

SUMMER 2017 VOL.19 NO.2

# OPC Register

THE MAGAZINE FOR ONTARIO'S PRINCIPALS & VICE-PRINCIPALS



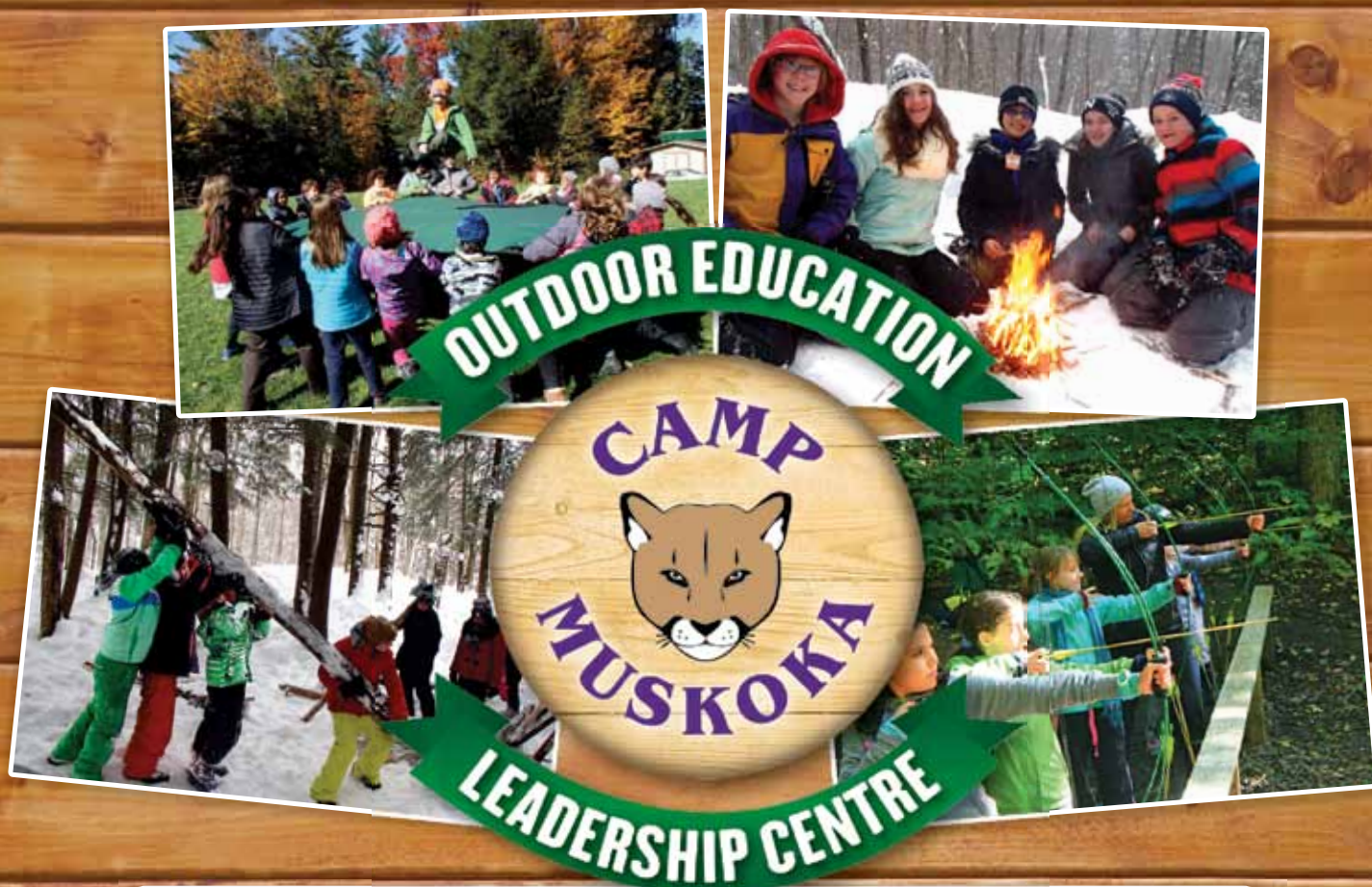
## The Role of the Ombudsman

Working with school boards to resolve complaints

► COLLECTIVE EFFICACY ► MANAGING CONFLICT ► MENTORING JOURNEY



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# Passing of the Baton

## Continuing to meet Member needs



We start each school year, position or opportunity with a look forward to what we hope to accomplish. Previously, I presented the goals and objectives for the year that were developed with input from the Executive, staff,

Provincial Councillors and the membership. As the school year, and my term as President, wind down, it is important to reflect on the progress made toward these goals, and to use this progress to determine the actions and goals for next year. Mary Linton, President-Elect, will be stepping into the role of President on July 1, and I am confident that the efforts made will continue to influence future endeavours.

Aligned with the goal of engagement, a highlight of my term has been the opportunity to meet colleagues from across the province. I have had the privilege of connecting with Members who are dedicated, talented and compassionate professionals, and I am truly honoured to be part of such a unique

community. Regardless of their panel, the leaders are focussed on their students and are so proud to share their experiences. It was my intention that OPC Members felt more connected to their provincial association and to the activities of the provincial office. As a colleague said, "We speak for school leaders. We act for our students."

I have seen firsthand the actions of many principals and vice-principals who serve their students in an innovative and persistent manner. I have also come to realize how many others in our sector do not fully understand the key role that we play in student learning and well-being. Telling our story and advocating for our critical role will continue to be a strategy

for the Provincial Council. We provide a distinct perspective on the learning conditions in our schools, and what it takes to improve access for all students. We have provided support to the critical role of Local Chairs/Presidents, and as the capacity of our leaders has grown, so has our local influence.

The primary issue that I have heard from across the province is the impact of work intensification. While this is not unique to Ontario and reflects the changing role of school leaders, it persists as a concern. This was a key issue communicated to MPPs during Queen's Park day, through the work of the Ministry Initiatives Committee and in our conversations with government and education stakeholders.

We have used research and relationships to communicate and advance our concerns. We have maintained a purposeful focus on the impact of school leadership. I remain hopeful that strategic and focussed efforts will see results for our Members, as were realized with the *Protecting Students Act* and peer review. Our relentless attention to this issue will continue to help us all achieve work/life balance. Our work here is not done.

In March, I had the privilege of hearing Malala Yousafzai address a large group of school leaders with a maturity beyond her years. She believes that all students globally have a right to be educated and she continues to lead a foundation and spread a message of the importance of education. This experience reminded me of the power of our

membership. Students are invited, welcomed, cajoled and encouraged in countless ways to attend our schools. We respect inclusivity, demand equity, celebrate differences, provide differentiation and lead schools to share in these values. And we do this all while managing budgets, creating supervision schedules, conducting facility inspections, attending meetings, leading professional learning sessions and building relationships with students, parents, staff and the school community.

This reflection is also bittersweet as I pass the baton to Mary. This year has provided incredible professional learning and opportunity, and I am truly thankful for the trust that you have placed in me. I am also grateful to be returning to the Waterloo Region District School Board to once again work with amazing colleagues, and to be back home with my family. I hope that you, too, can reflect on a year of challenges and experiences that allow for a moment of pride in the role that you have played as a Member of the OPC. ▲



**Kelly Kempel**

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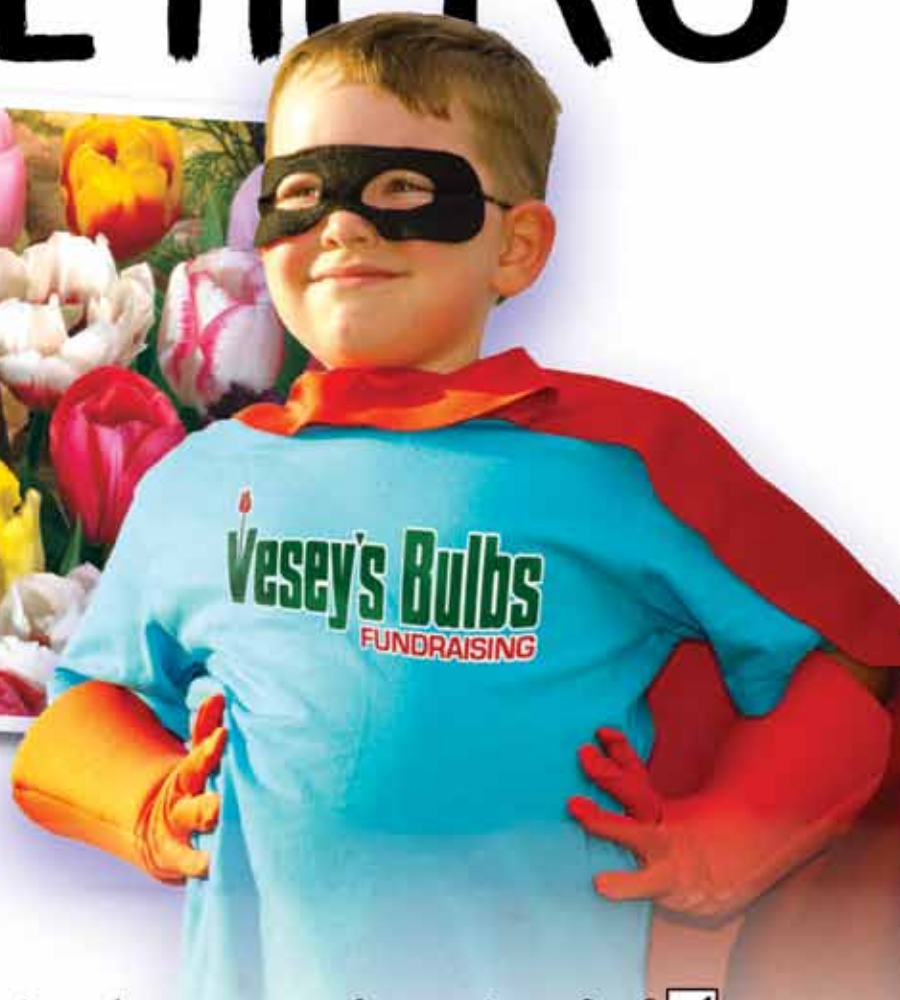
Keynote speakers at our February Council meeting included Provincial Ombudsman, Paul Dubé (left), presenting a review of the Office's mandate, values and mission, vision and school board oversight. In addition, Councillors participated in a workshop led by Josie Fung (centre) and Nogah Kornberg (right) from the I-Think Leadership Initiative, Rotman School of Management.



This spring International School Leadership (ISL) held workshop sessions with participants from China, Iceland (left), Denmark (right) and Uganda. We look forward to working with international groups throughout the summer and coming school year.



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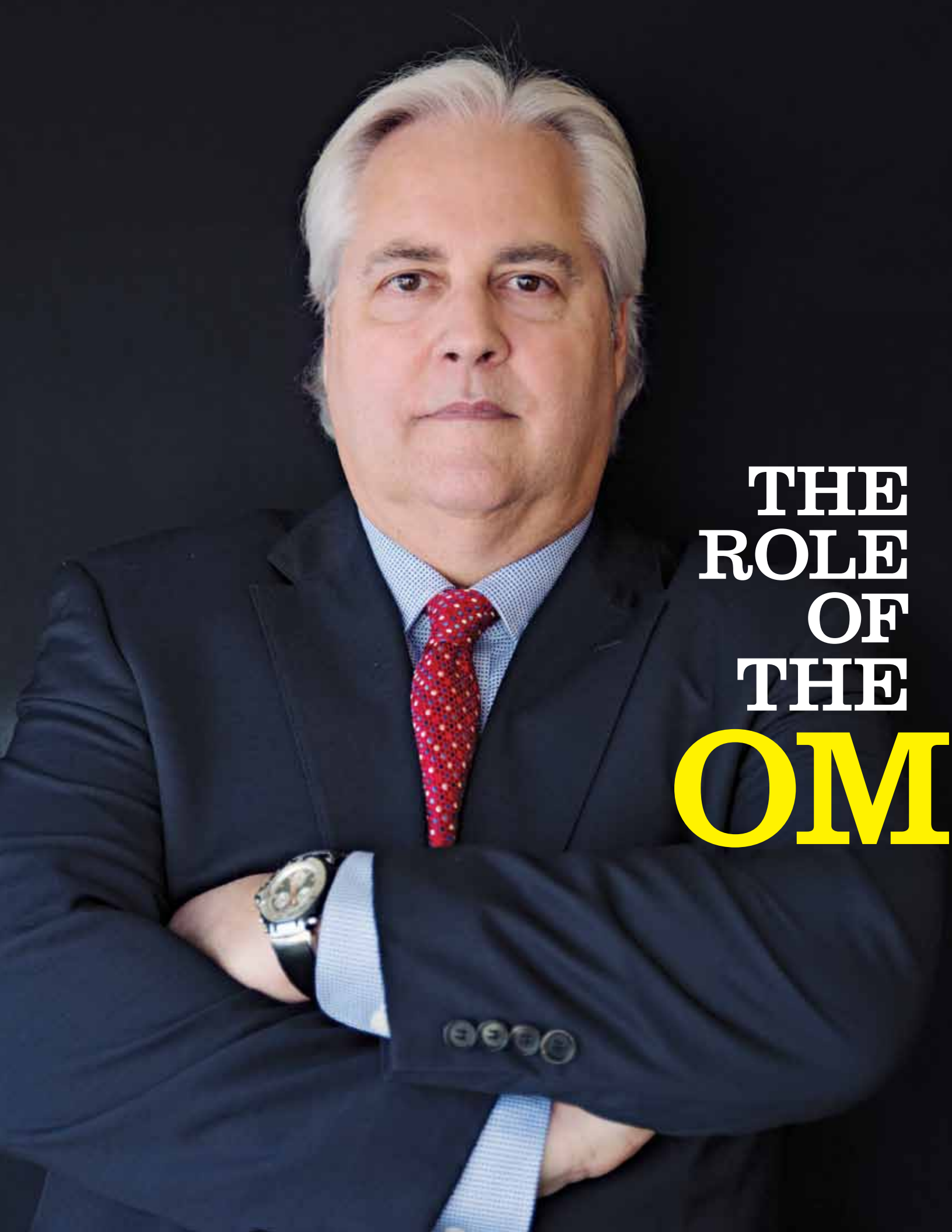
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# THE ROLE OF THE OM



# BUDSMAN

Working with school boards to resolve complaints

By Peggy Sweeney    Photography by Ethan Horst Mitchell and Stefanie Neves

The *Ombudsman Act* provides the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario with the authority to oversee and investigate the provincial government, including provincial ministries, Crown corporations, tribunals, agencies, boards and commissions. The Ombudsman's mandate was also extended to school boards in 2015 and municipalities and universities in 2016. The office receives more than 20,000 complaints from the public about these organizations per year.

The office is headed up by Paul Dubé, who began his five-year term as Ombudsman on April 1, 2016. He is the seventh person to serve as Ombudsman since the office was established in 1975. Prior to this role, Mr. Dubé practiced criminal law, with a focus on the protection of rights conferred by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the promotion of procedural fairness. In 2008, he was appointed as the first federal Taxpayers' Ombudsman, tasked with creating a new office to uphold the Taxpayer Bill of Rights and promote fairness in the Canada Revenue Agency's treatment of, and service to, taxpayers.

Dubé's role is to be an independent, impartial officer of the Legislature, promoting transparency, accountability and fairness within the public sector. People generally complain to the Ombudsman when they believe they have been subjected to maladministration or procedural

But do Ontario citizens need an Ombudsman to resolve complaints? Can't they approach their MPP or seek action through the courts? Dubé acknowledges there are occasions when both of these bodies can and should intervene with complaints, but he stresses that his office has an important, distinct role. "While MPPs do great work and try to help their constituents, they don't necessarily have the resources, connections or ability to solve problems, especially at the systemic level.

"And even if courts did look into maladministration or procedural unfairness, which they don't really, it is very prohibitive in terms of cost and time to proceed down that path, and it is usually a very slow process. The advantage of our office is that it is free, independent and reports to the people of Ontario through the Legislature. We fill the gap between what MPPs and the court system can do."

Dubé points out that the office is one of last resort. "We always ask complainants if they have gone through whatever local dispute resolution mechanism is available to them. If there is a right to appeal a decision through another body, then we wait for that process to conclude. Despite the large number of complaints received each year, almost all – over 90 per cent – are resolved without formal investigations."

Sometimes, formal and lengthy investigations are deemed necessary and are undertaken. In the past, the Ombudsman's office has looked into the government's direction to police on de-escalating conflict situations, the monitoring of unlicensed child care providers, delinquent child support, use of force in jails and services for adults with developmental disabilities who are in crisis.

"The vast majority of our recommendations are accepted, even though we don't have the power to order anyone to accept them. Our power is in our voice. We compile irrefutable evidence. We tell very compelling stories. We are fair and balanced in the analysis of evidence that we review. And we walk the talk of procedural fairness – we are fair in our approach when we investigate a public body.

"Notice is given to any organization we are investigating so they know what we are looking into. The public sector body then has ample opportunity to provide input to the investigative process and to work with us collaboratively in finding solutions. Potential recommendations are run by the organization, with an opportunity for them to provide feedback on the findings or anything else that is reported publicly.

"At the end of the day, we make feasible, sensible recommendations. After the process we go through, public sector bodies are hard pressed not to accept our recommendations."

Dubé notes that many of the issues under investigation are not a surprise to the organization or body involved. "Usually we are not discovering something that the organizations didn't already know. But we shine a light on it and bring attention to that problem. Often this is what is required; otherwise there is no political will to solve the problem."

**"OUR POWER IS IN OUR VOICE.**

**WE COMPILE IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCE.**

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**AND WE WALK THE TALK OF PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS ..."**

unfairness. His function is to resolve complaints and, ideally, prevent them from recurring.

"The *Ombudsman Act* gives us strong powers of investigation," Dubé explains. "We have a broad scope to reach opinions about a public sector body's conduct, including whether it appears to have been contrary to the law; if it was unreasonable, unjust, oppressive or improperly discriminatory; or was based on a mistake of law. We look at the setup, administration and framework for administration and whether it is working well. Typically, we don't get involved in policy decisions. But once a policy is decided or a program set up, we look at how it functions in the public sector."

Dubé stresses what the role is and what it is not. "When we receive complaints, we are not an advocate for either party. As my grandmother used to say, 'No matter how thin you make a pancake, there are always two sides.' It's important that we have an open mind, are impartial, objective, neutral and independent. We are the referee. We are not in the game."

While some may question if or why the education sector needs another complaint mechanism, Dubé is adamant that the expansion of the Ombudsman's mandate to include school boards is a good thing. "Complaints should be embraced by all organizations. They are a great source of feedback."





**“WE ARE THE  
REFEREE.”**

**WE ARE  
NOT IN THE GAME.”**

When a complaint is received, it is triaged to determine how to move forward in the most efficient manner. Outreach is conducted with trustees, school councils, principals, teachers, support staff and other board officials to inform them of the Ombudsman’s role and seek their suggestions on how to best work together.

“Serious and urgent matters receive priority. But the vast majority of complaints are handled by the early resolution team. Early resolution officers use alternative conflict resolution strategies to resolve complaints. It is also important to note that we have the discretion not to investigate in certain circumstances. For example, if the complaint is frivolous, vexatious or not in good faith; if an initial review does not reveal a problem; if there is another remedy available; if there has been a significant passage of time since the incident occurred; or if we are unable to deal with the matter effectively. In fact, many complaints are closed without contacting the orga-

nization itself. We make that determination upfront.

“Since we are the office of last resort, many complaints are resolved by referring individuals to internal complaint and appeal mechanisms. Sometimes we have to make inquiries to get the relevant facts before we can close a case or resolve it. We’re still learning about individual school boards. And they are learning about us.”

While most complaints are resolved at what Dubé terms a “low level,” some are escalated. In these cases, the office can escalate the case up the hierarchy of the organization. If the issue remains unresolved, a formal investigation may be launched. “Only a small fraction of cases are dealt with through formal investigation. For school boards, we have had only one systemic investigation launched since our oversight began.”

That one investigation involves busing. It is a result of the shortage of school bus drivers in Toronto in September 2016. When the investigation was announced, the office had already received 49 complaints, which has now grown to over 100. The investigation is looking at whether the boards involved (public and Catholic) prepared for and notified parents about the situation and whether the boards were adequately prepared to deal with the situation.

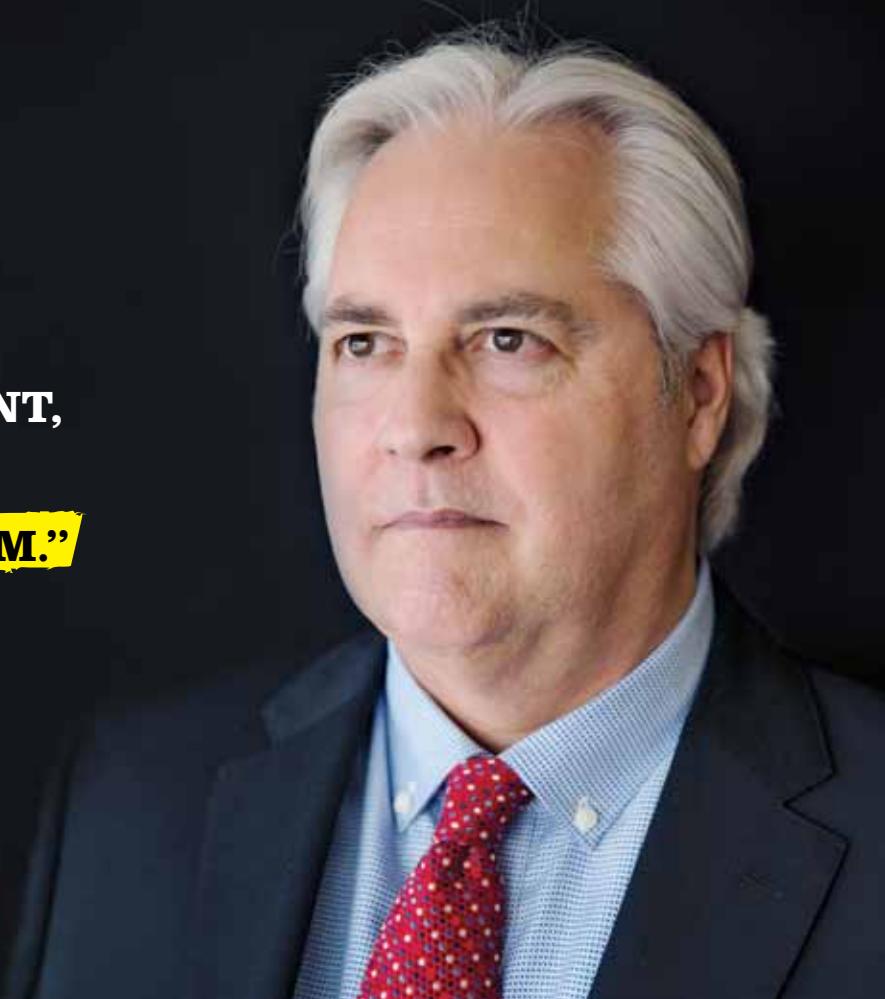
In 2015, the Ombudsman’s office had jurisdiction to receive complaints from more than 500 public sector bodies. With the expansion of its oversight to school boards, school authorities, universities and municipalities, its mandate effectively doubled.

For OPC Members, the additional jurisdiction over school boards has raised concerns and questions, as there is now another layer and another body looking at the way schools operate on a daily basis. But Dubé emphasizes that examining isolated incidents is not the priority of the office.

“Generally we aren’t looking at single incidents. If we look at complaints in isolation, we would miss the opportunity to figure out what the root causes are, solve them and prevent them from recurring. We more often look at systemic issues.”

That said, the office does resolve individual issues, often referring complainants back to existing complaint mechanisms at the school board for resolution. As of today, 1,327 complaints about school boards have been received by the Ombudsman. Once it gained this new jurisdiction over school boards, one of the first things the office did was to set up a dedicated team of early resolution officers, investigators, legal counsel and senior management.

**“WE ACT AS A  
CANARY IN THE  
COAL MINE FOR  
THE GOVERNMENT,  
AS AN EARLY  
WARNING SYSTEM.”**



Ninety per cent of the complaints received against school boards so far have been closed. There are approximately 100 ongoing. The most common complaints are about staff and trustee conduct, special education, transportation, enrolment and boundary issues, employment issues and student safety. The office does not get involved in employment issues.

Dubé encourages educators not to be afraid or suspicious of the complaint process. “Resolving complaints can be done more satisfactorily, more effectively and more efficiently in a collaborative process rather than through an adversarial one. We don’t often deal with principals and vice-principals directly. Usually, we deal with superintendents and school boards. But I reiterate that this process can be in your interest, as it may resolve long-standing issues. Whenever a complaint is resolved, the complainant is satisfied, the public-sector body has information to improve its systems, and it is a win-win for everyone.

“We go in with an open mind, talk to all the people we need to talk to and are very careful to get all the relevant evidence. Depending on what the evidence reveals, we either make recommendations or tell the complainant they were well served.”

If done correctly, the result of these investigations benefits all citizens. “The mission of our office is to strive to be an agent of positive change while promoting fairness, accountability and transparency in the public sector. We put those values into action. We are very proactive. A lot of our work is done behind the scenes.

“A senior public official once said to me that we act as a canary in the

coal mine for the government, as an early warning system. Sometimes just giving a heads-up about a situation effects policy change.”

Educators know that relationships are the key to success in our sector. Paul Dubé feels the same way about his work. “Relationships are at the heart of what the Ombudsman does, so it is essential that we build trust and credibility with all stakeholders, who need to believe that the Ombudsman will act fairly and work collaboratively with them. Our goal is to build better systems, enhance public confidence and reduce complaints.

“Successful organizations know that embracing complaints allows them to get more buy-in from their stakeholders. It’s human nature – if people think an organization is not going to treat them fairly, they won’t fully engage with that organization. They won’t accept the decisions of that organization. The opposite is true as well. If an organization is seen as open and willing to listen, people will be more willing to buy in. Complaints are an opportunity to strengthen relationships. The Ombudsman is a facilitator in that regard. We bridge between stakeholders.”

While another complaint mechanism may be an added obligation for educators, the current Ombudsman wants principals and vice-principals to understand that the office intends to work with school boards, seeking their advice and perspective, and looking for ways to improve the system. At the end of the day, that has to be a good thing for our students. ▲

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# Mentoring Journey

Learning how to listen in a  
more productive way

In 2016, I began my fourth year as an elementary vice-principal in Ottawa, and over that period I observed the different responses of staff to personal and professional challenges. Some staff flourished and used these challenges and setbacks as opportunities for growth, while others struggled and made only incremental progress. This became my challenge: how can I build the conditions that will better support those who struggle, while further developing all staff? It was this burning question that led me to register for the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) Mentoring course.

By Jeff Griesbach

Illustration by Byron Eggenschwiler

The OPC Mentoring AQ, offered in the spring of 2016 in Ottawa, became one of the most transformative professional development opportunities I experienced in my 18 years as an educator. The participants included principals, vice-principals and teachers, drawn from both elementary and secondary panels. The foundational text of the course was *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives*

states that “People are Naturally Creative, Resourceful and Whole.” The other three cornerstones provide support for mentee and coach to build on this foundation. To take this statement as an internalized belief means that the coach must let go of their agenda and desired outcome and listen deeply to discover the agenda of the mentee. Almost a full day was spent exploring the difference between Level I

from hours of practice listening at the various levels. I have subsequently learned that the true value of a deep listening practice comes only from experience over time in the form of relational trust.

It’s necessary to understand the differences between listening at Levels I, II and III because without this understanding, the potential mentor will remain unaware of how much of



## Level I Listening

Surface listening, where we listen just enough to understand the content and context to form an intelligible reply or ask a pertinent question.



## Level II Listening

Fully-immersive listening, where the listener is focused exclusively on the speaker, their words, tone, expression, etc.



## Level III Listening

The listener still engages in deep listening to the speaker, but there is a softer focus, which creates greater opportunity for intuition and nuance, which might be lost if the focus were too tight on the speaker.

(House, House, Sandahl & Whitworth, Nicholes Brealy Publishing, 2011). While this article is not intended as a summary of the Mentoring AQ nor a review of the MentorCoaching model, it does detail my journey and the role that MentorCoaching has played in it.

My first indication that the course might not be what I expected came in reading the text and taking part in coach/mentee conversations with course participants and facilitators. (Throughout this article I use the terms ‘coach’ and ‘mentee’ in describing various types of mentoring relationships and conversations.) One of the four cornerstones of the Co-Active Coaching Model

listening (surface listening, where we listen just enough to understand the content and context to form an intelligible reply or ask a pertinent question), Level II listening (fully-immersive listening, where the listener is focused exclusively on the speaker, their words, tone, expression, etc.) and Level III listening (the listener still engages in deep listening to the speaker, but there is a softer focus, which creates greater opportunity for intuition and nuance, which might be lost if the focus were too tight on the speaker). All of the course participants agreed that reading about these distinctions in the text did not provide the understanding that comes

their own agenda they carry into a conversation. One might hope that a teacher would try a different teaching practice or modify some other behaviour. Alternatively, the mentee might identify a problem they are facing, and the coach – drawing on their own experience – might see ‘the solution’ to this problem, and either present the solution directly, or spend the remainder of the conversation subtly nudging the mentee to reach this conclusion.

I immediately recognized this ‘fixing’ behaviour in myself, as did most of my colleagues from their own practice. It’s easy to see how this arises: if a colleague shares a challenging



situation, and we have direct, sometimes hard-learned experience with that exact type of situation, then why wouldn't we offer the best advice we have? When I first started in the VP role, an experienced principal told me that the number of staff who approach me with their challenges and problems is a good indicator of how effectively I am building trust. I took this advice to heart, and endeavoured to be a problem-solver. For administrators who pride themselves on their problem-solving skills, it is challenging to acknowledge that our positive intent might be more about us than the people we seek to support.

This led me to identify and challenge the other behaviour that I was carrying into my conversations: having my own agenda. This was a harder lesson to learn; isn't Setting Direction one of the five components of the Ontario Leadership Framework? How can a leader set direction if they don't have an agenda? Moreover, some behaviours – especially those touching on issues of student safety or professional responsibility – surely require clear direction from administration.

There are some situations in which the speaker needs an agenda, particularly when they have information to communicate or have a direction to deliver. While this type of one-directional information transfer is often necessary, it isn't a conversation. By going into a conversation completely open, listening at Level III and having no agenda – hidden or overt – we open the possibility of understanding where the mentee is coming from, what motivates them and what they value. The possibilities are literally unknowable and boundless. When entering a conversation with an agenda, there's already a limit on the growth potential of the mentee.

If a coach is able to listen at Level II or III, and enter a conversation with no other agenda than to understand their mentee, space is created for the mentee to uncover what actually motivates them, or what is standing in their way. Where the coach and mentee go from there can't be predicted in advance, but it will involve empowerment on the part of the mentee, support for the mentee to articulate and work towards their goals and – most importantly – the ability of the mentee to



The  
breakthrough  
for me comes  
not in resisting  
the urge to  
fix and jump to  
the resolution  
of the  
conversation,  
but rather  
in letting  
curiosity  
about the  
person sitting  
opposite  
overtake  
whatever  
agenda  
I might be  
carrying.

grow and self-actualize as a complete person.

Through my mentorship journey I have seen the impact a powerful question can have in moving a person forward. When a mentee is listened to at Level III by a person who has no agenda other than to understand and support the mentee, and the mentee has responded with honesty and forthrightness, then the coach may be in a position to ask a question that will flip the way a mentee sees a situation, will clarify for the mentee something that has been holding them back or will simply move the conversation forward by shedding more light on a particular area of discussion.

One of the first things I noticed in using this model in my own interactions is how difficult it is to break the habits of surface listening, and especially of being a fixer. With students, it comes naturally to ask questions to develop understanding, either in the classroom or in the school office, because this aligns with good teaching practice. When conversing with other adults, the urge to 'fix' can be difficult to overcome. The breakthrough for me comes not in resisting the urge to fix and jump to the resolution of the conversation, but rather in letting curiosity about the person sitting opposite overtake whatever agenda I might be carrying. The more I shut up and listen, the more the agenda slips away, and space for new possibilities are created.

The second thing I noticed is that many conversations change. They invariably become longer. They might start off with a staff member bringing a specific concern or question, but are far more likely to shift into reflective discussions of practice. It's important to clarify that not every conversation follows this model: a quick, operational question can still get a quick, operational answer. Nevertheless, there is a shift even in addressing all the issues that arrive in a typical day. Asking what a person needs – instead of telling them what needs to be done – leads to growth and increased confidence.

Focused listening and dropping the agenda can have another benefit: they increase the likelihood that powerful questions will present themselves to the coach. Powerful questions provide the 'ah-ha' moment that can shift the

thinking in both the coach and the mentee that drives change forward, but these questions will not present themselves to a coach who is only half-engaged in the process. Arriving at powerful questions can be more art than science, and the Co-Active Coaching Model sets the conditions for this art to flourish.

Dropping the agenda has the unexpected benefit of bringing conversations back around to instructional improvement and student achievement. When staff feel listened to without any agenda, they become more open to discussing their areas of concern, and not surprisingly student achievement is usually near the top of this list. Staff who previously showed reluctance to discuss their problems of practice took the lead in opening up about their challenges in the classroom, and generated possible approaches both independently and collaboratively.

It seems counterintuitive to suggest that talking less about teaching and learning leads to richer and deeper conversations about teaching and learning, and if it weren't something I had directly experienced, I probably wouldn't believe it. Nevertheless, the power of deep listening and dropping the agenda can lead the listener down surprising and rewarding roads.

Fortunately, these are roads that I have not had to travel alone. A network of other administrators and educators who see the benefits of the Co-Active Coaching Model have taken leadership roles in the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) and the Principal/Vice-Principal Intern program organizing committees. In addition to the content-based workshops that make up important parts of these programs, the organizing committees for both intern programs have added activities on levels of listening, holding the client's agenda, asking powerful questions and other elements of Co-Active Coaching.

The goal is to use this model to create the conditions that will allow an effective mentoring relationship to flourish between mentor and intern, leading to increased growth and success for the intern. A secondary benefit is the increased awareness of Co-Active Coaching that was spread across the system through exposure to the numerous interns and mentors

Powerful questions provide the 'ah-ha' moment that can shift the thinking in both the coach and the mentee that drives change forward, but these questions will not present themselves to a coach who is only half-engaged in the process.



involved in the NTIP and P/VP intern programs. On a personal level, the contacts I have formed with other administrators through the P/VP internship organization have been a huge benefit in my growth as an administrator.

In a surprising example of synergy, a few staff at my school who had been exposed to the basics of Co-Active Coaching as NTIP mentors, were interested in learning more, and formed the core of a Co-Active Coaching book club. It met over a 12-week period to explore and practice the principles of Co-Active Coaching. The connections they saw to their own practice included conversations with colleagues, parents and particularly students. Deep listening and powerful questions provide opportunity to activate and understand student thinking. The insights from my school colleagues in how Co-Active Coaching could be applied in the classroom were powerful, and something I never would have discovered if I had entered these discussions as an 'expert' with nothing new to learn.

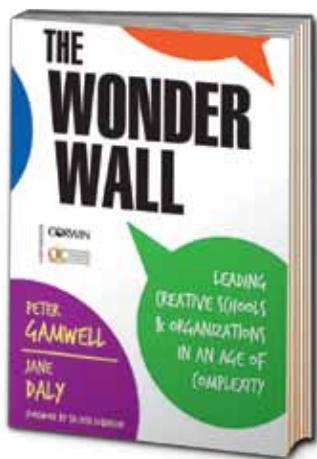
One of the most significant changes has been perception. My staff and colleagues have not changed, and yet to me they seem more competent, creative and interesting individuals than the ones I knew before. The desire to 'fix' the situation is increasingly replaced with a confidence that the person in front of me is creative, resourceful and whole, and their ideas are far more likely to surprise me, further my own learning and support the students in my school.

For individuals interested in beginning or continuing their own mentorship journeys, reading a copy of *Co-Active Coaching* and practicing listening at Level I, II and III is a good first step. Connecting with colleagues interested in mentoring Co-Active Coaching is even more important, because coaching requires a network of support. Check the OPC website for the next Mentoring AQ, or visit the Coaches Training Institute website ([www.coactive.com](http://www.coactive.com)) to learn more about the Co-Active Coaching Model, and how to access resources to support your mentorship journey. ▲

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## The Wonder Wall

By Peter Gamwell with Jane Daly

Corwin, 2017

ISBN: 9781506357379, \$26.95

Reviewed by Marla Newton

Peter Gamwell explains that the “wonder wall” is a metaphor for encouraging organizations to think differently, to “wonder” how things could be rather than focusing exclusively on solving problems. He conveys how innovation

isn’t always borne from the mother of necessity, but rather by aspiring to imagine “what could be.” He further suggests that in these times of “complexity” and “inbetweenity,” wondering what could be can lead to a more positive mindset, and encourage creativity. Focusing exclusively on problems and solving them, he maintains, can expose negativity and discourage a creative mindset.

Fostering a creative mindset, according to the author, is critical in our current society. Gamwell explains that we are now living in a state of complexity: a time where there are no longer beginnings or endings, but rather a continuous confluence of change. He uses an interesting word to describe the rapid rate of change we are in: “inbetweenity.” Our society, he feels, is no longer changing in an orderly way, but rather in a state of continuous complexity. Rather than focusing on controlling these changes or over analyzing them, we should strive to create conditions that encourage our individual and collective potentials.

The author describes the close connections between creativity, learning and leadership. A basic tenet of the book is the belief that everyone in an organization is a leader, and that by fostering informal leadership, organizations encourage creativity and engagement. Examples of fostering leadership and creativity are included in the book, and can be applied not only to school boards, but also to families and organizations.

Gamwell goes on to detail the three imperatives and the four conditions organizations need to adopt in order to thrive and succeed. The three imperatives: recognizing that there is a seed of brilliance in everyone, adopting a strength-based approach and creating a culture of belonging are explained in more detail. Examples of how these conditions have helped others to reach their potential, such as “The Circle of Courage” with at-risk Aboriginal youth, are described.

The next part of the book explores the four conditions that foster creativity: storytelling and listening, moving beyond

diversity to inclusivity, making it personal and celebrating. Each of these conditions is explored in depth, and linked to concepts of creativity and leadership.

The most pronounced practical example of how the conditions and imperatives are linked is provided in Gamwell’s retelling of his personal experience with the Ottawa Carleton Catholic District School Board. Beginning in 2005, he was responsible for leading the district’s leadership development portfolio. As a result of his nine-year journey, Gamwell developed a brand called “Lead the Way,” which was designed to spread the idea that creativity and leadership existed within everyone. Although no mention is made of the impact of this leadership on student achievement, this leadership initiative was reported to be well-received and successful.

Gamwell’s book does not pretend to have all the answers, nor to provide a one-size-fits-all template to developing creativity. Rather, it provides an inspirational and re-affirming read on why and how creativity and innovation can flourish in our organizations. ▲

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**i**  
Interested in  
writing a review  
for the OPC Register?  
Email Editor  
Peggy Sweeney at  
psweeney@principals.ca

## Collective Efficacy

### Powerful influence to improve student achievement

By Jenni Donohoo

What is collective teacher efficacy and why does it matter? Collective teacher efficacy refers to staff's shared belief that, through their combined efforts, they can positively influence student outcomes, including for those who are disengaged and/or disadvantaged.

It is the "collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities" (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004, p. 190). When school staff shares the belief that through their collective actions they can positively influence student outcomes, student achievement increases.

It is a shared sense of efficacy that matters the most in raising student achievement in schools. Hattie's (2015) research, which synthesized major findings from over 1,200 meta-analyses that examined factors influencing student achievement, demonstrated the magnitude and overall distribution of more than 150,000 effect sizes. He ranked collective teacher efficacy as the *number one influence* of all the factors, reporting an effect size of 1.57. According to Hattie's (2016) research, collective teacher efficacy is beyond three times more powerful and predictive of student achievement than socio-economic status. It is more

than double the effect of prior achievement and more than triple the effect of home environment and parental involvement. It is also three times more predictive of student achievement than student motivation, concentration, persistence and engagement.

Collective efficacy beliefs are very powerful as they guide the actions and behaviours of teams of educators. Bandura (1986) noted that "among the types of thoughts that affect action, none is more central or pervasive than people's judgments of their capabilities to deal effectively with different realities" (p. 21). These beliefs determine what school staff focuses on, how they respond to challenges and how they expend their efforts. When staff lacks a sense of collective efficacy, they do not pursue certain courses of action because they feel they lack the capabilities to achieve positive outcomes. "Perceptions of collective efficacy directly affect the diligence and resolve with which groups choose to pursue their goals" (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004, p. 8).



## THE POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES OF COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY

In schools where collective efficacy is thriving, the resulting positive consequences are numerous. Educators with high efficacy show a greater willingness to try different teaching approaches, resulting in deeper levels of implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies. Cantrell and Callaway (2008) examined the collective efficacy beliefs of high school teachers whose implementation patterns differed based on a year-long professional development program that aimed to integrate literacy strategies into content area classrooms. The researchers found that teachers who exhibited higher levels of collective efficacy required less time to internalize literacy strategies and determine how they could be used to teach content, were more successful in working through the barriers they encountered (including time constraints) and showed greater persistence in “finding resources for multiple strategies and approaches to meeting the needs of students” (p. 1746). An efficacious teaching staff also boosts students’ efficacy beliefs by setting high expectations and convincing students that they can do well in school.

Teachers with high efficacy hold high expectations for students. The Pygmalion effect explains how teachers’ expectations influence students’ performance and expectations. In a study conducted almost 50 years ago, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) demonstrated that when teachers believed students could perform at high levels, it influenced productive teaching behaviours toward students, which in turn influenced students’ positive beliefs about their own ability. In addition, Gibbs and Powell (2012) found that when teachers shared a collective belief in their efficacy for addressing the effects of home and community circumstances, students were ultimately less likely to be suspended from school as a consequence of misbehaviour.

Based on these positive consequences, it seems imperative for principals to find ways to foster the efficacy beliefs of their staff. Perceptions of collective efficacy vary greatly among schools. Some staff believe that through their collaborative efforts they can help students achieve in measurable ways, while others feel that they can do very little to impact student results. The adaptive challenge is in shifting the latter group’s beliefs. Efficacy beliefs are not set in stone; however, they do require a

concerted and substantial effort to change. In addition, once developed, there is reason to believe that collective teacher efficacy will thrive (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000). Therefore, it is important to determine ways in which principals and teachers can interact in order to develop collective efficacy beliefs in schools.

## HOW COLLECTIVE EFFICACY BELIEFS ARE FORMED

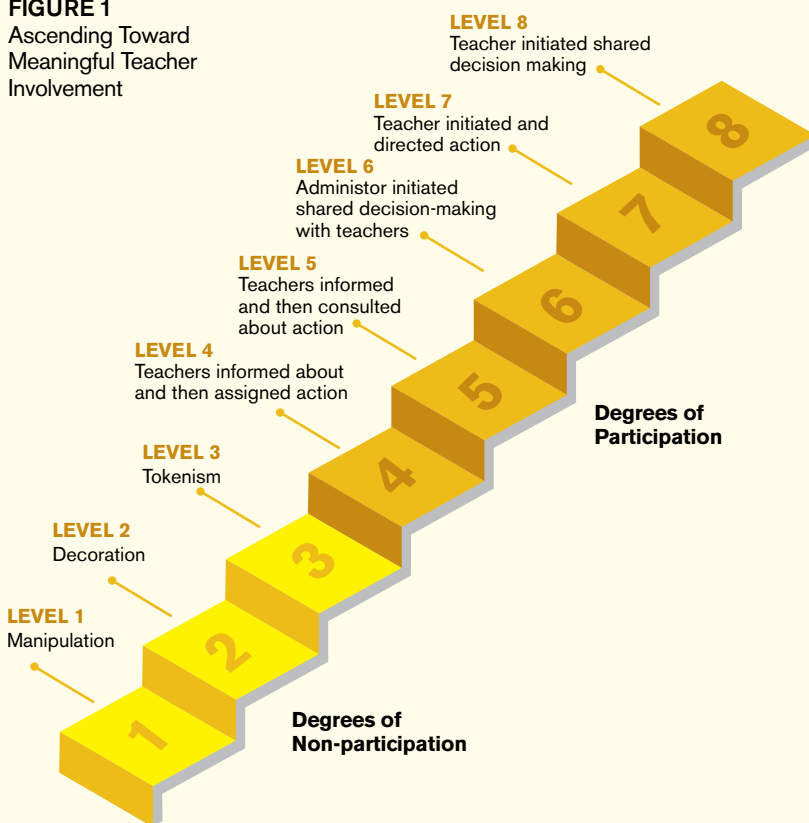
Research shows that both past experiences and present contextual factors influence efficacy beliefs. Much of the early research relied on Bandura’s (1986) theory that both self and group efficacy perceptions are formed through four sources of past experiences that include mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and affective states. Goddard et al. (2000) suggested that “perceptions of group capability to successfully educate students results when teachers consider the level of difficulty of the teaching task (in relation) to their perceptions of group competence” (Goddard et al. 2000, p. 485). Recent research suggests, however, that efficacy is shaped not only through past experiences, but also on present, contextual conditions of the school environment. Adams and Forsyth (2006) lent empirical support that contextual variables also inform the formation of collective efficacy beliefs. An important conclusion drawn from their study is that school level factors influence collective teacher efficacy.

Contextual variables include features of the school culture that can be shaped through the behaviours of principals. Some examples, recently examined in research, include school stigma (Zambo & Zambo, 2008), trust amongst faculty (Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011), teachers’ sense of belonging (Haworth, McGee, & MacIntyre, 2013), teacher leadership (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012) and social relationships (Moolenaar, Slegers, & Daly, 2012). Teacher collaboration, defined as the degree to which teachers work together to improve instruction, is another factor research is demonstrating contributes to school effectiveness through the development of collective teacher efficacy. Results from a study by Goddard, Goddard, Kim, and Miller (2015) suggested that “by promoting a culture of collaboration around instructional improvement, leaders have the potential to support school improvement in ways that positively influence teachers’ collective efficacy beliefs and thus promote student achievement” (p. 526).

### FACT

Collective teacher efficacy is three times more powerful and predictive of student achievement than socio-economic status.

**FIGURE 1**  
Ascending Toward  
Meaningful Teacher  
Involvement



Source: Donohoo, J. (2017). *Collective efficacy: How educators' beliefs impact student learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. A modification of Fletcher, A. (2003). *Meaningful student involvement: Guide to inclusive school change*, soundout.org. Modified from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. Florence, IT: UNICEF International Child Devevelopment Center.

## PROMOTING A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

How might principals act as a catalyst for teacher collaboration in order to create the conditions that are essential to the development of collective efficacy? The Ontario Leadership Framework (2013) identifies "building collaborative cultures" and "structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration" as two leadership practices found to be effective. There are two ways principals might go about enacting these leadership practices.

## INVOLVING TEACHERS IN IMPORTANT SCHOOL DECISIONS

When principals provide opportunities for shared leadership by giving teachers the power to make decisions, collective efficacy thrives. Teachers are empowered when they have a voice in school decisions and the decisions are better understood and more readily accepted. Schechter and Qadach (2012) found that teachers' sense of collective efficacy weakened when they lacked

information regarding factors related to school environments – including not knowing the outcomes of decisions in schools. It is to everyone's benefit to ensure decision-making processes are transparent and involve teachers in authentic, meaningful ways. Goddard et al. (2004) noted that "where teachers have the opportunity to influence important decisions, they also tend to have stronger beliefs in the conjoint capability of their faculty" (p. 10).

There are varying degrees of involvement in school decision-making. Simply inviting participation does not *guarantee* that teachers will feel empowered or an increased sense of collective efficacy. Teachers will experience feelings of alienation or empowerment based on their perception of the scope of their influence. They will feel less empowered (perhaps even disempowered) if they perceive their influence as low and will feel a greater sense of engagement and increased efficacy if they perceive their influence as high. Figure 1 outlines varying degrees of teacher involvement. The higher one ascends toward meaningful teacher involvement, the greater the influence. The greater the degree of participation, the greater the influence.

## FOCUSING COLLABORATION ON INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

In the Ontario Leadership Framework (2013) it is suggested that principals "provide regular opportunities and structures that support teachers in working together on instructional improvement" (p. 12). It is one thing to provide time and set up normative expectations for formal and frequent collaboration, but if the collaboration is not focused on instructional improvement, which includes teachers evaluating their impact, then it is unlikely that it will foster collective teacher efficacy. Collaborative inquiry, a professional development structure that has been widely used in Ontario, is a process that engages teachers in examining long standing fundamental beliefs and often results in permanent changes to their practices as they try, assess and reflect upon the effectiveness of different teaching strategies and approaches. During a collaborative inquiry cycle, educators analyze student evidence for the purpose of evaluating their impact, reflecting on their collective work and determining optimal next steps. Interpreting results by examining student learning data helps to strengthen connections between the learning task, content, instruction and student outcomes. When conversations shift from generalized talk about a student's progress and polite sharing of teaching strategies to more in-depth conversations about the relationship between the two, collective efficacy has the potential to flourish.

There are ways in which principals can strengthen and support



teachers' engagement in cycles of inquiry in order to foster collective efficacy. First, ensure engagement in the process is invitational. When teachers are invited to participate (rather than being told), it sets the stage for trust of and among teachers (Donohoo & Velasco, 2016). The experience becomes empowering and teachers are more likely to successfully recruit their more reluctant peers for future iterations in cycles of inquiry.

Second, help provoke the thinking necessary for teachers to assess the impact of their actions by building the team's appreciation for and capacity to use a variety of assessment data. Help teachers to see how collecting evidence fits into their daily routines. If teachers perceive data collection as an 'add-on' they might feel the process is too onerous and give up. Encourage teachers to focus on three or four students of interest and introduce protocols for analyzing student work.

Third, provide platforms for teams to share their learning from their collaborative inquiries; otherwise, the tremendous opportunity to engage teachers as partners in spreading and deepening school improvement efforts is missed. In addition, through sharing, teachers gain more intimate knowledge about each other's work. Newmann, Rutter, and Smith (1989) noted that collective teacher efficacy was significantly associated with teacher knowledge of other teachers' courses. When teachers know more about what goes on in other classrooms in the school, their perceptions about the ability of their colleagues are influenced.

Finally, recognize and celebrate successes. Escobedo

(2012) found that celebrations of success are perceived by teachers as positive events that strengthen their beliefs in the competence of the faculty.

## CONCLUSION

Fostering collective teacher efficacy should be at the forefront of a planned strategic effort for all administrators. Teachers' beliefs about their ability to reach *all* students should be openly shared, discussed and collectively developed. Collaboration can be supported through the leadership of administrators. Goddard et al. (2015) found that "teacher collaboration for instructional improvement was a strong predictor of collective efficacy" (p. 525) and results from their study confirmed that "principals' instructional leadership was a significant positive predictor of collective efficacy beliefs through its influence on teachers' collaborative work" (p. 525). By putting structures in place for shared decision-making and supporting teacher collaboration focused on examining the impact of instruction on student outcomes, principals can help to build a culture of collective efficacy in their schools. ▲

Jenni Donohoo is a Provincial Literacy Lead, seconded to the Ontario Ministry of Education's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch. Her most recent book, *Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact Student Learning*, was published in November 2016.

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## FACT

Collective teacher efficacy is three times more predictive of student achievement than student motivation, concentration, persistence and engagement.

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# CONGRATULATIONS!

## CANADA'S OUTSTANDING PRINCIPALS™

The OPC is pleased to recognize the following OPC Members who have recently been awarded with a **2017 Canada's Outstanding Principals Award**, in recognition of their outstanding contributions as exemplary leaders in public education. The program, sponsored by The Learning Partnership, also includes an Executive Leadership Training Program. This program, in partnership with the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, strengthens the education system in Canada by developing its leaders. Award winners become part of a National Academy of Principals, a pan-Canadian learning community of Canada's Outstanding Principals alumni.



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# Staff Collaboration

## Making it work for the benefit of all students

**IN** May of 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Education issued Policy/Program Memorandum No. 159 (PPM159) to clarify a shared commitment of stakeholders to building a culture of collaborative professionalism in Ontario's education system. The core priorities of this commitment include

- building a shared understanding of collaborative professionalism, and articulating a commitment to working together to further improve student achievement and well-being of both students and staff and
- transforming culture and optimizing conditions for learning, working and leading at all levels of the education sector in alignment with *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*.

There is no question that school teams working together to improve learning for students is one of the key foundations of Ontario's highly successful school system. As Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) have confirmed, "collaborative cultures value individuals and individuality ... [and] require attention to the structures and formal organization of school life" (p. 114) but it is the climate of collective efficacy and openness to sharing and learning together that is essential to genuine and authentic collaboration on behalf of students.

The role of the principal is often described as lead learner or pedagogical leader. We know that teaching and leadership do make a difference to students' learning. Research shows that teaching quality is one of the most important determinants of student outcomes (Sand-

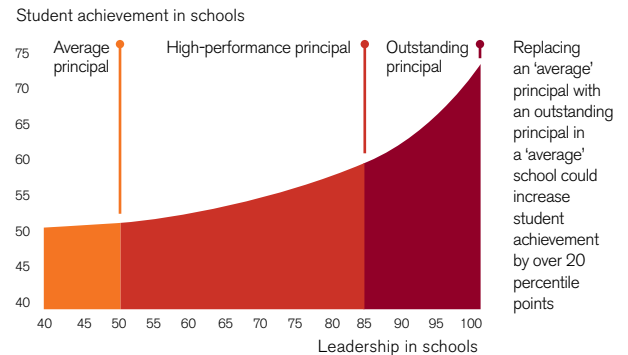
ers & Rivers, 1996). Students with high-performing teachers scored in the 90th percentile while students with low-performing teachers scored in the 37th percentile, a difference of 52 percentile points. The graph to the right confirms this is also true for school leaders.

Both teachers and principals need to be supported and enabled to be exemplary practitioners with the right tools, structures and supports.

Education Leadership Canada (ELC) and Curriculum Services Canada (CSC) have modelled this science of collaboration in projects both in Ontario and internationally. The Leading Student Achievement: Networks for Learning (LSA) project, now in its 12th year, has modelled the premise that networked leaders working with teams in their schools can have a profound effect on learning. According to project researcher Dr. Ken Leithwood (2016), "project evaluations conducted over the life of the LSA project indicate that participation in these networks is consistently rated by members as among the most useful sources of their own professional growth." As well, leadership networks have a positive impact on school conditions that build teacher capacity that influences student learning and well-being. For further information visit [www.lsaontario.org](http://www.lsaontario.org).

Internationally, in Lima Peru, with a school consortium called Innova Schools, ELC and CSC have worked coherently to bring common language, alignment of priorities and setting achievable focus to the schools. With recognition that school leadership

### Effective school leadership is also critical to student achievement Percentile<sup>1</sup>



### Effective school leadership includes three roles

- 1** Instructional focuses: improving current instructional practice
- 2** Changes focuses: altering the instructional practice themselves and their supporting systems
- 3** Administrative focuses: maintaining an orderly environment, budgeting and support functions

<sup>1</sup> For leadership and student achievement, percentile implies the relative placement within the distribution.

needed to be aligned with the goals of the back office/senior leadership, came the motivation to work with Ontario to design leadership programs which, in turn, led to a recognition that training teachers with a complementary focus on student achievement and innovative practice would be the key to an innovative education for students in their system. These students are reaping the rewards of their principals and teachers collaborating professionally, and it began with aligned messaging and learning opportunities.

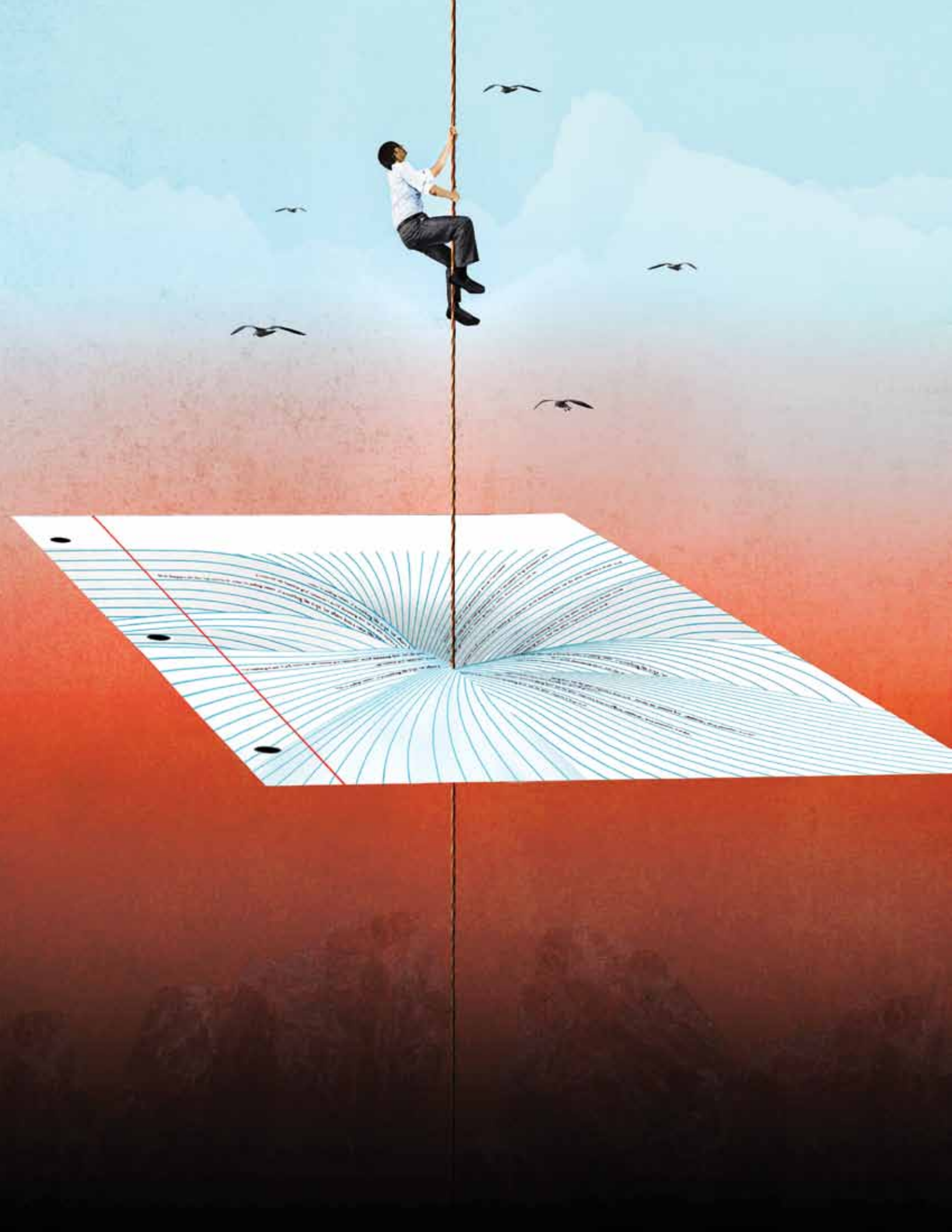
In Ontario, as we seek to build our own versions of collaborative professionalism, we must recognize that there are current existing models from which we can learn and deepen our work together for the benefits of students. ▲

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**GRAPH SOURCE:**  
A 'meta-analysis' of 69 studies of school leadership conducted between 1978 and 2001, involving an estimated 14,000 and 1.4 million students, Marzano, Robert J., Timothy Waters, and Brain A. McNulty, 2005

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# MANAGING CONFLICT IN SCHOOLS

## Practical tips to assist principals and vice-principals

By Protective Services Team   Illustration by Anthony Tremmaglia

Conflict in schools can come from virtually every direction and a variety of stakeholders. An administrator may observe student-to-student conflict for issues that can range from trivial to serious, leading to consequences for students, staff and the school community. Many administrators, at some point in their career, will be involved in a conflict between a parent and a staff member. Disagreements can take place among staff members. Schools are workplaces with people who bring different perspectives, personal and professional experiences and objectives to the table. Simply put, where there are people, conflict will be inevitable.

Vice-principals and principals hold a pivotal and unique position. Under the *Education Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, the principal is the “supervisor” of the school site and is accountable to manage school operations, the building site and the workplace conduct of staff members. Since all administrators were once teachers and may have previously worked with members of the staff as a co-worker, the administrator’s role is already prone to conflict considering the responsibility, authority and accountability associated with it. With the evolving role and work intensification, there has been an emerging trend in the number of reports of conflict in schools between staff members, staff member to administrator and, notably, conflict between the school administration team.

Workplace conflict can have detrimental impacts on an individual, the school community and to the school board. Turning

the negativity that conflict can cause into a positive learning experience can be achieved. This article aims to provide some helpful information and tools to effectively manage conflict in schools.

### Sources of Conflict

#### Communications

Many conflicts stem from interpretation of information, lack of information, no information, poor communication and miscommunication. Without clarity of information and expectations, conflict may arise. In addition, there may be a lack of information or poor communication as to acceptable protocols or procedures for how to execute a new initiative, or how the principal is operationally required to comply with an amendment to a law relating to the workplace. Multiple stakeholders work together in school boards, many of whom may have opposing agendas and may communicate differently.

### Unclear Definition of Responsibility

Throughout the course of your working life in a school, it would be difficult not to hear someone say, at least once, “who is responsible for this?” or “who is in charge around here?” If these statements resonate with you, there was likely conflict that arose from this lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. Especially in schools where there is more than one administrator on site, role clarity between the vice-principal and principal can be extremely challenging. Without a clear division of tasks, accountabilities and deliverables, a ‘fly by the seat of your pants’ approach to leadership and managing a school can lead to conflict when tasks are either not completed, completed poorly or, when there is an issue, no one knows who should be taking responsibility. Under the *Education Act*, the principal holds the statutory duty to manage the school site and the performance of staff. The principal also holds the authority to delegate tasks, specifically to a vice-principal, which can be a source of conflict if it is not clear which person manages each task. Conflict may also occur when one administrator ends up completing tasks that they believe the other is responsible for managing.

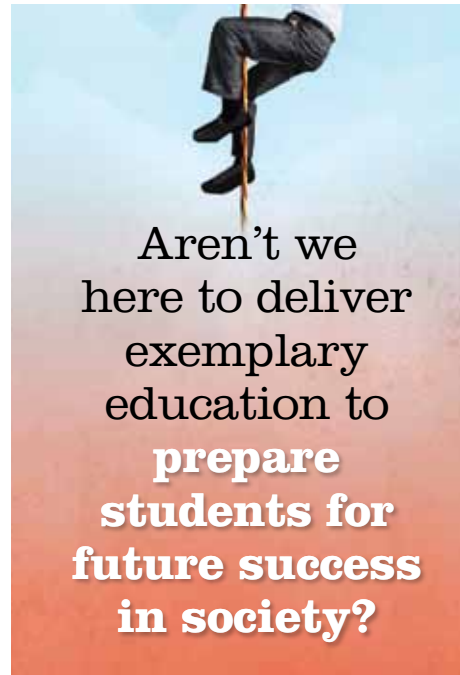
### Conflict of Interests

Not only do schools employ a vast variety of education professionals and support staff, schools also serve the students, parents and the community. Differing personal, professional and institutional objectives of all these different stakeholders can lead to conflicts of interest. Further, employee unions and professional associations also play an important role in positioning an interest through their members and local affiliates. Opposing objectives can lead to conflict, especially as the greater goal of the school board may get lost in the different interests of stakeholder groups. Administrators involved in conflicts of interest may have thought, “aren’t we here to deliver exemplary education to prepare students for future success in society?”

### Performance Review Conflict

The duties of a principal include one of the largest sources of conflict in the workplace – performance management. There is a great amount of autonomy in being a teacher. When

promoted to the role of principal, in accordance with the *Education Act*, you are responsible for evaluating teachers, support staff and the vice-principal. It is a daunting task to say the least. No employee likes to receive negative feedback on a performance appraisal. Working in a unionized environment, negative remarks should be



supported through coaching, counselling and letters of expectation that are clearly delivered to the employee prior to a formal performance appraisal. Employees will often take negative performance feedback personally and become defensive. The conflict that arises out of this exercise of supervisor authority can also lead to claims made by employees through workplace policies, including allegations of discrimination and harassment.

### Discrimination and Harassment Issues

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* provides the definition of harassment as “engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.” In addition, the Ontario *Human Rights Code* provides the “prohibited grounds” to which individuals cannot be subject to discrimination. While the *Code* does not specifically define discrimination, the Ontario Human Rights Commission notes that it usually includes the

following elements: (1) not individually assessing the unique merits, capacities and circumstances of a person, (2) instead making stereotypical assumptions based on a person’s traits and (3) having the impact of excluding persons, denying benefits or imposing burdens.

Given the complexity and sensitivity surrounding matters of harassment and discrimination, if an individual believes they are being subjected to treatment or behaviour that could be perceived or can be classified as harassing or discriminatory, conflict between the individuals involved can be extremely serious and may lead to legal proceedings for the employer and for employees. These types of conflict should immediately be reported to senior board officials for attention and action to appropriately address the claims in accordance with board policies and procedures.

### Strategies for Administrators to Effectively Overcome and Manage Conflict in the Workplace

Here are some helpful tips with practical examples for how to facilitate strategies to manage conflict in schools

#### Keep Calm and Carry On

Use personal de-escalation techniques to control anger and emotion before you speak and choose your words wisely. Stick to the facts and try to gather information in a respectful manner.

#### Separate Emotions from the Issue

Reflect and ask the right questions. What issue specifically caused people to react negatively and be displeased with one another?

Consider people’s personal circumstances and perspectives. An employee who has considerable family responsibilities may be looking to perform at a competent level while another employee with different family circumstances might be looking for a promotion and wanting to take on extra work.

#### “Listen and Learn” from the Individuals Involved

What are the concerns of each person involved? Narrow in on the root cause of the issue. Conflict outside of the school may be an indication that there are issues of conflict that arose in the workplace.



### Be a Role Model of Professional Workplace Behaviour

School leaders hold a great amount of responsibility and are held to a high standard of professionalism, required to comply with school board policies and procedures. If you routinely lose your cool and raise your voice to exercise authority, it is likely that this behaviour will be reported as violating board policies and workplace statutes. In addition, as a role model, some staff will think it is acceptable for them to behave in a similar manner.

### Attack the Problem, Not the Person

Focus on success and the future, not the mistakes of the past, to manage conflict.

### Pick your Battles

The statement “is this the hill you really want to die on?” carries much truth. Being “right” may not always be the best strategy for success in overcoming conflict.

### Learn from Conflict

Take the disagreement and turn the negative thinking into a positive opportunity for the school. You have an ability to influence others and positively impact culture.

### Leadership Accountabilities to Pro-actively Avoid Conflict in the Workplace

#### Understand and Communicate Board Policies

Ensure that you are well versed, understand and can speak with expertise on board policies, which may include those addressing the Respectful Workplace, Harassment and Discrimination, Workplace Violence and Human Rights and Equity.

Train staff and review the policies on an annual basis to encourage professional development.

Include conflict resolution tactics in the staff training. Encourage staff participation and feedback in the development of framework guidelines for acceptable workplace behaviour, which may reduce workplace conflict.

### Avoid Keeping your Head in the Sand

Conflict and harassing behaviour tend to escalate and are generally not resolved unless addressed. Confront the issues, investigate and

ensure you ask for support from board leadership for intervention strategies and techniques to overcome conflict in the workplace.

Spot trends in the workplace. Low morale and motivation, increased frustration and higher sick time can be indicators that there are issues with workplace conflict amongst staff.



### Take Ownership of Your Actions and the Actions of Others

Appreciate your own actions in the conflict, and if your actions have been a component of the conflict, apologize and learn from your own behaviour.

Praise others for their contributions to the school while stating there is conflict apparent in the workplace. Ask them what they believe is causing the conflict and how their actions may be contributing to the conflict.

Focus on outcomes and positive steps forward by encouraging those involved in the conflict to contribute to solutions.

Ask for staff involved in the conflict for specific actions that can be implemented to improve working relationships in the school.

### When Internal Interventions and Strategies Don't Work to Resolve Conflict – What's Next?

Some school boards may employ an in-house conflict resolution specialist or a Human

Resources professional with specialized training in conflict resolution. However, this is not generally the norm. Professional facilitators and mediators have experience setting ground rules for mediation sessions, time limits for resolution and are trained to identify the root cause of workplace conflicts to reach mutually agreeable settlement terms to ultimately resolve the conflict.

The Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Institute of Ontario provides comprehensive lists of both Certified and Chartered Mediators who may offer mediation services in your region. When selecting a mediator, it is important to consider if they have experience in dealing with workplace conflict issues. Some lawyers also offer mediation services. If hiring a lawyer to conduct a mediation for resolution to workplace conflict, inquire if they have received formal alternative dispute resolution training or whether they are a Certified Specialist in ADR through the Law Society of Upper Canada.

In selecting an outside mediator to facilitate a resolution to internal workplace conflict, consider

- What formal training in conflict resolution does the mediator possess?
- Do they have experience in resolving workplace conflict? Can they provide references? Do they have experience in the broader public sector and in working with employers who manage unionized employees?
- What contractual documents do they use in their ADR practice regarding confidentiality and resolution settlement agreements?

### Last but not Least, Celebrate Successes!

After resolution is reached relating to a workplace conflict, take the opportunity to implement practice changes in school operations based upon the learnings.

Use the strategies applied to overcome the workplace conflict to influence your leadership development.

Collaborate with others, inspiring leaders to understand that while conflict may be inevitable, resolution techniques can be used to grow, learn and become a more effective professional leader in schools. ▲

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# ADDRESSING WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS

Experiences in the Durham District School Board

There is increasing evidence and recognition that well-being is fundamental to overall student success. “Research shows that children who have a positive sense of well-being are more resilient and better positioned to make positive and healthy choices to support their life-long learning. Students cannot achieve academically if they do not feel safe or welcomed at school, if their well-being is at risk or if they lack the tools necessary to live active and healthy lifestyles, both at home and in the classroom” (Ontario’s Well-Being Strategy, 2016).

By John Bowyer, John Hamilton,  
Ken MacNaughton and Allison Potts

Illustration by Katy Dockrill







Promoting well-being is one of the four interconnected goals of Achieving Excellence, Ontario's renewed vision for education. This goal is based on the principle that our education system needs to help students build the knowledge and skills associated with positive well-being so that they can become healthy, active and engaged citizens (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

The Durham District School Board (DDSB) embedded the ministry's commitment into our strategic goals of Igniting Learning, and into the Mental Health and Addictions Strategic Plan: Linking Healthy Minds for a Positive Future.

... what needs to be done at the school and classroom levels to ensure that students feel that they are part of a safe, inclusive and trusting learning environment which positive relationships are developed and sustained.

A significant challenge to implementation is that well-being is a very complex and interconnected construct. It is difficult to identify evidence-informed strategies that allow schools to move to action. As a result of these complexities, it can be tempting to look for programs, "one-off" events and other initiatives that may not have a significant and sustained positive impact on student well-being. The resources provided by School Mental Health ASSIST and the addition of a Mental Health Leader in each Ontario school board has strengthened the commitment to an explicit and intentional approach to support well-being using evidence-based approaches that focus on a tiered approach.

In response, the DDSB has partnered with Ontario universities to ensure that the initia-

tives we are implementing are based on research and promote evidence-informed strategies that are effective in the whole school.

In partnership with researchers from Trent University, the DDSB is piloting a project on how to successfully gather student data in the area of self-regulation. Metrics will be developed and data gathered based on a "Spark Bike" pilot project. Spark Bikes are stationary bikes that allow students to ride silently in order to self-regulate. Bikes have been allocated to schools in the board that have already developed foundational knowledge on how to effectively use self-regulation. From this pilot, the DDSB will gain a better

ing evidence-informed initiatives/interventions) in the area of well-being. We continue to work with our research partners and the Ministry to enhance our data collection, and to use that data to refine our practices.

The Ministry's Well-Being Strategy supports work that is already progressing in our schools including

- implementing self-regulation initiatives at the school and classroom levels, and as an approach to build the individual skills fundamental for positive mental health and academic success
- ensuring that Safe and Accepting Schools Teams use data, including the school climate surveys, to develop and sustain positive, safe learning environments
- increasing mental health literacy for staff and administrators to provide greater understanding of the importance of well-being for achievement and to promote an inclusive and stigma-free approach to mental health
- collaborating with community partners to develop and implement initiatives that are evidence-informed and focus on healthy lifestyles and resilience.

To coordinate this work, the DDSB established a Mental Health Advisory Committee to collaborate in yearly action planning and created a Safe Schools Steering Committee that has been supporting well-being strategies for the last six years. This committee has representation from administrators and system support personnel from across all the areas and departments of the board.

The Safe Schools Steering Committee was established to build leadership capacity in the area of well-being, and to establish a network of leaders to support the promotion of well-being throughout the board. Recently, this committee reviewed planning priorities, and determined that well-being, in particular positive mental health, was a recurring and essential theme for resource development and school support.

Our board has a sustained focus on supporting student achievement and well-being using evidence-based, whole school approaches. Well-being is considered an essential component of sustaining safe, healthy, inclusive

understanding of effective data gathering to transfer to other well-being initiatives.

The Ministry of Education is engaging school boards to better understand the approaches used to promote and support well-being. Of particular interest is the manner by which boards collect data. Our board collects and analyzes data that includes school climate surveys, a safe schools audit and safe schools checklist, student attitudinal survey, violent incidents, school-based incidents, suspensions and expulsions and emergency incidents such as lockdowns.

From these data sources, Safe and Accepting Schools Teams are expected to develop, revise and communicate a safety plan that includes a bullying prevention and intervention plan, and a plan to identify and address deficits (us-



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schools.



schools. In addition, well-being is considered the foundation for student achievement.

The main goal of the board's well-being strategy is developing the "conditions for learning" – what needs to be done at the school and classroom levels to ensure that students feel that they are part of a safe, inclusive and trusting learning environment in which positive relationships are developed and sustained. The focus on building and sustaining the *Organizational Conditions for School Mental Health* (School Mental Health ASSIST, 2016) is ongoing and is supported by the Safe Schools Steering Committee's leadership in providing timely and accessible resources for schools.

In 2016, the Safe Schools Steering Committee developed two resources for school leaders to align with the renewed vision from the Ministry. The Committee focused on two key initiatives to support the board's strategic goal of increasing student achievement and well-being articulated in *Ignite Learning*, by aligning resources to support equitable out-

comes for all students and providing safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments that support positive academic, mental and physical growth.

#### Equity and Well-being Walk-Through Tool

An Equity and Well-Being Walk-Through tool was developed to support school teams as they review their schools for growth opportunities related to well-being. This tool was created in response to a recognized need to embed a focus on mental health and well-being within school walk-throughs, and to make actions for whole school approaches to mental health and well-being explicit and intentional. Several resources were reviewed to support the development of the tool, including Dr. Patrick Carney's book, *Well Aware: Developing Resilient, Active, and Flourishing Students* (2015) and *Equity Continuum: Action for Critical Transformation in Schools and Classrooms* (OISE, 2011).

The writing committee categorized key "look fors" that will provide school teams

with the opportunity to embed areas of focus for well-being within their school improvement plan. The tool has been created as an electronic resource to be used with hand-held devices, including an option to upload photographic exemplars. The tool was piloted in six schools for feedback and revision, with the refined tool presented to administrators prior to the 2016-2017 school year.

#### Stop the Stress in Schools Resource

The Safe Schools Steering Committee reviewed the book *Stop the Stress in Schools* by Joey Mandal (2014), and identified relevant connections to curriculum expectations, as well as a strong alignment to the self-regulation initiative supported throughout the board.

This resource was added to each school's mental health resources along with a supportive slide presentation. The slide show

- explores stress in schools and gives educators tools to reduce tension and pressure in classrooms while developing student strategies to manage stress in healthy ways



Developing child and student well-being means **supporting the whole child** – not only the child’s academic achievement, but also his or her **cognitive, emotional, social and physical well-being**.

- emphasizes the power educators have in building a positive learning environment in classrooms and the school
- introduces mental health strategies that lead to pro-social classroom environments
- focuses on social-emotional traits such as awareness, acceptance and the ability to manage stress instead of targeting symptoms and
- provides whole classroom and targeted activities to enable educators to teach the skills of conflict resolution and stress management.

#### Self-regulation

Self-regulation includes an awareness of what stresses us, how stress impacts us and the ability for students to develop ways to manage stress to become calm, alert and ready to learn. Self-regulation includes experiencing the impact of stressors, identifying whether “up-regulation” or “down-regulation” is required. When requiring “up-regulation,” a student may appear to be withdrawn and may have difficulty listening, comprehending what is being said and learning. In order to self-regulate, the student may need to “up-regulate” or increase the level of energy. When requiring “down-regulation,” a student has become overstimulated, and needs to “down-regulate” or decrease their level of energy to self-regulate (Shanker, 2013).

Self-regulation is closely tied to the Ministry goals of Achieving Excellence and Promoting Well-Being. It helps to build a positive school climate in which teachers and/or students implement interventions to get ready to learn. In addition, self-regulation promotes a “growth mindset” – allowing students to gain self-confidence. The board has been working in close partnership with Dr. Stuart Shanker and The Mehrit Centre to support academic success and the well-being of students in our classrooms, with a focus on staff building the capacity to teach and model self-regulation. Behaviour can be viewed as a reaction to stressors that occur in one of five domains:

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biological, emotional, cognitive, social and pro-social (Shanker, 2013).

Chapin and Penner (2014) reviewed a wealth of literature on self-regulation and concluded that, "... those who regulate themselves well have higher academic performance, are more successful and live longer, happier lives than those who do not."

The DDSB has a sustained focus on supporting student achievement and well-being through a whole school approach that includes building resiliency through self-regulation. A Regional Self-Regulation Steering Committee was established to support the on-going implementation plan.

The Committee focuses on capacity building and communication through

- on-going professional development including an Area Learning Network Session Approach focused on building capacity, sharing best practices and increasing access to self-regulation knowledge and skills
- a web page to allow educators and parents to access current and relevant information regarding self-regulation
- digital resources to support classroom teachers, students and parents
- an internal research project in which a select number of schools link the impact of self-regulation strategies to student learning skills
- the distribution of a "toolkit" that contains suggested items for use by schools to support the theory and expectations for self-regulation. The kits include items such as stress balls and calming colouring books. The toolkits allow concrete thinkers an opportunity to explore how the items can be used in a classroom

A number of DDSB schools have also enhanced classroom environments to better understand how innovative learning spaces can support self-regulation, such as the use of "fidget" chairs and "stand-up" desks. Teachers are collecting anecdotal data and formal data, including report card information, attendance and EQAO assessments. Preliminary data have shown that these innovative learning spaces positively impacted both student well-being and academic achievement.

Developing child and student well-being means supporting the whole child – not only the child's academic achievement, but also his or her cognitive, emotional, social and physical well-being. Achieving success in the implementation of well-being requires an understanding and commitment that well-being is essential to academic success. In addition, school boards need to adapt the structures and processes that lead to academic success as a means of achieving success in the area of well-being. This includes the collection of data to determine deficits and the implementation of data-informed strategies to address these gaps. By doing this, schools will be able to create a learning environment that is healthy, safe and caring. ▲

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# Flexible Seating

Essential for some and good for all



Students in Jennifer Pym-Murphy's grade 6 classroom feel fortunate to be the first class at Courtice North Public School in Courtice, Ontario, to benefit from a pilot project on flexible seating. Flexible seating has grown in popularity over the past

few years as educators are more aware of the needs of students from an emotional, social and cognitive perspective. A wide body of research now exists that supports the need for students to be able to move, fidget and be provided with multiple options for optimal learning. Educators are taking into account the whole student when programming for their classrooms, and this includes a wide variety of seats, desks and work stations including exercise balls, bean bag chairs, wiggle seats, coffee house style seating, computer pods, standing

desks, stationary bicycles and more.

Pym-Murphy decided to jump right in and had the classroom completely set up for the first day of school. She greeted students in the hallway first for a quick welcome message and then invited them in to view their classroom. Pym-Murphy reported plenty of “ooohs” and “aaaahs” as they entered, and excitement continued to build as they looked around and noticed things for the first time. She explained to students why she was piloting flexible seating. They would be offered a choice

of where to sit, which would increase their opportunities for collaboration with their peers, assist in improving their communication skills and help them engage in critical thinking.

It is not enough to simply buy the seating, invite students in and commence the learning process. It was imperative for Pym-Murphy to set the tone with high expectations regarding how the classroom would work.

“We immediately established norms for the classroom which included the rationale for flexible seating. Students understand that if they are not making good choices for their own learning, teachers will intervene and move them. On occasion, students will become distracted but those moments are few and far between” (Pym-Murphy).

Having variety and the lack of an assigned seat is also a huge draw for students: “I like flexible seating because you don’t have to always sit in the same spot. You can sit in one place one day and then a different place the next.” For students with special needs who require environmental accommodations as part of their IEP (Individual Education Plan), a flexible seating classroom not only creates a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) system where their needs are being met, but also benefits all learners.

Comfort is also immensely important. Students are at school for roughly 1,358 hours per year, and many in traditional classrooms sit on a hard chair behind a desk. Students

crave comfort: “It helps me because it is more comfortable. It is also nice knowing I can sit where I want instead of being assigned a seat. So I can choose the best place for me.”

A lack of assigned seats creates variety in a classroom culture, and offers the opportunity for collaboration. “It makes me feel happy when I can change to different seats during the day. You can sit alone or sit with your friends or even sit with someone you don’t talk to a lot.”

Students have reported that the flexible seating model assists with improving their level of focus.

Education has changed drastically in a few short decades and today’s parents are aware and conscious of the needs of their 21st century learners. Parents have provided overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding this pilot project and are appreciative of Pym-Murphy’s efforts to create a unique culture in her classroom that values the needs of each of her students. The importance of the skills of the teacher as a facilitator are imperative to ensure that management does not become an issue.

Strong instructional strategies, good classroom management and an authentic, caring and patient educator like Pym-Murphy are essential in pairing with a flexible seating classroom to ensure student success. Classroom design in 2017 must take into account all of the unique learning needs of each student, and educators need to broaden their ideals of what effective



learning looks, sounds and feels like. Similar to the embrace of technology as a learning tool, we should move towards the adoption of a unique flexible seating classroom that allows for student choice, collaboration, problem solving and a mutual celebration of individuality leading to a love for learning. ▲

Jennifer McMullen is a Vice-principal with the Kawartha-Pine Ridge District School Board.

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# SAVE THE DATE!

## APRIL 18-19, 2018 - TORONTO

### A COLLABORATIVE FORUM TO CELEBRATE OUR 20TH ANNIVERSARY

More details will be available in the coming months.

[www.principals.ca](http://www.principals.ca)

# 3 Opportunities to Grow as an Educator in 2017

No matter which events you choose to attend, you'll learn from some of the most respected minds in education and walk away empowered with new solutions for achieving your professional goals and improving student learning.

## ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE

for Indigenous Canadian Learners

Montreal | October 18–19

Through this powerful event, you'll learn best practices and research-based strategies to build resiliency, promote student ownership of their learning, and eliminate the achievement gap. Perfect for leaders, teachers, support staff, parents, and community partners, this unique opportunity provides a unifying experience where teams can learn together.



Charlie Coleman



Luis F. Cruz



Mike Mattos



Anthony Muhammad

### 2-DAY WORKSHOP

#### Grading From the Inside Out

Toronto | December 4–5



Presenter: Tom Schimmer

- Recognize why traditional grading practices are no longer relevant and how grading practices can be modernized in a standards-based instructional classroom.
- Develop grading true north (accuracy and confidence), the essential overarching vision for sound assessment and grading practices.

### 2-DAY WORKSHOP

#### Starting a Movement

*Building Culture From the Inside Out in Your PLC*

Toronto | December 6–7



Presenter: Tom Hierck

- Acquire the authentic alignment model and its four stages.
- Gain strategies to create maximum buy-in among members of your school community.
- Embrace the idea of defining your WHY.
- Establish what is needed for a collective commitment.

**LEARN MORE**

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