school daily looking for evidence of the components of the waterfall chart in every classroom. She says:

“In terms of assessment “for” and “as” learning, I regularly meet with teachers to discuss their students’ data through Case Management Meetings – one student at a time. In staff meetings, I talk about the frequency of the data collection, where student voice is within that assessment process, and whether students are setting their own learning goals. (Sharrat, 2019, p. 313).

Another principal, Judith Ryan, says,

“As leaders and teachers, we use the data collected during Learning Walks and Talks to narrow our areas of need on the

Assessment Framework (Figure 1). As a community of learners, we focus on the five questions, for example, to help us, as a staff, have an intense focus on developing constructive feedback with each other and on setting our own Learning Goals. Our staff love doing Learning Walks and Talks together. We developed ‘The Learning Walks and Talks Feedback Book’ too. It was something we all had to go into with trust, being non-judgmental and focusing on being about building teacher capacity – the capacities of all. (Judith Ryan, Principal, Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese, in Personal Conversation, Nov. 2018).

CONCLUSION

Having students and teachers answer the five questions provides feedback to leaders and teachers, guiding their next steps in making learning, teaching and leading visible. As Maar and Ryan noted, to become more effective and to increase students’ achievement, leaders and teachers must offer Descriptive Feedback in the context of the comprehensive ‘assessment for and as learning’ framework (Figure 1). By continuing to be precise in assessment literacy practices, leaders, teachers and students will easily accomplish our target – Hattie’s ‘Factor of 2!’ ▲

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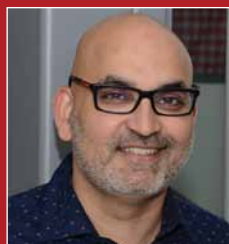
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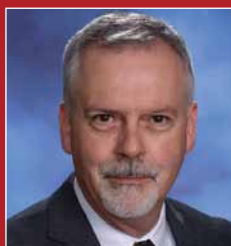
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Refusal to admit incidents on the increase

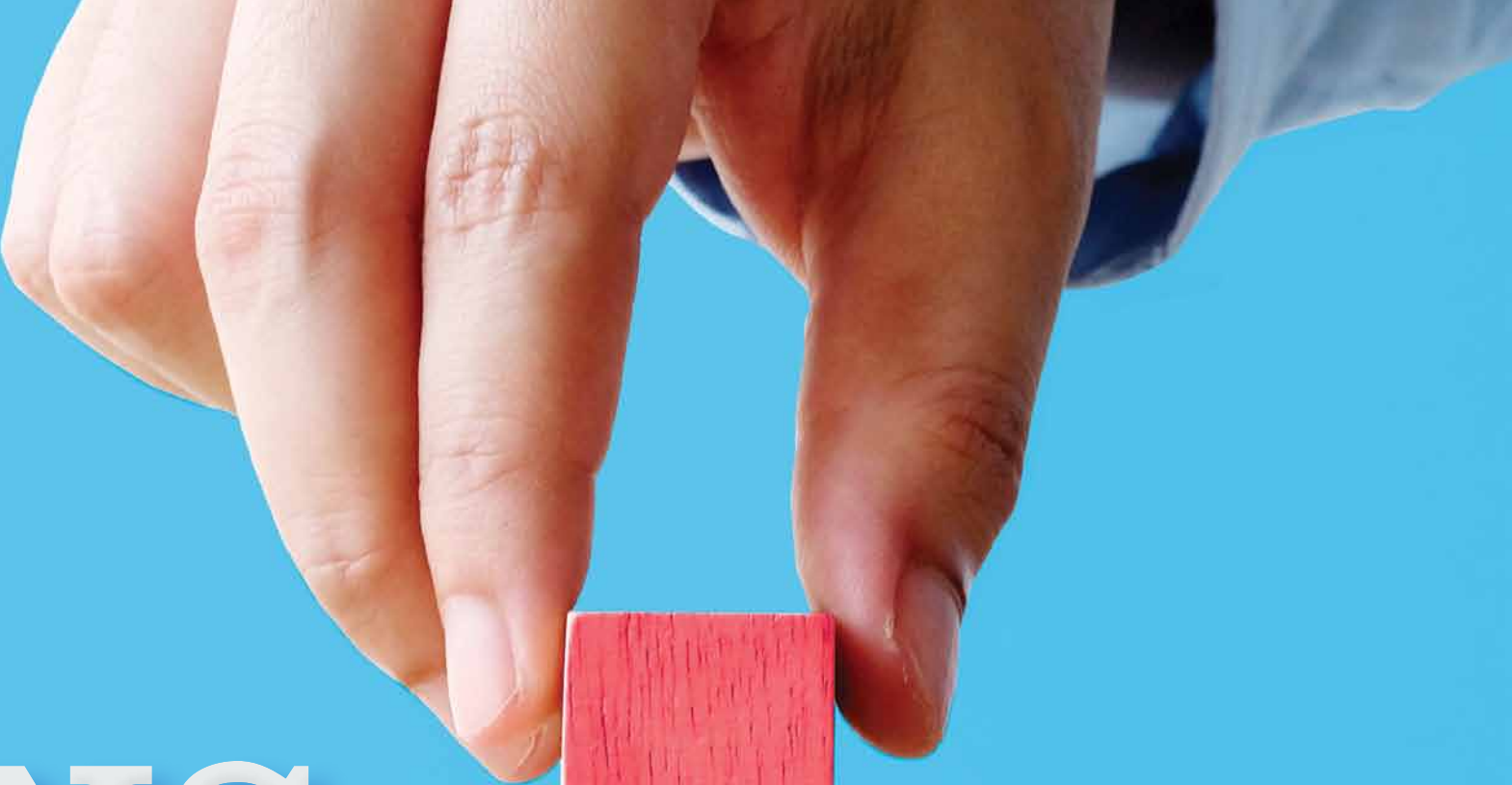
By the OPC Protective Services Team

EXCLUSIO

Principals and vice-principals across Ontario have experienced an unprecedented period of change in the public school reality over the past several years. The OPC Protective Services Team (PST) is seeing an increased prevalence in reports from school leaders related to mental health issues and general unwellness in both students and staff members alike. At the same time, there has been an increase in violent or aggressive student behaviours within schools. In carrying out their legislative duties and adhering to board policy, staff members are

expected to submit to their respective principals Violent Incident Report Forms or Safe Schools Incident Report Forms. In addition, school leaders must understand how to respond to incidents of workplace violence that come to their attention. Whenever incidents of violence in schools involve students as the aggressor, the question of interventions, supports and, where appropriate, discipline will always be foremost in the minds of school leaders. Arguably, however, disciplinary measures afforded under the *Education Act* and other legislation may not always be appropriate.

INS



Most recently the topic of exclusion or refusal to admit has become one of increasing concern for administrators. The reality is that over the last decade, parent advocacy for themselves and others and parents seeking the advocacy of outside agencies or partners has increased considerably. This has caused school leaders to be even more mindful of their actions and how they navigate these difficult situations. The failure to appropriately manage such situations attracts the potential for civil and human rights action against the district school board and against the principal.

So, What is an “Exclusion” Anyway?

Exclusion, or by its legislative vernacular “refusal to admit,” is a tool to address serious safety concerns for students in a school. When a student’s presence would be detrimental to the physical or mental well-being of other students, the student may be excluded from the classroom or school until the appropriate resources are put in place to address the safety concerns that have arisen. It is important to understand that, according to the *Ontario Education Act*, exclusion is neither defined as a right of a principal nor a request by a principal, but a legislated duty to act accordingly. Section 265(1)(m) of the *Education Act*, defines exclusion as follows:

265 (1)(m) It is the duty of a principal of a school, in addition to the principal’s duties as a teacher to refuse to admit to the school or classroom a person whose presence in the school or classroom would in the principal’s judgment be detrimental to the physical or mental well-being of the pupils.

Exclusions are a response to urgent, emerging situations and are entirely focused on ensuring safety as opposed to punishing a behaviour. An exclusion is neither intended to be disciplinary (it is a response to safety concerns) nor indefinite (the goal is always to have the excluded student return safely to school). A significant and necessary component of the exclusion is a plan, inside of which there are provisions developed to help ensure the student’s safe and productive return to school.

When Should I Use an Exclusion?

It is the duty of the school leader to use their judgment, in consultation with and after seeking the support of a supervisory officer, when considering whether an exclusion is warranted. Exclusions are not a form of discipline and are therefore vastly different from suspensions or other disciplinary measures. Exclusions are used as a tool to provide support for students who exhibit unsafe behaviours that place other students, or the student themselves, at risk of physical or mental harm. Exclusions often involve students with special needs who, due to a particular excep-

tionality, may not be able to control their behaviours or may not fully understand the foreseeable consequences of their behaviour, but exclusions are not exclusive to students in this unique group. When a school leader has considered, implemented and exhausted all other strategies to manage the unsafe student behaviour situation, an exclusion can be used.

It is incumbent on the principal to be mindful of and appropriately consider competing rights in these situations. School leaders need to balance the rights of all pupils to learn in a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment against the safety of the individual student who is acting out as well as the right of that individual student to attend school and have meaningful access to education. In addition to an exclusion from the entire school, a principal can exclude a student from a single classroom or multiple classrooms. Though arguably less impactful on the student and family in question, this exercise of a principal’s duty can also cause upset and attract a similar level of opposition from parents, guardians and family advocates. The exclusion of a student from a classroom will also necessitate consideration of how and by whom that student is supervised during the duration of the exclusion. Principals will need to exercise their judgment to make the most appropriate decision accordingly.

Communication is Key

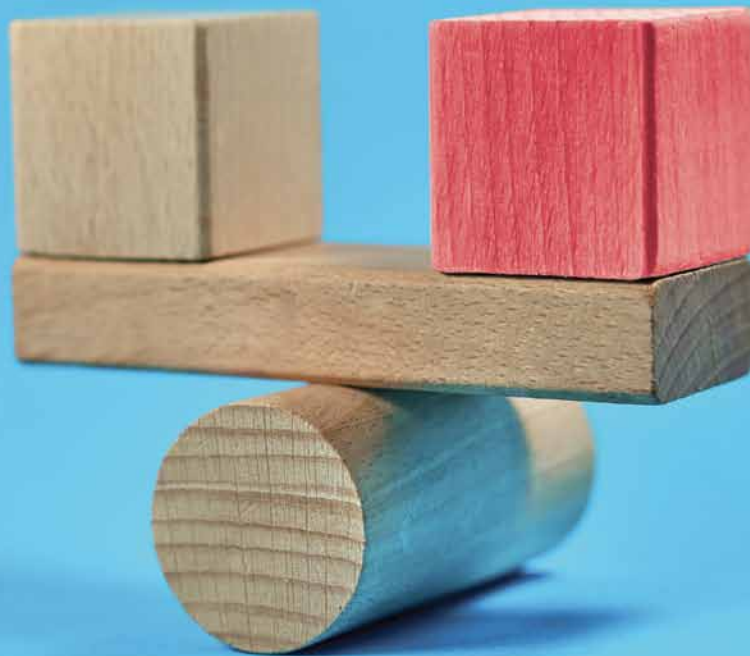
When administering an exclusion, procedural fairness and communication are of the utmost importance. School leaders must act in a fair manner, documenting their decision-making, communicating and consulting with relevant stakeholders wherever possible. School leaders are encouraged to leverage the knowledge, input and advice of superintendents, system principals, special education staff, parents/guardians and teachers. School and system-level staff need to understand the parameters of the exclusion and must collaborate in the development of an inter-disciplinary plan that allows for a safe and productive return of the student to the school in a reasonably timely manner. When necessary, principals should invite support from partner groups in the community including, but not limited to, the Children’s Aid Society, mental health associations and hospitals. Commit to reviewing the plan regularly to ensure it is neither intended nor viewed as indefinite and modify the plan as necessary.



Exclusions are used as a tool to provide support for students who exhibit unsafe behaviours that place other students, or the student themselves, at risk of physical or mental harm.

School leaders need to
balance the rights

of all pupils to learn in a safe,
welcoming and inclusive
environment against the safety
of the individual student
who is acting out ...



Parents of an excluded student need to be part of the conversation. Their input should be valued and incorporated where practical and appropriate. When dealing with a potential exclusion, provide advance notice to parents and staff where possible in an effort to mitigate any negative reactions to the deci-

sion and to provide staff with an opportunity to prepare work for the student to complete at home. In accordance with the *Education Act*, the duty to refuse to admit is prefaced by the phrase “subject to an appeal to the board ...” Whereas a suspension (*Education Act* Sect 306) or expulsion (*Education Act*

Sect 310) are subject to an appeal to a panel of three trustees, the appeal of an exclusion exercised under 265(1)(m) is heard before the entire board of trustees. Principals must inform parents/guardians about their right to appeal and provide them with instructions related to the process involved in an appeal.

The exclusion plan should include conditions of re-entry to the school. The conditions should be detailed, achievable and include both conditions prescribed to the family (e.g. appointment with a specialist), as well as those prescribed to the school board (e.g. extra staffing/resources). The PST has seen many effective practices related to exclusions across the province. One such practice involves the use of board templates/forms to assist in guiding the principal as they navigate the exclusion process. These templates/forms allow for a level of consistency across

the board and are designed to help provide support for the school leader throughout the process.

An exclusion or refusal to admit can present significant legal, operational and emotional challenges for those involved. It is crucial that the absence of the student being excluded from school or classroom is coded appropriately in the attendance management system and that homework is provided throughout the duration of the exclusion to ensure that any disruptions to learning are limited.

Conclusion

School leaders, teachers and support staff alike have all experienced an increase in violent or aggressive student behaviours within their schools over the past several years. The very real challenge of programming for some of the hardest to serve students raises an ethical challenge of competing interests and rights among students and staff. When a staff member, or 'worker' as defined under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, becomes the victim of violent student behaviour, school leaders must understand how to respond to such incidents when brought to their attention. While the school leader has authority to issue discipline in accordance with the *Education Act* and other legislation, disciplinary measures may not always be appropriate.

When a student's presence in the school is detrimental to the physical or mental well-being of other students, the student may be excluded from the classroom or school until appropriate resources are put in place to address the safety concerns that have arisen. The exclusion plan should include conditions of re-entry to the school. The ultimate goal is to ensure the safety and well-being of others while minimizing disruption to learning as much as possible.

The conditions of re-entry should be detailed, achievable and include both conditions prescribed to the family as well as those prescribed to the school board. As educators, it is our goal to have all students enjoy their education in a safe, healthy and welcoming learning environment. Difficult decisions must often be made, and appropriate measures put in place when this desired learning environment is threatened. School leaders are encouraged to leverage the knowledge, input and advice of superintendents, system principals, special education staff, parents/guardians and teachers in order to ensure the most appropriate and effective response to violent student behaviour. Contact the OPC Protective Services Team for advice and support as you navigate these challenges. ▲

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Modern learning and leading

The fast-changing pace of the modern world puts schools at the centre of ensuring that students, staff and school leaders realize their full potential. Re-imagining different and more powerful ways for school leaders to take an active role in creating learning environments that are designed to ensure a high level of learning and success for all students is at the core of exploring new professional learning opportunities. The Professional Learning opportunities offered by the OPC are designed to provide additional views on things we take for granted, and alternative ways of addressing educational challenges. Through the exploration of trends, ideas, current and emerging developments and professional learning needs, participants examine a variety of perspectives of modern learning and modern leading.

Our Professional Learning provides opportunities to challenge thinking, motivate, promote critical reflection, collaborate, stimulate learning and deep change and offer thoughtful action and concrete possibilities. Primarily, we are responding to the needs of busy school leaders to engage in a view of professional learning as an internal process that challenges previous assumptions and creates new meanings.

A shift from professional development to professional learning is one of our key commitments. Professional learning is an internal process in which individuals create professional knowledge through

interaction with information in a way that challenges previous assumptions and creates new meanings. Challenge

The intent of our Professional Learning opportunities is to support the application of practice and theory within the authentic context of teaching and learning.

and meaning-making are critical in solving daily and long-standing educational problems.

Another important shift in thinking about professional learning is that students are at the centre of the process. Improvement in student learning and well-being are the central purpose of professional learning for school leaders.

Our goal is to provide school leaders with collaborative learning opportunities to nurture a reflective professional stance and draw on the collective knowledge base of colleagues to improve practice through inquiry and the wisdom of others.

Our Professional Learning team has created multiple opportunities for learning based on Member surveys, current research, practice in the field, Ministry initiatives and program evaluations. We have established face-to-face, blended and fully online learning programs. The online programs provide candidates with learning activities in a shared “digital space” using a mix of synchronous and asynchronous undertakings.

Participants are involved in individualized activities and forms of collaborative discussions essential for learning in a

socially constructed learning environment. Activities support the exploration of divergent perspectives, problem solving and critical reflection in an environment that promotes a sense of safety, openness and trust.

We are responding to the need for learning activities that are authentic and based in the real world of school leaders. “Just in time” learning opportunities are divided into smaller manageable chunks that acknowledge the hectic work of a school leader. The intent of our Professional Learning opportunities is to support the application of practice and theory within the authentic context of teaching and learning. The professional judgement, knowledge, skills, efficacy and pedagogical practices of participants will be enhanced and refined through our Professional Learning opportunities.

Learn more about the many ways we can offer you support for your next Professional Learning opportunity. ▲

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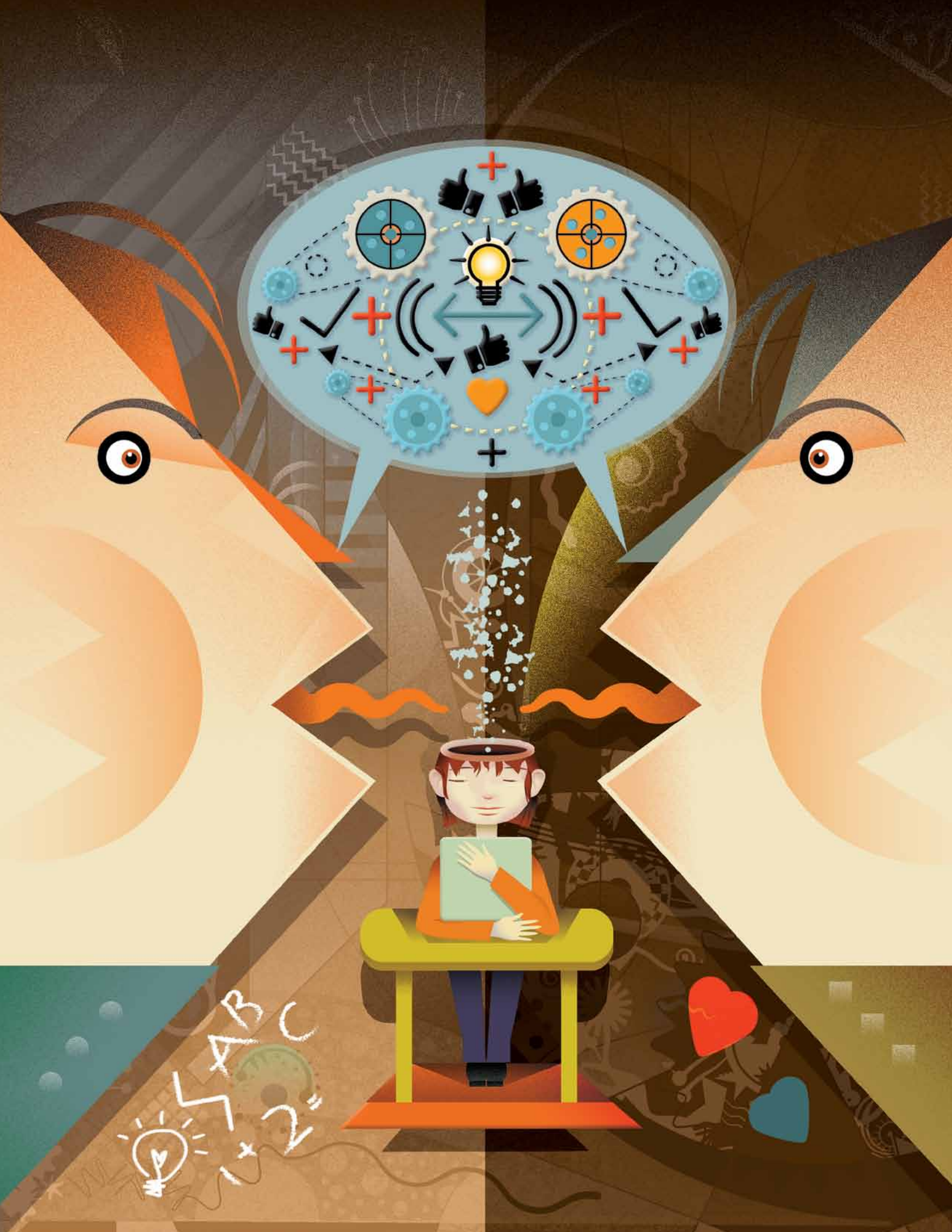
Interactions

— WITH PARENTS

Taking the time to build a relationship is crucial

By John Bowyer and Ken McNaughton

Illustration by
Doug Panton



The role of the principal/vice-principal is becoming more complex. A significant change is managing expectations from parents who are more knowledgeable and involved in their child's education. Parents play an essential role in their children's education, and research confirms that student achievement and well-being are enhanced when families are engaged in learning both at home and at school. Having parents who are informed, involved and capable of supporting their child's education is positive, and should be encouraged by administrators.

The Ontario Leadership Framework includes a section on building trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents. In it, Leithwood (2012) describes the importance of developing and sustaining trusting relationships that foster both organizational effectiveness and efficiency. "When people trust one another, they are more likely to take the risks needed to innovate and to make significant improvements to their practices. The growing body of evidence about trust in schools suggests that it does make significant contributions to a positive school climate and to student learning."

Difficulties may arise for administrators when a relationship with a parent breaks down and there is no longer trust. This may lead to interactions that are challenging and disruptive. Once a relationship with a parent is damaged, it's difficult to repair. As a result, it's important for administrators to spend the time required to build and sustain trusting, productive relationships.

An important way to help develop professional working relationships is to communicate the expectations for behaviour. The School Code of Conduct informs and reminds parents that they have a responsibility to support the efforts of school staff in maintaining a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment, stating that

- all students, parents, teachers and staff members have the right to be safe, and to feel safe, in their school community
- a positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included and accepted
- all members of the school community must
 - respect differences in people, their ideas and opinions
 - treat one another with dignity and respect at all times, especially when there is a disagreement
 - respect all members of the school community, especially persons in positions of authority.

It should also include proactive measures to address potential problems before they occur, such as a reminder that the *Freedom of Information and Privacy Act* prohibits unauthorized video or audio recording on school grounds.

There are many ways that a school leader can establish positive relationships:

- use school board resources and supports to help resolve issues, such as connecting with Special Education staff when a parent is upset by their child's Individual Education Plan
- recognize the diversity of your school community and how culture and/or diversity may impact school/parent relations
- be familiar with board policies and procedures governing School Councils, promoting one that is representative of the school demographics and inviting parents to share in the school's decision-making process

- know the "pulse" of your school community, manage situations in a timely manner and don't "let things go" or "overreact" to situations
- anticipate possible incidents, and be prepared to respond
- have frequent, meaningful interactions with parents that demonstrate you are interested in their concerns and questions
- ensure you are accessible, visible and communicate effectively
- post key resources in multiple languages
- ensure that positive school climate initiatives are communicated to parents
- engage guest speakers to share their knowledge and experiences on topics of interest to parents and provide parent engagement opportunities
- share strategies on how parents can support classroom learning at home
- create a learning environment in which parents are welcomed, respected and valued as partners in their child's learning
- be visible and accessible, walk the halls, visit classrooms daily, greet parents at drop-off and pick-up, maintain an open-door policy with respect to parent interactions, meet with parents in person whenever possible, invite parents to engage in school-wide and classroom experiences, volunteer in the school or be a member of committees, communicate clearly and frequently, especially "good news" items
- demonstrate that school pride is evident, keep the school well maintained, display student work
- inform parents about how to appropriately voice concerns in a productive manner, use de-escalation and mediation strategies, provide guidance and support for staff who are dealing with challenging interactions

Parents play an essential role in their children's education, and research confirms that student achievement and well-being are enhanced when families are engaged in learning both at home and at school.

- when applicable, involve community agencies or board staff to support you.

Even when an administrator has implemented a variety of proactive strategies to engage parents, it is likely that he or she will have to deal with situations that will be challenging. When an administrator encounters an upset parent, it is important to separate emotions and deal with the situation in a progressive manner. It is also important to determine what factors may be contributing to the challenging interaction to better understand the reasons for the parent's actions and help guide the response.

For many parents who present as angry and/or difficult, their actions may be a response to stress. Administrators must manage their own stress response, ensuring they remain attuned to the parent while remaining regulated.

Parents can be upset for a variety of reasons. Here are some constructive responses:

- Determine ways to create a welcoming and inclusive climate that is culturally responsive.
- Be attuned to the fact that the administrator role has an inherent power base, create overtures that can reduce barriers.
- Be sensitive to the parent's position, concerns for their child and associated emotions of anxiety and frustration that may lead to stress responses.

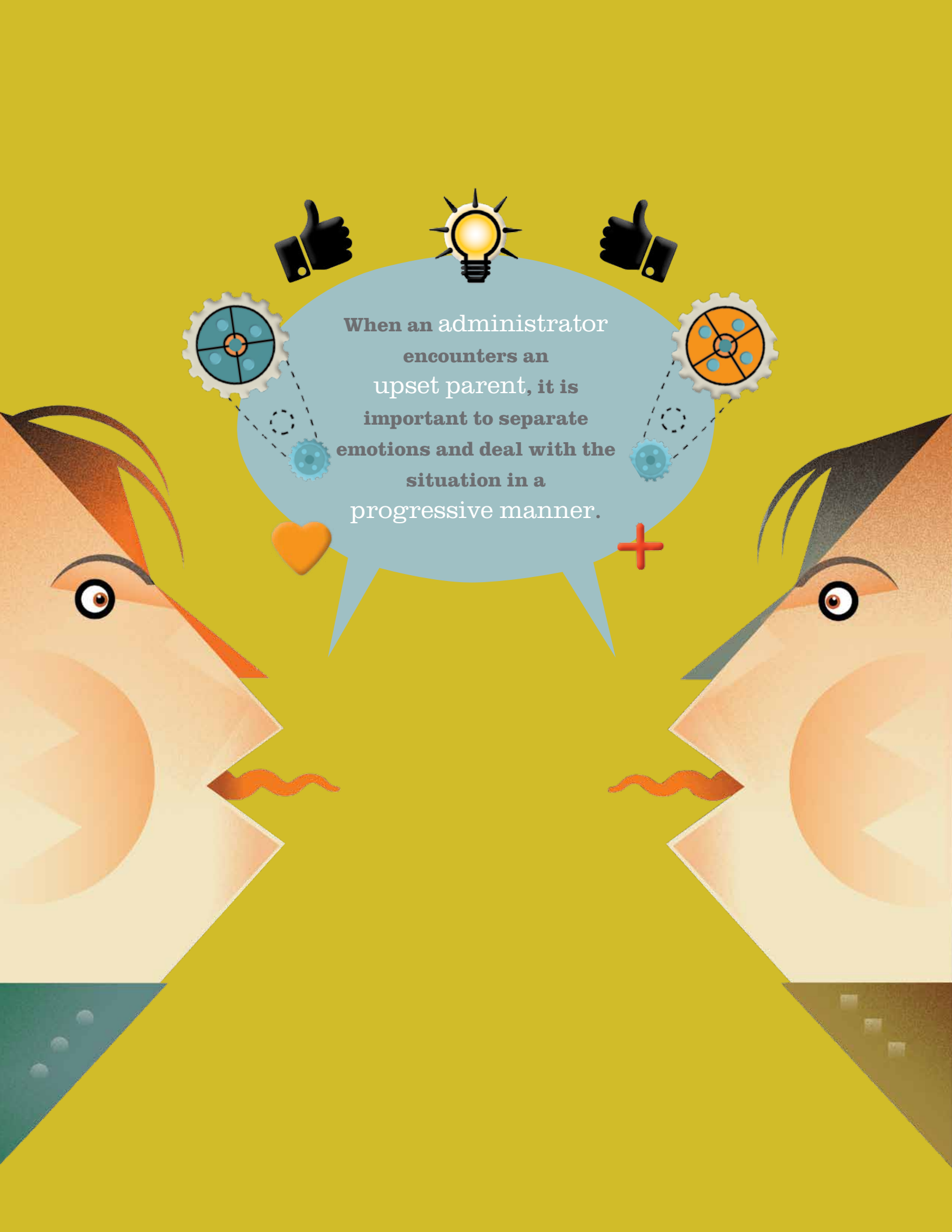
When stressed, a person's thinking patterns may change. Stress often leads to a narrowing of one's thinking process, wherein flexible problem-solving can be challenging. If a parent seems resistant to hearing the school's perspective, try to position the perspective to help shift the parent's thinking.

If you know that an interaction has the potential to be challenging, prepare for it and the possibility of future interactions. For example, if there is going to be a meeting with a parent whose conduct has been challenging,

the teacher(s) and administrator should speak to each other beforehand and plan accordingly.

- Review notes from past communications, gather relevant information.
- Consider the interests, goals and concerns of those involved in the meeting.
- Focus on understanding and addressing the underlying interests behind a position. When a parent says, "I want my child out of that class" it might mean "I want my child to feel safe and happy at school."
- Use objective criteria to assess options. If a parent wants their child moved to a class that is at maximum size, share the section of the Collective Agreement that prevents that.
- Brainstorm possible solutions; be creative with options. Try to find a "win/win" situation such as "How can we make sure we follow the Collective Agreement, while making sure that your child feels safe and happy at school?"
- Determine acceptable alternatives in case an agreement between you and the parent isn't reached.
- Separate the people from the problem. Be hard on the problem, not on the people. Remember that it is not "me versus you," but it is "us versus the problem."
- Trust is easily lost and difficult to restore. Be mindful of the need for a working relationship with the parent.
- Create an environment in which positive communication can take place. Don't sit behind your desk.
- Be aware of your assumptions about the parents' conduct. Model the behaviour you want others to exhibit.
- Prioritize the order of items to discuss; build success by starting with simpler, easier-to-solve issues.
- Practice interactive listening; be mindful of your body language and other non-verbal





When an administrator encounters an upset parent, it is important to separate emotions and deal with the situation in a progressive manner.



cues; paraphrase important statements; seek clarification and/or confirmation; reframe negative comments into positive statements. People may not budge unless they feel well heard and understood.

When meeting with parents to try and mediate a resolution of a dispute

- Ensure that all parties have the necessary information: who will attend, the purpose of the meeting and the opportunity to take notes.
- Establish norms at the start of the meeting. An agenda will help to keep the meeting focused.
- If appropriate, connect with community partners, and/or with a family member to act as a support mechanism.
- Be alert to your tone and body language.
- Listen deeply to the message of the parent.
- Reassure the parent that their perspective is important.
- Validate the parent's emotional state, the frustration and stress they may be feeling.
- Respond with an explanation, not a defense.
- Resolve to understand what happened, collaborate with the parent to find a solution and discuss alternative ways of acting in the future (Souers & Hall 2016).

If the interaction escalates, remain calm and listen. Allow the parent to vent. Focus on the needs of the student and let the parent know that you are invested in a mutually agreed upon outcome. If the parent tries to intimidate by making statements about contacting a lawyer, Human Rights, the Ministry, etc., remain calm. Let the parent know that is within their right to do so and don't respond in an inflammatory manner. If the parent becomes verbally and/or physically threatening, stop the meeting. Your safety is paramount. Ask the parent to leave and consider contacting the police. If you do so, inform your Superintendent.

As a follow-up to the meeting, confirm the outcome of the meeting and actions to be taken in an email or letter. It should include a summary of the events, confirm the school's position and outline what the parties have agreed to. Connect with your Superintendent to draft a letter that is professional and contains sufficient information to effectively communicate expectations.

If the parent continues to behave in a challenging manner, try other responses. It is important to inform the Superintendent early in the process so that they can help navigate potential responses. Regardless of how challenging an interaction has become, try to keep the lines of communication professional and open. Continue to try and problem-solve at the school level since this front-level engagement will often resolve the matter.

Offer to meet again with the parent(s) to discuss concerns and outline expectations for parental conduct. If there is a third party such as a family member, friend or advocate who may help to facilitate a productive conversation, encourage the parent to invite that person to the meeting. The administrator may also wish to consult with their Superintendent to discuss whether their presence at the meeting would be productive.

If the meeting(s) with the parent isn't productive, continue to work with the Superintendent to determine next steps, which may include issuing a Cease and Desist letter. It is important that letters are tailored to individual circumstances, and if possible, reviewed by the board lawyer. If all else fails, the board may need to enact legal options.

There are legal options that may be used by an administrator to limit the access of a person to the school site. Subsection 265(1)(m) of the *Education Act* gives the administrator the discretion, subject to their judgment, to refuse a per-

son's access to the school where their presence would "be detrimental to the physical or mental well-being of the pupils..." This option should only be used for a limited time period since it is subject to an appeal to the board.

Another option is to issue a Trespass Letter. In cases that involve threats of physical violence, the police should be contacted for advice and support.

When faced with especially challenging or complex circumstances, it is also important to connect with the Ontario Principals' Council.

For the most part, interactions with parents are positive and productive. Even when a parent is upset or concerned, the majority of parents are able and willing to work with administrators to resolve the issue in a professional, collaborative manner. The time invested in productive, healthy relationships with parents is well worth the effort. Developing respectful, healthy relationships with parents assists in the development of positive learning environments that are safe, inclusive and equitable for students, staff and parents. ▲

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Mark Your Calendar

We'll be offering a number of courses and workshops over the next few months including the following:

Leading the Special Education Program (PDC Module 11)

Starts July 10

PST Workshop on the Unionized Environment – Toronto

July 10

Workshop by Dr. Tranter on The Third Path – Toronto

July 11

Instructional Leadership (PDC Module 2)

July 29 – August 16

Leading the French Immersion Program (PDC Module 14)

July 29 – August 16

Special Education for Administrators Qualification Program (SEAQP)

August 19 – December 9

MentorCoaching Institute Public Session – Toronto

August 12 – 14

Special Education for Administrators Qualification Program (SEAQP)

August 19 – December 9

Speaker Series – Jennifer Abrams
Richmond Hill

August 20

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



Student Artwork Submission

We invite students (individuals or groups) from across Ontario to design artwork that will be featured in our magazine. This submission comes from Ella Pasco of Char-Lan District High School in the Upper Canada District School Board.

If you would like to submit a piece of artwork, please email psweeney@principals.ca

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2021 International Confederation of Principals Convention Metro Toronto Convention Centre (MTCC)



icp2021@principals.ca

www.principals.ca/ICP

OPC's Strategic Plan

We are pleased to announce that we have now finalized our 2019–2022 Strategic Plan that was unanimously approved by Provincial Council in May.

As part of that process, we have a new **vision statement**

Our **mission statement** is to

“ Develop, support and promote exemplary leadership for student success in our schools. ”

“ Leading public schools that are the global standard of excellence. ”

Our Strategic Plan is the result of an extensive consultation process with our Executive, senior staff, Provincial Council, stakeholder partners and a membership survey completed by 1,162 of you.

The Plan includes four key priorities, or pillars of service, based on what you told us is important to you.

Member Support

- Advise and represent individual Members needing support related to their employment.
- Continue efforts to promote P/VP provincial and local terms and conditions of employment.
- Continue to improve the quality and reduce the intensity of Member's daily work to attract and retain the brightest and best in school leadership.

Advocacy

- Develop informed, non-partisan positions on issues that affect students, staff, schools and school leaders and articulate them publicly through a variety of channels to advance student achievement and well-being.
- Advocate on behalf of principals and vice-principals, the OPC, students and public education in Ontario.

Professional Learning

- Develop and deliver leading edge, responsive professional learning for OPC Members that is actionable and practical.
- Support and curate ground-breaking education leadership research.
- Advance school and system leadership training world-wide.

Member Engagement

- Facilitate enhanced Member ownership and connection in the OPC through two-way, multi-media communications, governance capacity-building and active consultation on emerging issues in education.

Act Local Think Global

Leading, Linking, Learning

We are excited to invite
school leaders from around the world to
engage with us at the International Confederation
of Principals (ICP) World Convention 2021 in Toronto!

The OPC is a proud and active member of the ICP, whose mission statement aligns closely with our own values, namely, a dedication to “the development, support and promotion of school leadership globally” with a particular focus on “creating more equitable opportunities and outcomes for students through quality school leadership.” The connections made through ICP have helped to inform our practice both at the school level and as an association.

ICP is a global association representing 135,000 school leaders from over 40 countries. It is a major voice for education policy while being a non-political and non-sectarian organization. The World Convention is held every two years focussing on dialogue and professional development, bringing together education leaders from around the world to share and learn new practices on leadership trends and insights.

In 2011, we hosted the World Conference in Canada, attended by over 2,000 delegates. We are proud to be hosting again from **August 16 – 19, 2021 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre (MTCC)** in Toronto. Based on our success in 2011, we envision that the 2021 Convention will be the largest educational conference in Canada dedicated exclusively to the needs of school leaders, an event you won't want to miss. There will be renowned keynote speakers, featured speakers, discussions and workshop sessions, as well as an interactive exhibition space with companies showcasing applications, products and services for every facet of the educational field.

Make plans to join us in Toronto to welcome the world, as we showcase the excellence that is our Ontario education system, while also learning from our peers around the world, promoting global co-operation. We are confident that you will come away with new ideas, professional contacts and other valuable information.

Stay tuned for details over the coming months, including your opportunity to contribute to the content and shape of our program. At the request of our Members, we have created an early, domestic online registration site to accommodate those who would like to apply their current year professional development funds.



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- Gain strategies for making RTI efficient, effective, and equitable.
- Build a toolbox of effective interventions.
- Cultivate a positive team spirit and use collaborative team time to help achieve your desired learning outcomes.

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Luis F. Cruz



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ultimately improving student outcomes.

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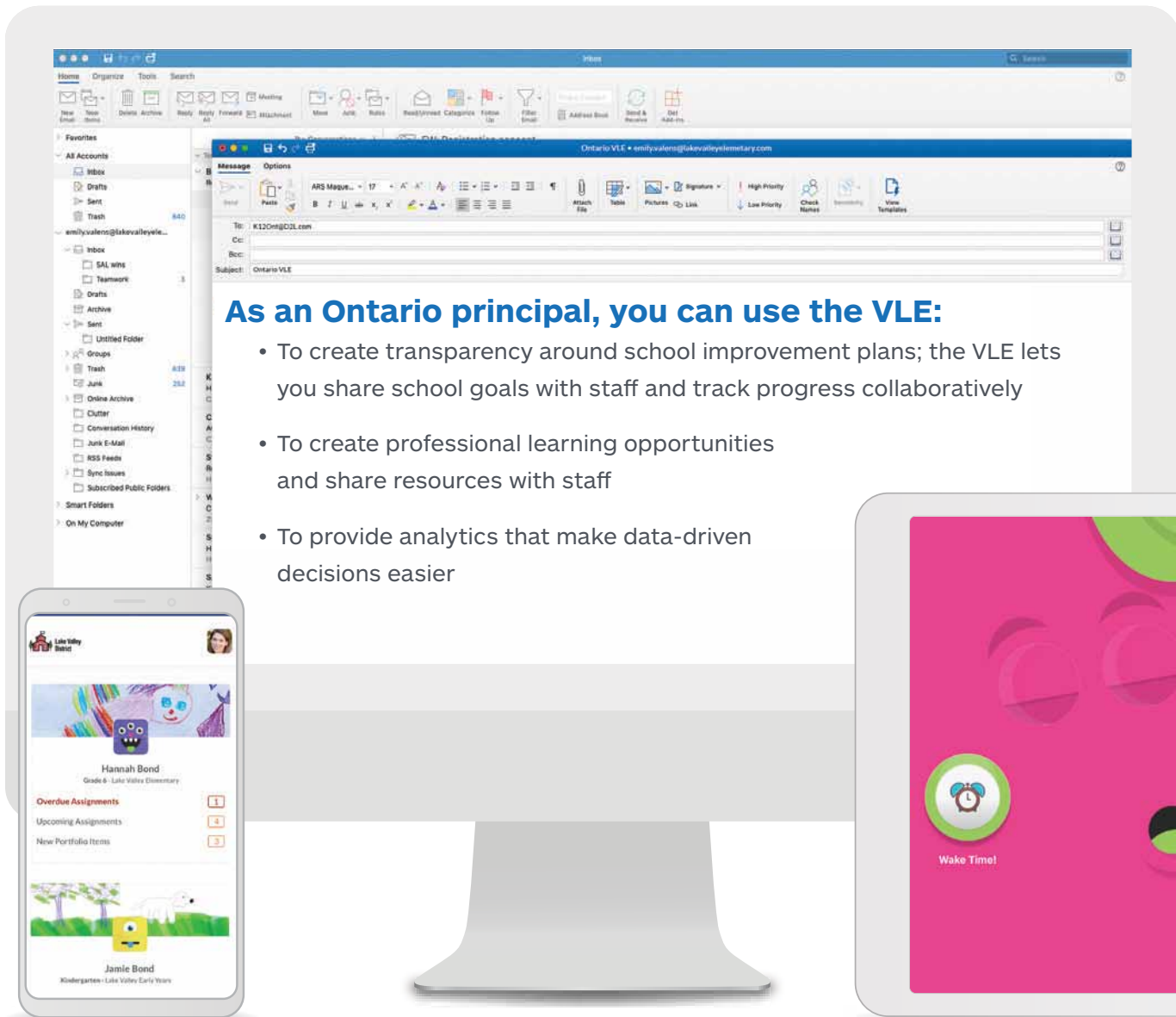
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