

FALL 2020 VOL. 23 NO. 1

# The Register

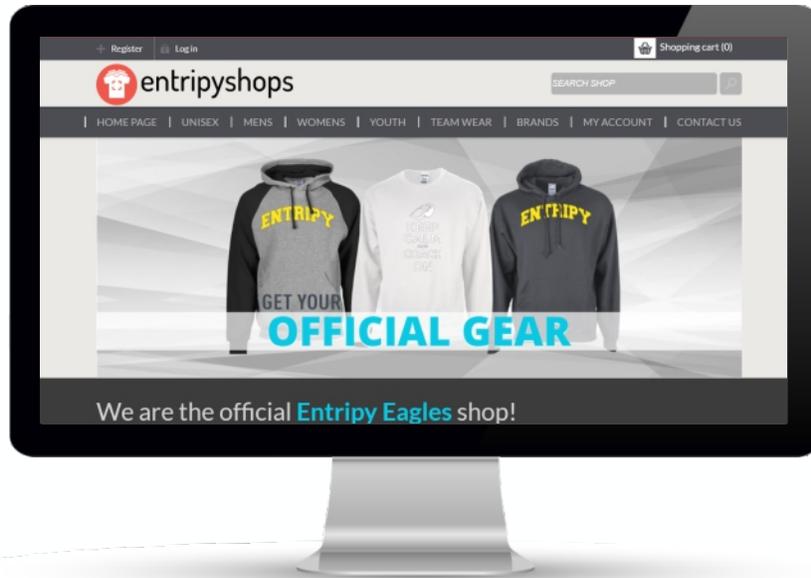
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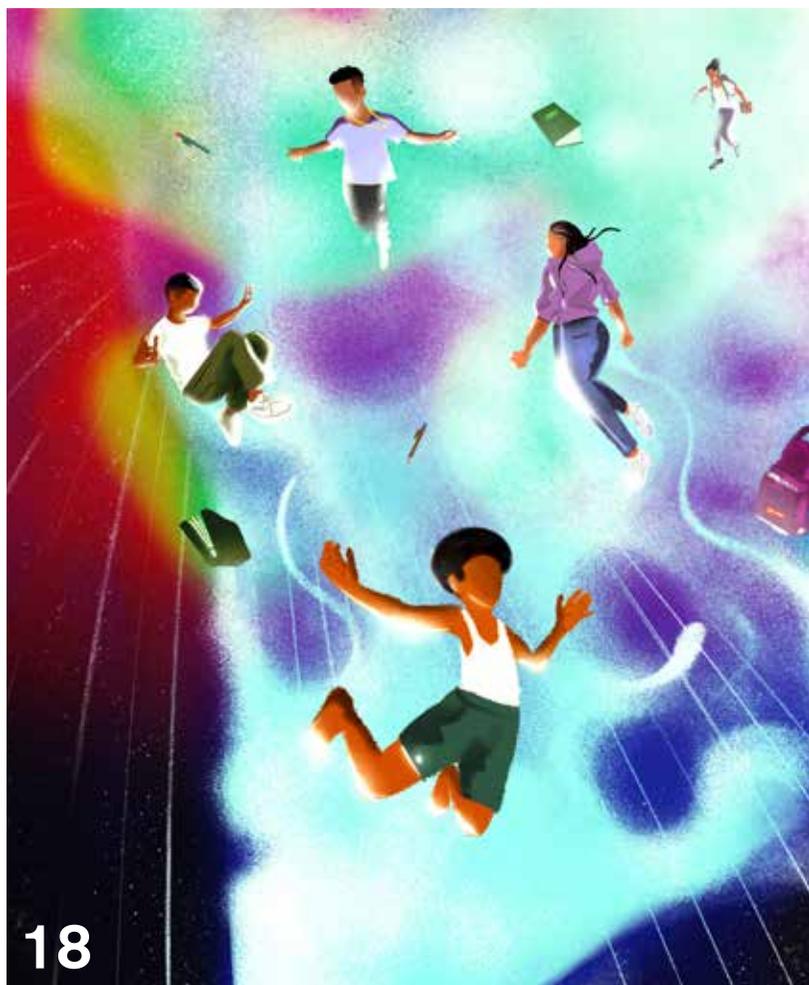
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Cover Illustration by Julia Breckenreid

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# Prioritizing Equity

Creating a new Standing Committee to focus our work



For the first time in our history, we have created a Standing Committee that is both critical and timely. Our **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Advisory Committee** is providing advice, insights and recommendations to the Provincial Executive and Council.

While we have been engaged in equity work in our Professional Learning department and have been advocating for racialized Members via various legal proceedings in individual cases, the Executive saw the need for a more comprehensive and coherent vision. It sought to form an Advisory Committee to examine all of our services through an equity lens, and ensure that we are working within an anti-racism/anti-oppression framework. In 2019, our Provincial Council recommended that the Advisory Committee be struck with a budgetary commitment.

Since that time, work was undertaken to envision and map out the Committee's mandate and composition. A call

for interest was put out, and 80 talented and diverse administrators signalled their interest.

Nine Members – principals and vice-principals from diverse communities, backgrounds, identities (including Black, Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQ+), genders, regions in the province and panel – were selected to join three Executive Members (president-elect, president and past-president) to form our Advisory Committee with the support of our staff. You'll "meet" these passionate and skilled EDI members on page 34.

The mandate of the [EDI Advisory Committee](#) is set out in its [Terms of Reference](#), accessible on our website.

Included is the Committee's commitment to moving us forward along our equity journey, using an anti-racism/anti-oppression framework, finding ways to better serve all Members who belong to historically disadvantaged groups by addressing systemic oppression including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism and transphobia.

The Committee will also provide advice on training to further your understanding and enhance your skills as we work together to dismantle all forms of oppression and barriers to inclusion.

This will support all Members to become human rights and equity leaders within your schools and boards. The Committee is also committed to developing mentorship programs and other opportunities to achieve diversity in our profession that better reflects the students in the province.

The Committee's mandate is a good first step. Yet, we realize the journey will not be short or easy. There have and will continue to be uncomfortable conversations as we work to recognize, understand, acknowledge and interrupt our own unconscious biases, to fully appreciate that one's positive intent does not mean there aren't negative impacts.

We need to support one another through the upcoming challenges and difficult conversations, recognizing that mistakes may be made – mistakes that must be owned and then used as a catalyst for continued learning and deeper understanding.

Another task has been to prepare and undertake a Member census, completed through broad consultation and support from those with expertise in this area. It seeks Members' demographic information, asks you to share your experiences of harassment and discrimination and seeks the identification of activities you would like us to undertake to advance equity, diversity and inclusion.

The census will be voluntary and anonymous. Results will be shared in a way that does not disclose any potentially-identifying information. We welcome and strongly encourage your participation when it is launched in the near future.

From our inception, the OPC has believed that we could be a single association representing all principals and vice-principals. It is time for us to ensure we represent and serve the full diversity of our membership, using our currency to speak out to disrupt that which we know to be wrong. With support and training, we have the ability and opportunity to apply our focus and talents to disrupting all form of oppression, improving student outcomes, nurturing diversity within the profession and breaking down barriers to inclusion.

We look forward to you engaging with us on this journey. ▲



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# EFFORTS TO **END RACISM**

The Ontario Principals' Council issued the following statement following the death of George Floyd in the US on May 25, 2020.

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It was a tough week, watching the horror of a Black man dying violently and unnecessarily at the hands of a police officer. The events since, with protests and more violence, remind us that the fight against racism must continue. We must acknowledge the impact of historical and current practices of anti-Black racism and the continued effects they have on Black people today. We also have the responsibility to monitor our own actions and words, and understand their impact on all in order to recognize and interrupt overt and unconscious bias. We must also use this as another opportunity to reflect on these events and the impact they have in our schools through our own professional learning. As educators and school leaders, we need to increase our own understanding of systemic oppression and act to dismantle policies and practices that exist in our schools.

If adults are feeling anxious about the events, we know that students are as well. Unfortunately, the pandemic makes it even more difficult for us to reach out and support students who are struggling and confused with what is happening in their world. We all need to be aware that current events may trigger anger, sadness, confusion and fear in our students, our staff and ourselves.

We encourage you to reach out to the families in your school community, help your staff do the same and share any resources your board may have to assist. At the OPC, we have work to do, not only in terms of our structure, but also in the way we assist you in your role. We are committed to listening, learning and engaging to ensure equity, inclusion and diversity are priorities for our organization.

# Building our Knowledge

## Resource supports for school leaders

Racism, oppression and homophobia are often seen as individual biases, but following the events in recent months, we know too well that even the most well-intentioned

people or systems are capable of reinforcing systemic bigotry.

Equitable change takes reconditioning the discourse in ourselves, our schools and systems. Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, racialized and gay rights global communities are asking that collectively we make time to call ourselves and our systems into proactive education. Take time to read, listen and learn, recognizing there is a great unlearning and re-learning to occur, to support the historical and social values that represent the stories of our students.

We've put together an initial list of resources available to support this dialogue. They've been read, heard and recommended by your peers. We recognize that these are just a few, and that there are many more. Our intent is to support avenues for further in-depth education in your own personal and professional journeys.

### To Read

- [21 Things You Did Not Know About the Indian Act](#) by Bob Joseph
- [A Knock on the Door](#) by Phil Fontaine
- [A Mind Spread Out on the Ground](#) by Alicia Elliott

- [Am I Safe Here?: LGBTQ teens and bullying in schools](#) by Donn Short
- [Anti-Racism Resources](#) by the Government of Canada
- [Breaking the Ocean](#) by Annahid Dashgart
- [Deep Diversity](#) by Shakil Choudhury
- [Generation M](#) by Shelina Janmohamed
- [How to Be an Antiracist](#) by Ibram X. Kendi
- [Islamophobia at Work](#) by Canadian Labour Congress
- [Is Everyone Really Equal?](#) by Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo
- [Me and White Supremacy](#) by Layla F. Saad
- [Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence](#) by Derald Wing Sue
- [Seven Fallen Feathers](#) by Tanya Talaga
- [So You Want to Talk About Race](#) by Ijeoma Oluo
- [Stamped](#) by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi
- [Stand by Me](#) by Jim Downs
- [Stonewall](#) by David Carter
- [The Muslimah Who Fell to Earth](#) by Saima S. Hussain
- [The Skin I'm In](#) by Desmond Cole

- [White Fragility](#) by Robin DiAngelo
- [Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?](#) by Beverly Daniel Tatum

### To Watch or Listen

- *13th*
- *All My Relations* (podcast)
- [Building Critical Consciousness for Educational Equity](#) with Nicole West-Burns (TED Talk)
- *Code Switch* (podcast)
- *I Am Not Your Negro*
- *Just Mercy*
- *Pod Save the People* (podcast)
- *The ABCs of Oppression*
- *The Diversity Gap* (podcast)
- *The Secret Life of Canada* (podcast)
- *When They See Us*

### Resources and Courses

- [Egale](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign](#)
- [OK2BME, Public education, training and consultation](#)
- [The Equity Continuum, Centre for Urban Schooling](#)

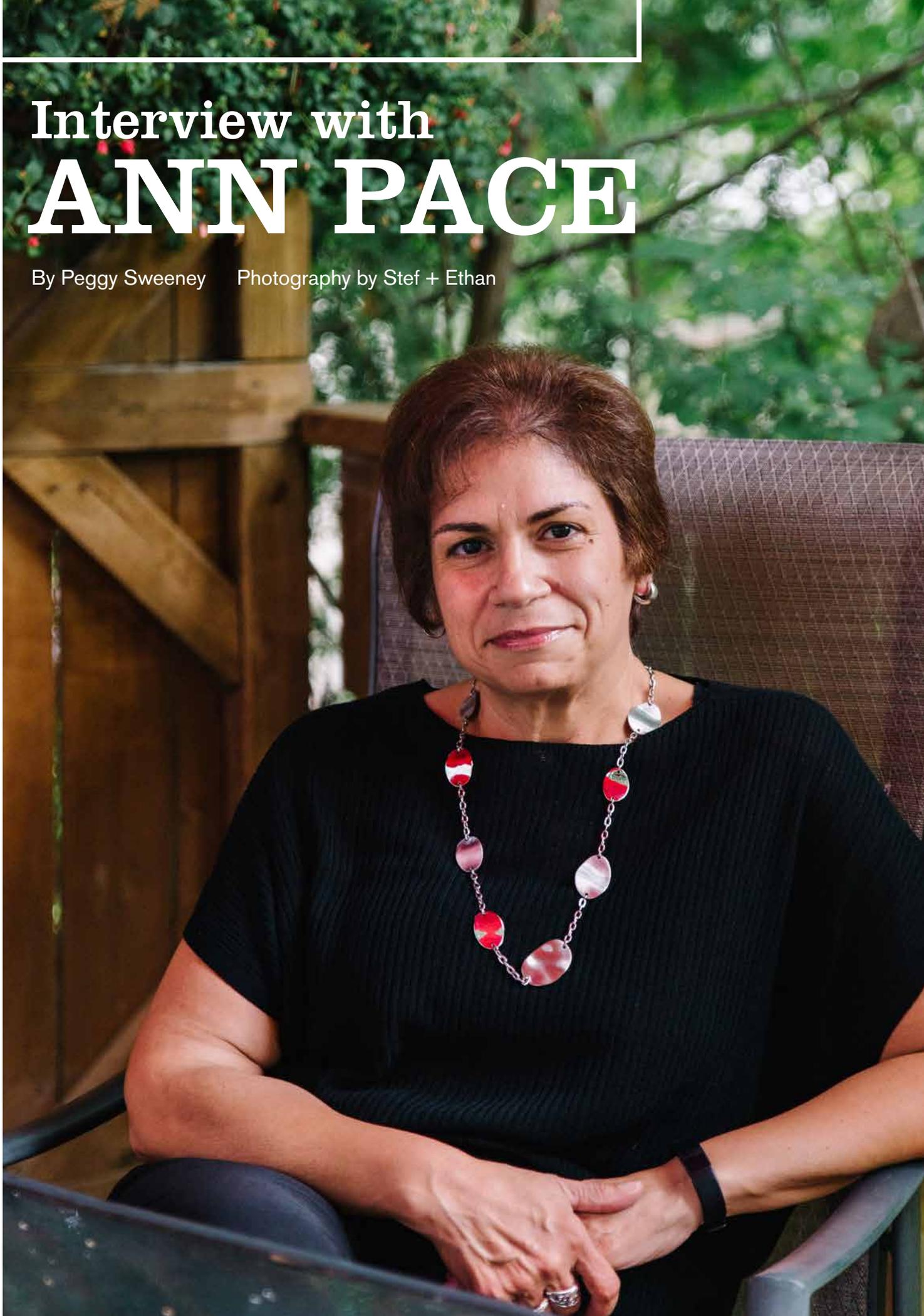
Do you have additional social justice resource recommendations?

We welcome you to share them with your peers. Please send them to [lromanese@principals.ca](mailto:lromanese@principals.ca). ▲

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# Interview with **ANN PACE**

By Peggy Sweeney    Photography by Stef + Ethan





When Ann Pace was elected President-Elect in May 2019, she had over a year to prepare for the role. She would be leaving her board on a one-year secondment and moving into the OPC office in downtown Toronto. Having served on the Provincial Executive for three years, she has been mentored along the way for the role in which she will be the spokesperson and main advocate for public school principals and vice-principals across the province. Although she knew there would be much to learn in the president's role, she was confident that the time she had spent preparing would help to ease the transition.

And then the pandemic hit. Schools closed. Everyone was quarantined. Learning went online. Classes, graduations, proms and end-of-year activities were all put on hold. And suddenly the year Ann thought she would be heading into changed, drastically.

At the time of this interview, Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce had just announced the three possible scenarios for re-opening schools in September. There were more questions than answers. No one knew what the health outlook would look like by the fall. Principals and vice-principals were being asked how this "new normal" would look in schools.

"It will definitely not be a business-as-usual year," says Ann. "One of the things that we have to focus on is how we can best support all educators – not just our Members but all educators – in understanding more about the unknown. What I mean by that is developing our resiliency in dealing with the unknown, recognizing that we have to trust experts. To develop our expertise, we need to be informed by others."

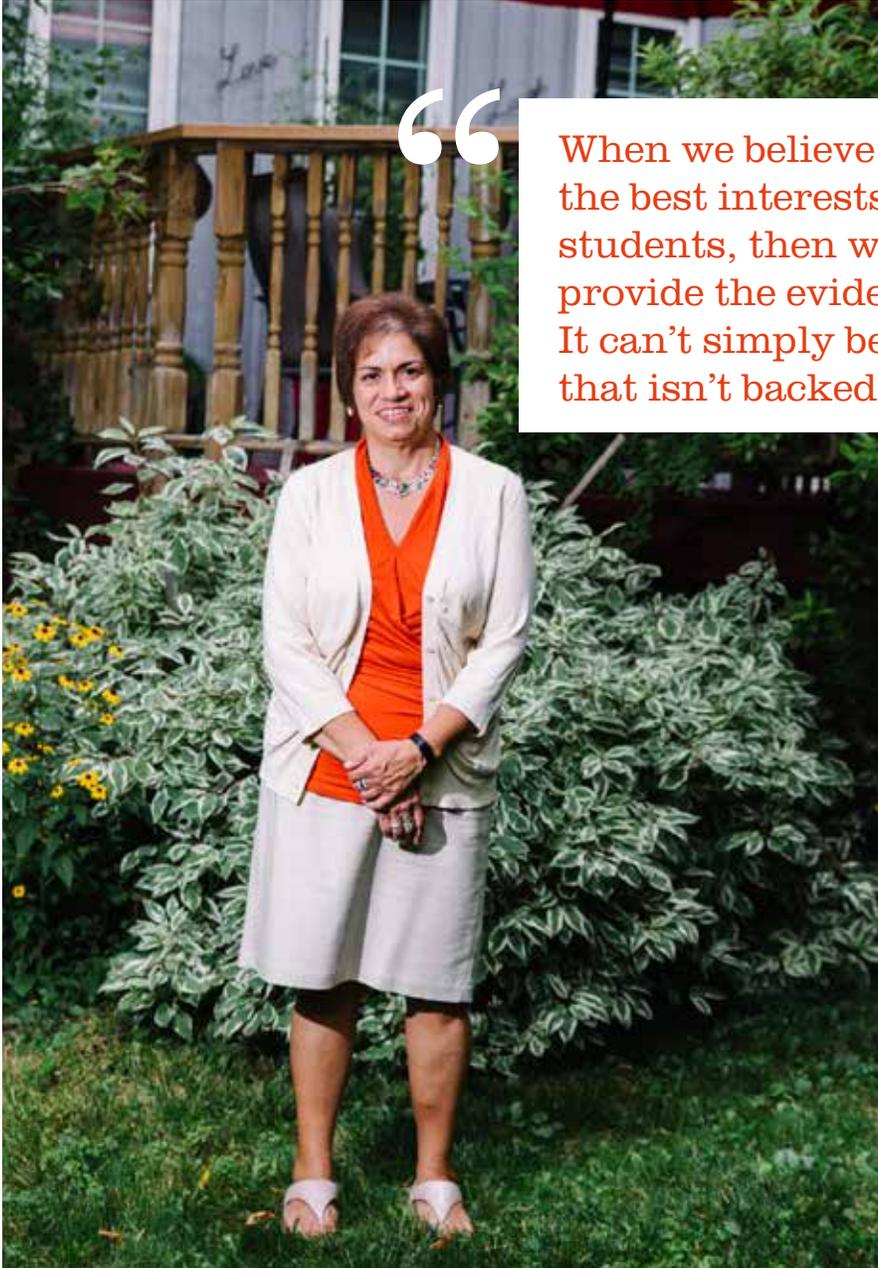
This is going to be a year like no other. Is Ann ready? Is she prepared? Is this still what she wants to do? In short, the answer is a definitive yes.

Ann was born and raised in Toronto. She went to the University of Waterloo where she completed a double major in English and History. Wanting some work experience as well as her studies, she did the co-op program "to help me get a greater understanding of what the world had to offer."

But even before starting her undergrad program, she knew she wanted to be a teacher. "I remember wanting this when I was four or five years old. It was a calling. It was always there. In fact, one of the reasons I did co-op in university was to make sure that this was what I really wanted. It gave me exposure to other professions, other aspects of the world and areas that I had some interest in."

One of her work terms was in education, working for the Toronto board. "I also worked in industry but was still drawn to education." After Waterloo, she headed to the University of Toronto, completing her Bachelor and Master's degrees in Education.

Ann began her teaching career at Dr. Denison Secondary School in Newmarket in the York Region DSB and later taught at King City Secondary School. In 2005, she became a vice-principal, and after five years was promoted to principal at Woodbridge



“

When we believe it's not in the best interests of staff or students, then we have to provide the evidence for it. It can't simply be an opinion that isn't backed up.”

each other and adopt best practices.

“It was also a great way to develop a much greater network. I could take what I had learned about other boards back

to my colleagues in York Region, so they could understand and appreciate the provincial differences. When we were looking for ways to deal with local issues such as an inability to have sufficient EAs or dealing with the challenges of regulation 274, we learned that these weren't just our issues. They were provincial issues. And we were able to consider how others were dealing with those challenges and whether their solutions might work for us in our district.

“I wanted to learn more, so I put my name forward to stand for the Provincial Executive. I've always had a desire to do more, to learn more. I've always sought out challenges and am not afraid of change. It's how we continue to grow.”

Ann was then encouraged by her peers to run for the president's position. “It was a recognition that others believed in me, that they sought and felt like I gave reasonable sage advice. So, I decided to go for it.”

Now that she's in the role, the “new normal” is starting to take shape. While she has been pleased to see the medical community offer sug-

gestions for how school should re-open, she also notes that, “we are the ones who know about running a school.

“It's important that we merge the medical and educational know-how. We need to be educated by the medical professionals, to ask questions of them. Then we have to articulate our views and concerns and work collaboratively with them. One of the reasons that the healthcare professionals were pushing to have schools reopen was because of the mental health and well-being of students. And I didn't disagree with that. But we also have to be mindful of the mental health and well-being needs of staff, some of whom were struggling with the isolation.

College. In 2014, she was given the opportunity to open a new school – Tommy Douglas Secondary School in Woodbridge – and has been the principal there since the opening.

After becoming a vice-principal, Ann joined her local OPC association, eventually becoming the chair. That role also included becoming a member of Provincial Council. “I really enjoyed the opportunity to learn from others, to get an understanding of the complexities of various issues from the perspective of other districts. There were areas where we had similarities, and others where there were differences. It was an opportunity for all of us to learn from

“There were also principals, vice-principals and teachers struggling with the anxiety of what a return would mean. We knew we wouldn’t be returning to the same normal. There’s going to have to be more time spent on hygiene, socially distancing and the availability and use of personal protective equipment.

“How will things work differently in different parts of the province, depending on case numbers? How are we making sure that students as young as four or five aren’t putting their fingers in their mouth? What do we do with the hospitality programs where it’s constant food preparation, keeping in mind that in those courses kids are taught about infection control? It might be that we have to cancel or change the way we deliver some programs until we can get a better standard of care.”

School leaders also knew that heading back to school, there would be expectations among students and parents around consistency. It’s possible that learning and opportunities will look different across the province. How do we maintain equity?

“Unfortunately,” says Ann, “we may not be able to. What is fair in this post-pandemic world and how can we mitigate consistency or equality versus equity? Is it right to say to a student in Thunder Bay that we’re not going to open up their school even though there are no COVID cases there because there are cases in Peel, Toronto or Windsor?”

“It does have to be inconsistent, unfortunately, because we cannot mitigate every single aspect of differences between communities. So, how do we try to level the playing field a little bit more? What resources and training are available for teachers? What can school boards do to ensure that the professional learning is available for teachers? How are school boards providing platforms, structures, et cetera that will level that playing field in the districts that have to do at least a portion of teaching online? There are just so many what-ifs.”

And what if we, as an organization of school leaders, disagree with measures that the ministry or boards want to put in place this year?

This is our role as advocates, insists Ann. “When we believe it’s not in the best interests of staff or students, then we have to provide the evidence for it. It can’t simply be an opinion that isn’t backed up. We would have to identify the pitfalls and develop some workable solutions. It’s a solution-focused approach, because if we’re just going to be the voice saying no, we are not going to be listened to. We have to be able to provide viable options.”

Each year, the president sets a goal or goals for their term. Ann admits that, while she has some, “I don’t know if the conditions will allow us to get to them.

“The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee is something that has to move with relative speed. That’s an absolute priority to ensure that our membership feels included and sees

themselves fairly represented by the OPC. We have to work to ensure that our membership represents the students we’re educating.

“I’d also like us to continue advocating for making schools safer places by addressing the needs of our most vulnerable students. And that includes students struggling with mental health issues, high anxiety students or students who have been traumatized. We have to look at the trauma that our racialized students face. In parts of our province, that is our Black, Muslim, Indigenous or students of colour. How can we ensure that we are making schools safer emotionally and physically for staff and students? We need more trained professionals: child and youth workers, social workers and individuals who have the training and experience to deal with the emotional well-being of students.”

Ann acknowledges that school leaders get concerned when they hear “we have to do more,” thinking that means more will be expected of them. “It’s not about us doing all of this work. It is about being able to recognize what a student needs and looping in the person who can do that work. I’m not suggesting that administrators become social workers or psychologists or medical professionals. But I am asking that they are able to recognize when a student requires help and be able to help them find the right resource.

“It’s advocating for the training, advocating for the appropriate support staff. I don’t have to be the social worker, but I should be able to recognize when somebody needs a social worker.”

Beyond the school, Ann considers herself to be “a pretty laid-back person. I try not to take many things too seriously when I’m off work. Since I take what I do for a living extremely seriously, I recognize that I need to refuel. That can include early morning bike rides, DIY projects, dinners with friends and families. I like to cook and bake.

“And I especially love spending time with my two amazing nephews, who are nine and 13. I love to take them places and give them experiences more so than buying them material items, although I do that as well,” she laughs.

“I also love to read, typically more biographies than fiction. I take inspiration from others. When I am reading fiction, I look for books that focus on the triumph of the human spirit, because I believe if we don’t remain optimistic and if we don’t continue to strive to learn, then we won’t grow.

“And our best way of learning is learning from others. So, I like to be the teacher when I can be, but I’m more of a learner at times. Even as a principal I’m more of a learner than a teacher.”

That last point is prescient. Because the role Ann is now in will certainly require her to be both a teacher and a learner. ▲

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# What's Fair, What's Right, What's Just?

Working with complaints as we seek to understand and interrupt systemic racism in our schools

By the Protective Services Team

Illustration by Pete Ryan

As we consider the complex demands on principals and vice-principals in leading their schools, none is more critical than the work they do to ensure a safe, equitable and inclusive learning/working environment. Recognizing and calling out discrimination and bias, both conscious and unconscious, remains necessary if we are to position our schools within the anti-racist, anti-oppressive framework. Collectively, the goal is to ensure that all students believe they can be successful and are supported within that belief.





The challenge to us – as individuals, school teams and leaders in education – is to grapple with our own belief systems. Research indicates that it is common for many to identify themselves as “colour-blind,” as someone who does not “see colour.” Significant concerns continue to be raised by those who feel the opposite:

The common idea of claiming ‘colour blindness’ is akin to the notion of being ‘not racist’- as with the ‘not-racist’, the colour-blind individual, by ostensibly failing to see race, fails to see racism and falls into racist passivity.

– Ibram X. Kendi

### [How to Be an Antiracist](#)

Within our schools, students and staff who experience offensive actions and comments – as well as the teachers and leaders who are charged with identifying, interrupting and standing up to this behaviour – may exhibit a wide range of reactions. Expressions of frustration, rage, anxiety, stress, and/or helplessness can result in dysfunction at both school and system levels. The dismantling of systemic racism requires that our school leaders educate themselves on what it means to lead anti-racist and anti-oppressive schools.

Over the past year, the turmoil experienced in our schools has been very evident to the OPC’s Protective Services Team (PST). We have responded to an ever-increasing number of cases from Members dealing with harassment and human rights concerns. Complaints have been made by Members facing harassment or discrimination, while other Members have responded to allegations of

harassment and discrimination from staff, students and community members.

Principals and vice-principals are duty-bound to do their best to ensure the safety and security of students and staff. Should you feel that you or others are being discriminated against on the basis of race, ethnic origin or ancestry, or facing bias, it is important to identify those concerns through the appropriate processes.

Alternately, those who come to you, as the school leader, with their concerns must be given an opportunity to fully express those concerns. It is then your responsibility to follow the appropriate process that will entail a reasonable, appropriate investigation and necessary follow-up actions. The goal of these processes is to ensure a safe, equitable learning and working environment.

Some administrators who have complained to their boards about discriminatory or racist comments and actions have also expressed frustration that their concerns were not treated seriously. Alternatively, others are fearful that they will make a misstep in the supervision of staff performance or behaviour, worried that an expression of concern could lead to an accusation of bias or racism. In considering your concerns or the concerns of others, it is important to ask:

- Are my actions or the actions of others consistent with appropriate behaviour as described in board policies and procedures (including Codes of Conduct)?
- Is my professional conduct or the professional conduct of others appropriate according to my board’s policies and procedures,

and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) Standards of Practice?

- Is discrimination or bias present in the comments or actions of concern? Is there evidence to support the perception of bias?
- Is any of the behaviour in question consistent with [Regulation 437.97 Professional Misconduct?](#)

Administrators should always consult with their board personnel and respect board directives. All boards have developed Harassment and Human Rights policies and procedures, which school leaders are expected to know, understand and follow.

If you are unclear as to these policies, contact your supervisory officer for assistance in locating and discussing the relevant policies. As always, your PST consultants are here to assist you with questions or concerns that may arise.

PST support is available for Members during the investigation process, whether they are a complainant, respondent or witness. This involvement will be offered in the form of regular support and communication, either by phone, virtual meeting or meeting in person, and in meetings with investigators and board senior administration. In any case, Members will be advised by the PST to gather any notes, documentation, written evidence that might exist or witness names and contact information.

Members will be cautioned whether as a complainant or a respondent that the process is confidential, and there must not be communication with anyone involved so as not to influence the investigation. PST Consultants

confer with our Legal Team as needed to seek advice on how to best proceed, and whether direct legal assistance is needed.

When registering a complaint or concern, the process usually begins with the involvement of the administrator's supervisory officer, with the hopes of an informal resolution. If a resolution is not reached, the complainant may then draft a formal Harassment or Human Rights Complaint. The board will first conduct a threshold assessment to determine whether the complaint is within the scope of the policy and that it is not vexatious or frivolous. Once the threshold has been met, depending on the type of complaint, an investigator will be appointed, either internally or as an external independent source.

As an alternative to the internal human rights complaint mechanism within school boards, sometimes Members prefer to consider filing a complaint with the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (HRTO). The HRTO has jurisdiction over violations of the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) (Code), which includes the right to equal treatment in employment without discrimination on a Code ground and the receipt of educational services without discrimination on a Code ground. An application to the HRTO must occur within one year of the alleged discrimination, outline the allegations that have occurred and state what remedy the applicant is seeking. Additionally, the applicant must identify whether or not they would be interested in participating in mediation.

The PST has a number of cases where Members have been named as a respondent in an HRTO

case, along with the school board. Where this occurs, Members should notify their board that an HRTO complaint has been received, as well as notifying the PST. It is common for the board to provide legal support to the Member through the process, where the Member was acting appropriately according to the board policies and procedures. In some cases, the board may request that the HRTO remove the Member as a personal respondent, where it was not proper that they were named in the application.

The HRTO process is a lengthy and legalistic process. Members who would like to submit an application to the HRTO or who have been named as a respondent in an application are advised to contact the OPC intake consultant, and the PST will provide support as needed throughout process.

Regardless of whether the complaint is a harassment complaint or an HRTO application, it is very upsetting and anxiety-provoking to be a complainant or a respondent. It requires facing

## Recognizing and calling out discrimination and bias, both conscious and unconscious, remains necessary if we are to position our schools within the anti-racist, anti-oppressive framework.

concerns you may have expressed that were not examined in a fulsome manner, or concerns that someone has brought forward against you, and in which you still seek to understand why the complaint came forward. As previously noted,

## The dismantling of systemic racism requires that our school leaders educate themselves on what it means to lead anti-racist and anti-oppressive schools.

examining behaviour and actions will be a significant part of the investigative process. Investigation findings are not always predictable, but they will serve to provide future direction for administrators as to what should be a focus in ensuring the school continues to build anti-racist, anti-oppression awareness and strengths.

The OPC has undertaken several initiatives to respond to the needs of Members. Protective Services and Professional Learning resources relating to anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion as well as the HRTO [provide guidance on best practices](#). The OPC'S [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee](#), struck in June 2020, includes a diverse group of Members. Several anti-racism sessions were held as part of the [Just in Time](#), Professional Learning opportunities, and recordings of these workshops, panels and webinars are archived and available [to Members through the OPC website](#).

This is a challenging time for both educators and students. We are all looking to

find our place and to live a good life, and to teach our students to do the same. As we seek to build our awareness and provide unwavering support of those who have faced many obstacles in raising their children in environments that are less than fair, sending them to our schools to become the best they can be, and trusting in the world to be equitable, respectful and kind, we know our role as school leaders will be instrumental in making this a reality. The only way forward is for our schools to become anti-racist and anti-oppressive.

Ibram X Kendi, in [How to Be an Antiracist](#), describes this challenge as “the basic struggle we’re all in, the struggle to be fully human and to see that others are fully human. We know how to be racist, we know how to pretend to be not racist. Now, let’s know how to be anti-racist.” ▲

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**HAPPY HANDS  
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# Developing Critical Consciousness

## Working to dig deeper into topics

**P**rofessional learning (PL) has always been an important consideration for the OPC. When school closures were announced last March, our PL team wanted to be responsive to school leaders across the province. We developed a [Just in Time](#) series to accomplish that goal. Sixty sessions were offered, 12 of which had an equity, diversity and inclusion focus. Most sessions were recorded and available to our Members for viewing, along with any session materials.

The Just in Time sessions were well-received, and we gathered important feedback from participants. That feedback, along with comments made during the sessions and informal discussions with Members, has highlighted a need for continued PL opportunities focused specifically on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). To that end, our 2020–2021 PL plan includes monthly offerings on a topic that is EDI related.

Some topics we are exploring include developing critical consciousness, understanding implicit bias and intersectionality. We will work with our recently founded [EDI Advisory Committee](#) to identify specific topics to be addressed, and will ensure that we work with Members and contractors who have the appropriate experience for the development and delivery of such sessions.

For information on those sessions, as well as other opportunities, we invite you to visit our department [landing page](#).

Since the beginning of the school year, we have begun to release new programming that aims to provide participants with multiple entry points into relevant topics through a variety of forums. As well, we are working to dig deeper into some of those topics, such as critical consciousness, as we respond to feedback that surface work is insufficient and more support is needed to effect lasting change in our leadership practices.

Additionally, we have put a plan in place to review our Additional Qualification Programs and our Emerging Leaders Development Program, to ensure that they are in fact culturally responsive and bias-free. To support this review, we will rely on our newly formed roster of EDI experts who bring together different perspectives, as we continue to develop our individual and collective critical consciousness and reflect that in our PL opportunities such that they reflect our commitment to bias-free, anti-oppression and inclusive programming.

Beyond our work to provide PL opportunities to school administrators, we are also committed to ensuring that our PL team, including program facilitators, are learning and sharing their experiences. As we continue to work towards improving our offerings, we welcome feedback and suggestions. ▲

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✉ [learning@principals.ca](mailto:learning@principals.ca)





# LEADERSHIP

BY

# DESIGN



Giving youth a seat at the table

By Trevor Massey

Illustration by Jeremy Leung

In fall 2016, the Lifelong Leadership Institute (LLI) launched the Leadership by Design (LBD) program, providing innovative leadership development opportunities to youth of Black and African-Canadian heritage in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). While all students have varying capacity for leadership and perform leadership roles within their families, social circles, schools and wider community, we wanted to amplify these skills while providing seat-at-the-table leadership.



When some eight per cent of Toronto’s population self-identify as Black, yet this community is insufficiently included in the commerce, governance and important decision-making forums of the city and country, it is time to adopt a mindset reflective of the often quoted saying – “*if you are not at the table you are on the menu.*”

The Leadership by Design program targets leadership development, fully aware that leadership skills not only enable good, effective and responsible leadership in all spheres, but also influence employment decisions and overlap with skills required in most endeav-

ours including [entrepreneurship](#) and good citizenship.

### Leadership Soft Skills

Acquiring identified skills of an authentic leader is paramount to LBD students, who are able to influence and inspire others to accomplish objectives and model exemplary leadership through practising an array of soft skills. These are mostly skills that start with the mindset of ‘getting things done’ and include

- effective communication
- self-awareness
- self-confidence

- reliability
- resilience
- teamwork
- persuasion
- networking
- time management
- empathy
- problem-solving
- critical thinking
- civic responsibility and
- intellectual curiosity.

One major challenge for LBD is how best to effectively teach these leadership soft skills, instill a leadership mindset, inspire a lifelong pur-



suit of proficiency and do this outside of the regular Monday-to-Friday high school program for students.

Another challenge is fulfilling a commitment to deliver high-quality educational services at no costs to parents. We are confident that as a learning organization that is committed to continuous improvement, we will be successful in our mission. September 2020 marked LBD's 5th year of operation.

### The Students in Leadership by Design

The students in the program identify as Black and are from high schools across the GTA – from Oakville to Newmarket to Oshawa and in between. Each year, the program admits just over 40 Grade 10 students and offers service to students spanning the Grade

10–12 years, and into university or college. Students transition through the program as distinct cohorts.

### The Process

Student can apply after completing Grade 9 and admission is based on an interview plus academic achievement from their Grade 9 year. The intent is to select students within a bandwidth of capability because the LBD program is demanding in terms of curriculum, effort, achievement, ambition and time.

Parents are full participants in the admissions process. Each year, we communicate

our admissions information to principals and vice-principals and rely on them to distribute program information to guidance staff and teachers with the intent they will identify and encourage eligible Black students to apply. So far this system has worked well, but we would be pleased to extend these lines of communication to more school administrators.

Programming is categorized into 10 buckets of activities and these activities are re-

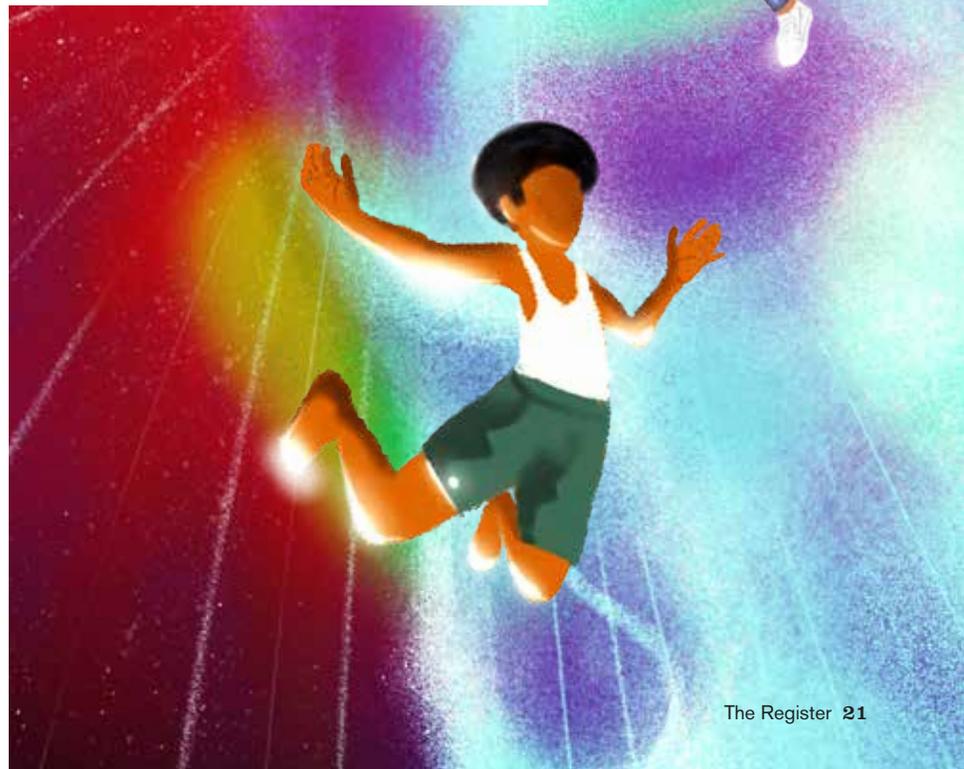
viewed and updated each year. Here are some quick insights into the curriculum.

### 1: Saturday Learning Sessions

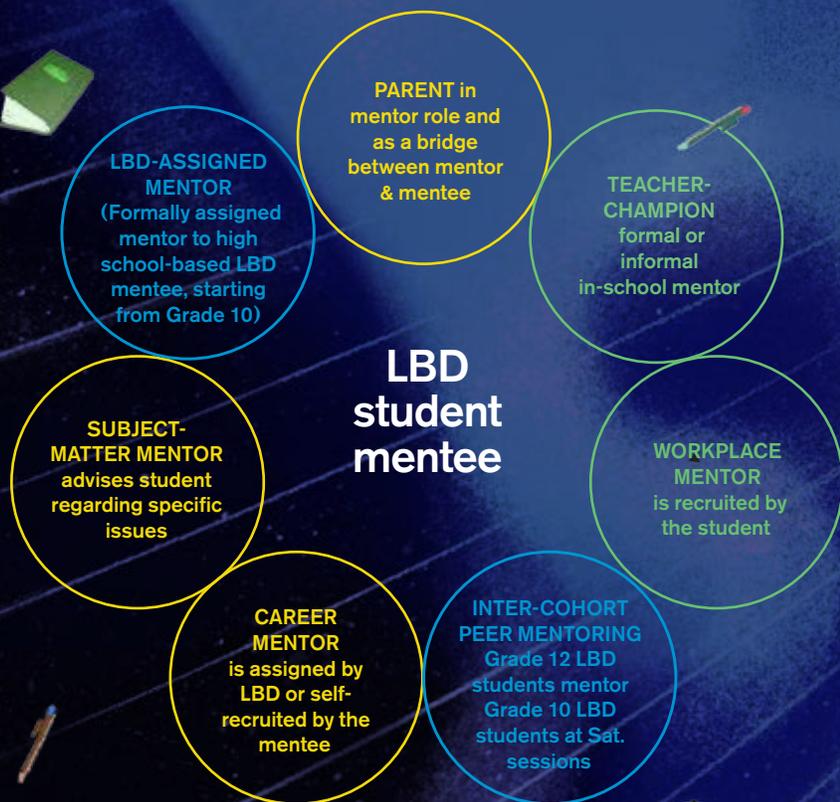
We normally program 10–12 Saturday sessions each academic year and attendance is around 200 people. The program starts at 9:00 a.m. and ends early afternoon. Sessions are sited at universities (UofT, Ryerson, York, UOIT), which helps to normalize the university setting and

“ My final mark was 96 per cent and I believe one of the things that contributed to this award was the tutoring I received thanks to the LBD.”

— LBD Student



## Leadership by Design – Mentorship Ecosystem



experience. Saturday sessions are about collective learning, relationships and community building and infusing students, parents and volunteers with a deep sense of belonging.

The program is highly structured with separate learning tracks for students and parents, and yes, parents do attend on Saturdays, which contradicts the worn narrative that Black parents are not engaged in the education of their children.

Saturday sessions offer programming that aggregates all the learning objectives such as leadership skill building, intellectual curiosity, career exploration, self-confidence, public speaking and more. After the mid-March 2020 introduction of physical distancing due to COVID-19, our Saturday sessions migrated

to a virtual format. School administrators are invited to attend our 2020–21 Saturday sessions virtually or in person.

### 2: Mentorship Ecosystem

The graphic at the top of this page describes the mentorship ecosystem that supports the students in this program. The role of subject-matter mentor is currently performed by teacher candidates from the faculties of education at Laurentian University and Ontario Tech University. Thwarted from classroom practice due to COVID-19, teacher candidates are currently delivering virtual tutoring services to some 53 LBD students using the WIZE virtual-tutoring platform. Called *Study Buddy*, this tutoring ser-

vice is coordinated by the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University, and spans mid-May to the end of August.

*“The Study Buddy Program provided a safe environment. My tutor related to my fears and concerns.”*

–LBD Student

*“I am emailing you to let you know on behalf of my school’s science department, I received an outstanding achievement award in Chemistry. My final mark was 96 per cent and I believe one of the things that contributed to this award was the tutoring I received thanks to the LBD.”*

–LBD Student

### 3: Career Exploration

The LBD covers the waterfront in terms of [career exploration](#) and partners with [universities](#) and [corporations](#) in doing so. Black professionals are brought in to speak about their career trajectories. The program also runs workshops on OSAP and funding, sourcing scholarships and other awards and transitioning from high school to post-secondary studies.

*“I just thought I would share with you the good news that I have been awarded the Schulich Leader Scholarship worth \$80,000 over four years to study at York University. Thanks so much for your support and motivating LBD students like me to aim for the best. You are truly instrumental in my success. Many thanks once more for taking your time to run LBD sessions that are very informative and are always inspiring us to reach our highest potential.”*

–LBD Student

These three buckets are just a small example of this program’s curriculum. Other activities include skills-focused workshops, civic engagement, community service, building so-

cial and [cultural capital](#), cultivating the curious mind, collaborations and partnerships and parental engagement.

What LBD is working to forge is a leadership-development program of a different kind. Focused on the socio-economic well-being of Black youth, it aspires to enhance the leadership capacity of participating youth and, by extension, the Black communities in Canada, and one that fully engages parents.

It promises to be a leadership-development program of a different kind. ▲

Trevor Massey is a retired college registrar (Centennial College, Toronto) and educational consultant. He is currently the Chair, Lifelong Leadership Institute (LLI) which operates the Leadership by Design program

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<http://lileaders.com/>

“The Study Buddy Program provided a safe environment. My tutor related to my fears and concerns.”

— LBD Student



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**Views**



# from the **Front Line**

Equity needs to be the foundation  
of public education

By Sue Morrison & Merrill Mathews

Illustration by Julia Breckenreid

We asked two principals who serve in the role of central Equity system leader to share their perspectives of their roles and how their work helps school leaders create accepting school communities for students.

Equity conversations are uncomfortable, and that discomfort is the path forward, for within this discomfort is awakening and growth. As leaders of public education, administrators are key in this long overdue movement forward, and it is our job to be responsible for our own learning and actions to course correct. It was a marked day in February of 2018 when our director stood before every administrator and system leader and indicated that it was “time to get comfortable with discomfort,” as we were all being called as leaders to see equity work as foundational to our roles.

It’s incredibly uncomfortable, but necessary, to acknowledge and understand that public education systems are not exempt from the marginalization and oppression that lends itself to the perpetuation of the “isms” that exist in our larger society. We don’t get to claim that these inequities exist in our world, but that our education systems are somehow magically immune from oppression. We don’t get to claim “good intentions” or claim that we are “good people” and therefore cannot possibly be complicit in the advantages that our system provides to some, but not to others.

We are being called to action, with administrators as central agents of change. This call is rooted at the core of who we are as public educators. Never before have I been more proud to be part of a board who is willing to hold a mirror up to itself and be challenged to root out the systemic issues, policies and procedures that lend themselves to the ongoing marginalization of various groups. When we know better, we must do better. It is time for all of us to do better!

I have been an administrator and Member of the OPC for 19 years, and as I look back over my career, I must acknowledge

that my current work in Human Rights and Equity is the most foundational work that I have done in almost two decades. This role was created in our board in 2018, to ensure an explicit and integrated focus on equity and to provide administrators with a “central principal” who understands the dynamic role of being an administrator, and who is able, with a team of central staff, to support the learning of others and the development of strategic moves to close the equity of opportunity gap.

I have never before been in a position that explicitly calls me to challenge the bias from within the system, that the system itself perpetuates. The mandate of this role requires me to support the learning and improvement of people’s equity literacy at all levels of the organization, with a specific focus on fellow administrators. We have a long way to go, and it is incredibly regretful that certain groups of people continue to experience harm within our systems.

At the current height of the call for social change, we are to be leaders in this work, not merely bystanders. As administrators, we are called not to stay silent, but to speak up and speak out for young people in our schools whose voices are not heard – all students! This work requires an elevating of voices that are not heard, while disrupting the system enough so that the role of a Human Rights and Equity System Administrator is no longer necessary.

Where we are and where we need to be are two very different states of existence. This is not easy work. However, it is foundational work if we are to truly hear, and respond to, the voices of our marginalized staff and our marginalized young people.

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Sue Morrison  
System Administrator, Human Rights and Equity Division  
Waterloo Region District School Board



**Equity conversations  
are uncomfortable,  
and that uncomfortability is the path  
forward, for within this uncomfort-  
ability is awakening and growth.**



Throughout my career, I have strived to develop and maintain an equity and human rights centred focus that works to identify and remove systemic barriers to learning. In my current role as an Education Officer with the Equity and Inclusive Education Department at the Durham District School Board (DDSB), I work with an incredible team to support the systemic implementation of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP).

I am extremely fortunate to have experienced a variety of leadership positions during my 27 years in education. Before DDSB, I had the opportunity to work with the Education Equity Secretariat at the Ministry of Education. During my time there, I was the principal lead to 36 boards of education in various stages of implementing CRRP, and worked collaboratively with remarkable vice-principals and principals across the province.

Given my experience with the Education Equity Secretariat, I optimistically brought the work of implementing CRRP with the strategies that were already in place at the DDSB in relation to its Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan. The province-wide outlook made me very excited to join the team at the Durham board, to work with school leaders and the senior team to advance the goals of the board's Equity and Inclusive Education Policy.

In my current role, I work alongside an extraordinary equity facilitator, Camille Ali, and two integral and supportive superintendents, Mohammed Hamid and Margaret Lazarus, to assist principals and vice-principals in creating professional development that is specific to assess the needs of our students. This past year, our team committed to a system-wide implementation of a CRRP toolkit and web tool to support school administrators. The goal is for our team to assist in the capacity building of staff in their commitment to developing learning environments that are safe, welcoming, respectful, equitable, accessible, inclusive and free from discrimination. We have been using these tools to

help with the required knowledge building, coaching/mentoring and job-embedded learning in advancing school cultures that are centred on equity and human rights.

Our team is also addressing anti-Black racism by implementing the Compendium of Action for Black Student Success. I am grateful to work alongside two retired DDSB principals, Jacqueline Steer and Chrystal Bryan, who are facilitating and leading the work outlined in the Compendium. Through their leadership and the support of our superintendents and school leaders, we are committed to enhancing our board's practices to be responsive to our Black communities and close gaps for our Black students.

As a result of our work in CRRP, the use of the Equity Continuum has given schools the self-assessment tool to enhance their school improvement planning process. Schools are measuring how they are creating more equitable experiences for all students. We are breaking down silos in departments by connecting with the Indigenous Education Team, the Safe Schools Team and the Mental Health and Well-being Team to create spaces where discrimination is being addressed and our students and families feel they matter and belong.

Our social climate is changing, and amidst a global pandemic there is a movement that has started for educators to reflect on our role to educate our students on principles that will further social change. Our goal is to empower students to stand up for social justice issues and have the language and knowledge to stand up for one another. I strongly support the efforts that are being made by the DDSB to advance equity in all spheres of its work, and I believe that in this unprecedented time, we will continue to do so together. ▲

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Merrill Mathews  
Education Officer with the Equity and Inclusive Education Department  
Durham District School Board

# ***Student Voice***

*Student Voice*





## Let students take the lead

By Harpreet Ghuman

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The students we are privileged to work with are a common thread in the work of *all* educators. Every education policy, framework or instructional strategy impacts students in some way, shape or form.

As a principal in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), I have been part of many discussions about student voice being a “key” priority, and that we must centre the voices and lived experiences of historically marginalized and underserved populations.

The question we should be asking is, what is our intention in centring student voice?

At times, promoting student voice might be tokenistic and celebratory acts to check boxes or affirm ourselves as responsive educators. However, when student voice is authentically welcomed, it may actually reveal some uncomfortable truths and realities that, from the students’ perspectives, are problematic and harmful. Upon hearing such reflections and experiences, this critical piece of data must guide our work to frame the day-to-day schooling experiences not to just address what may have happened prior, but to move forward and disrupt systemic practices of racism and oppression that have harmed Indigenous, Black and racialized students for far too long.

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To truly see and hear the voices of all students, in their joys and their traumas, we need to be willing and able to see and hear our own voices. How can we make space for all students' voices if we do not make space for our own?

In examining our own voices and stories, we must also recognize the ways that our stories, biases and privileges influence how we hear others' stories. We must also model these truths. By doing so, we can establish foundational trust and inspire students to share their voices.

How is the education system centring such voices, and who holds leaders accountable for doing so? To what extent are our students involved in shaping/influencing day-to-day school realities and the important systemic changes that directly impact them? How can principals or vice-principals enable students to more directly influence their own schooling experiences?

Through my own observations as an educator, and parent of two school-aged children, I've seen a variety of opportunities for students to get "involved," including on student advisory councils, as a student trustee, leading committees or clubs and other roles that may differ from one community to the next. Students might also sign up for or spearhead a variety of movements or causes themselves.

While principals may inherit the cultural practices of a given school, we should recognize that we have a significant platform, and can influence a shift in practices working to ensure cultural norms broaden and evolve over time, just as our student demographic broadens and evolves.

## Student Voice Informing School Improvement

School boards offer their own unique strategic plans (for example Toronto DSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan) and also develop School Improvement Plans and protocols to guide the important work that we do. There are ministry mandates (like EQAO scores in reading/writing, math, Caring Adult) to school board specific goals (Black student achievement, de-streaming, reduction in suspensions, for example.). As principals, vice-principals and leadership teams move forward with this work, what role do our stu-

dents play in shaping how this may look? The Student Voice Crew at the schools in which I have been principal was one important platform for students to inform administration on a variety of matters from school safety to conditions on the school yard to the day-to-day learning and social experiences. Its purpose was to go beyond serving as an 'advisory' group to the school, to also leveraging information and data from our students to enact urgent responses to some critical social issues.

At one of my schools, Crescent Town Elementary, this involved ensuring students had new basketball nets and other outdoor play opportunities at recess and lunch, advocating for elevator repairs in local apartment buildings and addressing the collapse of a pedestrian walkway/bridge connecting the school to surrounding buildings. At another school, students highlighted the harsh realities of anti-Black racism and [put out a call to action](#) to the broader community to speak out against injustices through a YouTube video.

The Student Voice Crew also shared their own insights as to how families can spend time together at home during a period of extended lockdown across the Greater Toronto Area. These are just a few examples of authentic student voice, recognizing that the issues relevant to a particular community may differ from others.

As principals, we must understand the deeply rooted issues impacting the communities we serve and respond in a manner that honours the lived experiences, histories and talents of our students. We can do so by physically immersing ourselves in the community beyond the four walls of the school.

## Listen More and Project Less

As we embark on School Improvement work, an important first step is to hear the insights of students on a variety of matters. It is important not to assign what we feel students are hearing, seeing and feeling. Instead, we must listen more attentively, project less and respond accordingly. From age-appropriate well-being or school climate surveys, to student interest activities, both administrators and teachers can get a sense of the students' emotions and experiences. Discussions

with family members, both in the school and in the community, provide additional, authentic insights into student voice.

While community circles and other student voices honouring activities unfold in classrooms, how can principals hear or see such voices?

Principals are tasked with making many decisions every day, and while we often say that every decision is with "our students' best interests in mind," how would we know this if their voices are not involved in any processes?

The term "disengaged students" is often thrown around loosely. We must reflect on which school conditions cause students to feel disconnected. How can we access art forms (hip hop, spoken word) and digital platforms/social media that they value, not only to connect with them but to promote critical thinking that disrupts assumptions and stereotypes and takes social action to address school-based and societal injustices?

Aside from culturally responsive leadership, [the Inclusive Design Framework](#) is an important vehicle for principals and vice-principals to examine deep-rooted inequities and gaps among learners to put in place important teaching and learning structures that centre the most marginalized student voices.

## Respecting our Learners

It is often said that "we are what we teach" and that we impart our values, interests and beliefs onto students. I applaud principals and teachers who take the time not only to gauge the interests of their students, but also to explore how their interests, experiences and realities are informed by both privilege and marginalization related to their intersectional identities.

We can get to these more nuanced conversations and experiences when we share our vulnerabilities as people and as school leaders. The thought of sharing our vulnerabilities may cause anxiety, but we may find the courage when we consider the potential benefits to student learning and empowerment. For me personally, sharing my own struggles [with identity and racism](#) in my schooling experiences has enabled students to see me as someone other than just the "princi-

North Kipling students' gather for a socially distanced Public Service Announcement to speak up against Anti-Black Racism.



pal.” And while I recognize the risks involved in putting my vulnerabilities out there, I have greatly benefited through developing strong relationships with students and families. I also reflect on the fact that we ask students to be vulnerable each day in the learning process regardless of their experiences of privilege or marginalization.

These are not easy conversations or situations for any individual to navigate with staff, students or parents, particularly when relational trust may not have been established. The Courageous Conversations framework is often referenced to support creating the conditions for challenging discourse. Parker Palmer and the [Center for Courage & Renewal](#) also offer reflective touchstones and norms that I have found useful in various educational settings.

Palmer’s book *The Courage to Teach* (2017) is just one such book that may support understanding the importance of knowing and sharing your “inner teacher.” Participating in Circles of Trust sessions with colleagues and fellow adult learners has informed some of my own education

## TO WHAT EXTENT

**are our students involved in shaping/ influencing day-to-day school realities and the important systemic changes that directly impact them?**

pedagogy. Indigenous, Black and other racialized voices comprise a major basis and context for the literature and art connected to both staff and student learning. These are mediums for students to see themselves. It is important to know, however, that highlighting historically marginalized voices should never take the form of charity mindset or saviourism.

### Sharing Stories & Providing Platforms

Being in a remote learning context since April 6, 2020, virtual class (Google Classroom) visits and email or phone calls became the main platforms to stay connected to students. As students, staff,

and parents began to share their emotions about the murder of George Floyd, it was yet another painful reminder to all of us of the prevalence of anti-Black racism in society. It was time to listen. Black students, staff, colleagues and community members shared how this was a seminal moment in the ongoing oppression and generational trauma the Black community has experienced for centuries.

A common message from the young Black voices in the school was how tired and frustrated they are with daily realities of anti-Black racism. For some of our Student Voice Crew members and their peers, this was a

platform to reflect (what does this moment mean to you?), write (how do you feel and how do you want to express those feelings?) and create (spoken word, poetry and dramatic enactment). They created a moving public service announcement entitled [“Don’t Fear Us, See Us, Hear Us.”](#)

This was only possible through the tireless work of student leaders, committed staff and supportive parents who trusted the students to share their voices with such honesty.

Earlier in the school year, Grade 6 students were inspired to write an original rap song entitled “Be Kind,” which pays tribute to Indigenous peoples impacted by the legacy of residential schooling. This culminating learning was modeled by their teacher and inspired by the work of local community activist and artist Ruben Esguerra.

These are mere snapshots of what Student Voice looked like in my contexts, given the students and families I work with, and will inevitably look somewhat different in another context. Ultimately, centring a multiplicity of student voices directly impacts their learning. Once

again, this is especially important for students most marginalized in and by schooling.

### More Student Voice

What are some of the potential outcomes of our daily interactions with students whether in classrooms, the school yard or the community? In one particular school, our predominantly Muslim student population often shared their experiences with Islamophobia and the constant need to dispel or explain stereotypical depictions of Muslims in mainstream media and society. To support students and staff to better understand the day-to-day realities of Muslim families, Imam Shaykh Yusuf Badat from the Islamic Foundation was invited to share in new learning of both Islamic belief systems and the ways in which teachers can support Muslim students at the school. This enabled staff to ask questions and engage in dialogue from areas of Religious Accommodations to student participation in the Arts and Health and Physical Education curricula.

Student led photography clubs, original art and music compositions, and staff commu-

nity outreaching are additional vehicles for students to share more of their lived experiences from their own perspective as a counter to potential staff assumptions about them and/or the community in which they live.

Through every interaction with our students and families, we reveal a sense of who we are. Perhaps as students feel comfortable, they may reveal more of their true feelings about schooling. Let’s learn from those students’ voices. They may help us remove some of the masks that we ourselves have been wearing to reveal parts of our identities that we didn’t even know existed.

I am deeply indebted to the students of the schools I have worked in – Firgrove, Shoreham, Crescent Town and North Kipling – who’ve taught me so much and inspired me to ensure their voices are always centred. ▲

Harpreet is “just a kid from Jane and Finch.” He is extremely proud to have learned, taught and grown in a community which has shaped so much of who he is today. He is principal at North Kipling Junior Middle School in Rexdale, Toronto DSB.

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## AS PRINCIPALS,

**we must understand the deeply rooted issues impacting the communities we serve and respond in a manner that honours the lived experiences, histories and talents of our students.**

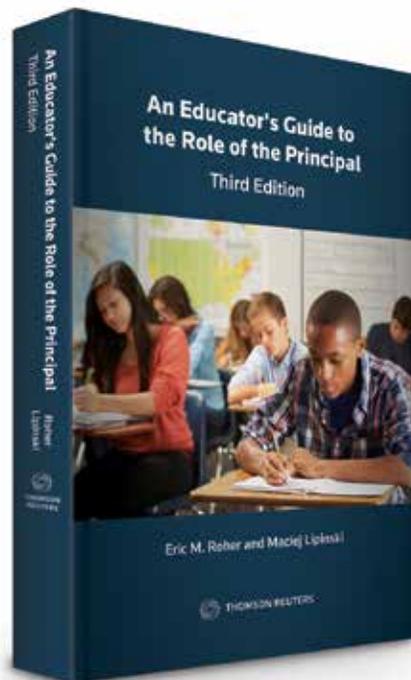


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# The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee

We are proud to introduce you to the 12 OPC Members who have been chosen to represent you on our recently formed Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Advisory Committee. Their mandate is to examine all of the OPC's services through an equity lens and provide insights and recommendations.



Nancy Brady

Nancy has had the privilege of being an administrator in the Ottawa Carleton DSB for the past 17 years, in the elementary and secondary panels. She always had a passion for leadership, education and making a difference in students' lives. However, when she expressed her aspirations to a trusted mentor in the first board she worked in, she was told that unless she was willing to hide who she truly was, keeping her private life and "alternative lifestyle" hidden, she would never be an administrator in that board. Luckily, that same mentor helped her transfer to the Ottawa-Carleton DSB, where she was able to pursue her goals and remain true to who she was, a member of the LGTBQ2 community.

Nancy admits that the journey she then traveled has not been without bumps or difficulties. While able to move forward professionally, there were still many occasions (in and outside

of the education world) when she faced (and still faces) discrimination, hateful comments and abuse. There are still areas in the world she will not travel due to the continued criminalization of LGTBQ2 people. She notes that she and her partner of 20 years are still cautious about holding hands in public.

Nancy wanted to be part of the EDI Advisory Committee not only to move forward the rights of the LGTBQ2 community, but also because as the Past-President of the OPC, she heard from colleagues from diverse backgrounds who felt it was time for our association not only to increase the speed of our equity journey, but to take on a leadership role in this journey.

A piece of advice from Nancy: "Even those of us who are from a diverse or marginalized group are not without our own unconscious biases. As a bisexual woman, I have not only faced discrimination outside the LGTBQ2 community, but also within my community for not being "gay enough." I also acknowledge that I have much work to do personally and professionally to truly be an ally and accomplice for others along this journey."



**Michelle Rodney Bartalos**

Michelle submitted her name to be part of the EDI Advisory Committee with both enthusiasm and trepidation. She doesn't consider herself to be "the average applicant with a formal list of experiences to note." But as an advocate for various marginalized communities, she has exercised a confident and passionate voice to inspire students and staff to excel in all aspects of school life, despite the systemic barriers. She began her elementary teaching career in Toronto, moving later to Ham-

ilton-Wentworth. Working in two boards within an assortment of single and dual track schools provided her with experiences in culturally and socio-economically diverse communities. She also effectively engaged and motivated her colleagues through her roles in her local OPC association as Vice-Chair, Elementary Chair, OPC Councillor and Past Chair. She wanted to join this committee to learn, grow and advocate for what she believes racialized administrators need. Michelle doesn't believe that we can't keep doing the same things and expect different results. She hopes to provide a perspective of what provincial colleagues may want/need if they are currently part of a structure that does not recognize its systemic barriers.

A piece of advice from Michelle: "Get out of your comfort zones and engage a variety of

different perspectives in problem solving. Surrounding yourself with people who look and think the same as you do doesn't lead to greater innovation or creativity; it leads to further systemic entrenchment that ultimately harms student engagement and success. You shouldn't be inclusive because it's the politically correct thing to do. Instead, do it because a diverse range of voices leads to better outcomes for everyone. It's ok to feel the discomfort and engage in action that will bring about the change to create a future we all want to be part of. Speaking out against racism, sexism, the 'mindset of poverty' and other "equity detours" in an unwavering and unapologetic voice is not always appreciated, but it is necessary. Our children deserve it."



**Lisa Collins**

Lisa is a 0.5 Principal of Alliance French Immersion School in North Bay and 0.5 Well-Being Lead Principal (K-12) for the Near North DSB. She is also the President-Elect for the OPC for the 2020-2021 school year.

She began her career as an Educational Assistant and went on to teach in both the

English and French Immersion streams. Lisa has always had a strong passion for Special Education. Growing up with two siblings with special needs and working as an EA provided her with a great interest in this area, where she could use her background and experience to support students in reaching their full potential as learners. Collectively, these experiences contributed to her wanting to reach the entire school community and beyond. The role of principal provided her this opportunity. As a school leader, she has led several diverse school communities, facing the different challenges both large urban districts and smaller rural communities experience. She believes that regardless of district or community, school

leaders share many common challenges.

Throughout her childhood and adulthood, Lisa has observed a lack of understanding of both physical and intellectual disabilities. She has always believed that education and collaboration build understanding and the development of empathy. Lisa wanted to participate in the EDI Advisory Committee to support others in developing a better understanding of our many differences. She believes leadership is about empathy and having the ability to connect with people to inspire and empower their lives. United by diverse backgrounds and experiences, Lisa is confident that we can make a difference for our province, communities, Members and especially our students.



**Yonnette E. Dey**

Yonnette's passion for equity and social justice led her to teaching. As a Black woman

growing up in Kitchener, she experienced many acts of discrimination because of her skin colour. She learned to navigate those spaces by practicing the values taught to her by her parents: always be respectful, treat others the way you want to be treated and dream big. Yonnette quickly learned that while this was sound advice, she would need others to achieve success in a predominately White society.

She took the lessons from her parents and learned to advocate for herself. As an administrator, she demonstrated passion for equity work by building strong relationships with students and challenged inequitable practices. She became a champion of diverse resources and high-functioning classrooms. Yonnette believes equity is achieved by culturally competent and compassionate leadership, a skill she curated over many years working with families

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disadvantaged by systemic barriers. Being part of the EDI Advisory Committee will allow her to extend her leadership at the provincial level to be a greater voice for the underserved. Given the long-standing climate of dissatisfaction expressed by many racialized communities, she

believes it behooves the OPC not only to prepare principals and vice-principals to be culturally competent, but also to offer them support on an ongoing basis.

A piece of advice to educators: “Always respond with compassion and understanding. We live in a

global society and that network requires a better understanding of the impact of systemic racism. Effective educators have an inclusive mindset for all equity-seeking groups and a vision for a just society. Our students deserve better outcomes for a life defined by excellence and opportunity.”



**Tina Futers**

Tina’s career in education began as the principal of a ballet school, which then led her to becoming an elementary teacher with the Grand Erie DSB, where she taught for 11 years. Proudly, she is now a vice-principal

entering into her third year with the Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB in Peterborough.

As the mother of a transgender son, Tina considers herself to be quite passionate regarding the equity of our children and young adults across Ontario. Our students are faced with many unique challenges throughout their growth in the education system, including systemic barriers causing unequal access. Unfortunately, there is very limited representation of similar races, cultures, genders and lived experiences mirrored in the professional roles in education, adding to the feelings of

isolation and hopelessness. Tina believes our students deserve better.

Acknowledging her own privilege has led her to recognize the need for sharing her voice to support those with fewer opportunities. As a collective, Tina thinks we must navigate our way through some of the barriers that exist for our students, using our powerful voices to interrupt some of the learning. Being a part of this powerful committee will allow her to model her commitment to equity and diversity, support other administrators as equity champions and continue with her own learning.



**Elizabeth Innes**

Elizabeth is the proud System Lead for Indigenous Education at DSB Ontario North East. She has been an educator for 21 years; teaching for seven and a vice-principal/principal/system principal for 14 years in Northern Ontario.

As an Omushkego Cree woman, and the proud daughter/granddaughter of residential school survivors, she has witnessed varying degrees of knowledge and understanding of

our shared history and current modern-day experiences as Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, on the territory we share. Describing her lived experience related to diversity, Elizabeth believes that while we have come a long way with understanding and respecting people from all backgrounds, her lived experiences tell her otherwise. Some of her experiences have been shaped by a dominant society that desperately needs to consider how the lack of diversity affects us all. Elizabeth believes that when we lead with love, respect, bravery, truth, honesty, humility and wisdom, we create inclusive, safe learning environments. These are the teachings gifted to us all. She wonders if strong diversity in schools was modelled, widely accepted and celebrated, would she have the

same connections to diversity and how our systems have failed our people?

Elizabeth sees the historical trauma every day in her people, but she also sees strength and resilience. She believes that when we work together to understand the root causes of trauma, and strengthen that empathetic response to our shared, inherent history, we can begin to build confidence and strength in our students. When all students feel represented and visible in their schools, when more than one voice is shared and heard, our students will begin to thrive in places not typically reflective of their true selves. When working towards system level change, Elizabeth encourages us to ask ourselves if the change benefits the system or the people it is designed to serve.



**Kenneth Mak**

Kenneth has been an educator for 13 years, and is currently an elementary vice-principal with the Ottawa-Carleton DSB. Growing up

as a child from an immigrant family in a Toronto suburb, he was fortunate enough to be surrounded by many diverse cultural experiences and understands how this is invaluable to schools. As an educator, he has been a strong advocate for providing students space where they feel that they belong to foster inclusive learning communities. Having served on a variety of committees, working groups and collaborating with many com-

munity partners to support LGBTQ+ and Indigenous Education initiatives, he believes that the work of creating inclusive environments is not an individual task, but rather a collaboration of many stakeholders. Moving inclusivity forward is an intentional act by everyone in schools. Kenneth believes we all have the responsibility of coordinating efforts and gathering expertise to make these spaces available for all.



**Ann Pace**

Ann is the President of the OPC, on secondment from the York Region DSB, where she has worked for 28 years. Ann was a secondary teacher and became a vice-principal in 2005 and a principal in 2010. Born and raised in Etobicoke to immigrant parents, she eventually moved to Richmond Hill.

Ann is committed to ending systemic racism in education and other societal systems. She recognizes that her first steps involve deepening her understanding of the roots of systemic racism that have been perpetuated through colonialism, recognizing her role in supporting those marginalized by race, creed, gender, ability, etc, and acting to impact change in the areas where she has influence and responsibility.

Ann believes that the OPC has a responsibility to represent and support all of its Members. She sees the first formal step in ensuring that the organization is fulfilling this mandate to be recognizing our diversity, understanding what we must do to be inclusive of all and ensuring that the organization authentically reflects equity. Ann believes that to truly champion equity and diversity, one must first recognize their own privilege and unconscious bias and commit to removing systemic barriers.



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**Dr. Kimberley Tavares**

Kimberley is an Education Officer, cross-appointed to the Education Equity Secretariat and the System Evidence and Design Branch, in the Ontario Ministry of Education. She serves as an Educational Policy & Systems Advisor and the Equity and Literacy Lead,

respectively. Kimberley has been seconded from a vice-principalship in the York Region DSB, and prior to this was an Equity Officer in the York Region Board serving students of African and Caribbean heritage.

As a result of her graduate work in anti-Black racism, leadership and equity, Kimberley's current appointments centre on developing and supporting anti-oppression, anti-Black racism and equity policy and practice initiatives for the ministry. As an educator with over 20 years' experience, she is most proud of her doctoral work with marginalized and racialized youth

who find themselves disenfranchised by schooling practices. Her most recent work focuses on how the educational structures can benefit from the experiences and expertise of those most willing to support the aspirations of Black, underserved learners, in particular, Canadian Black women teachers. Her goal is to render the invisible, visible.

Kimberley believes that the real work of equity is to work with students, families, communities, school and system leaders to uncover and then address the systemic barriers limiting the opportunities and successes of marginalized learners.



**Irfan Toor**

Irfan (He/Him) has been an educator for 28 years, teaching in a variety of settings including outdoor and alternative education, but primarily as a secondary science teacher. For the last 13 years, he has been working as a secondary vice-principal and principal and is currently the Principal of Equity, Diversity

and Inclusion for the Simcoe County DSB. Irfan is also involved with the OPC as a member of his local executive, a Provincial Councillor, a Member-at-Large for Provincial Executive and as an instructor for the OPC PQP program. He appreciates that the OPC will have a large role to play in advocating for more equitable practices in our school systems.

As a Pakistani-born Canadian growing up in small towns but also living and working in Toronto for some time, Irfan has an appreciation for the diversity that is present across Canada, but also for the persistence of patterns of bias and discrimination that exist in our communities and schools. Reflecting back on

over 40 years of being involved in public education both as a student and then an educator, the diversification of the identities of educators has lagged far behind the identities of students as compared to other sectors. Irfan recognizes the importance of education leaders starting with self-reflection and personal identity if they want to create safe and inclusive spaces. He believes school administrators are integral to fostering inclusive pedagogical practices and dismantling systems of oppression and discrimination in education. Irfan is honoured to participate in the EDI Advisory Committee committee to support administrators in doing this work.



**Abe Wall**

“For the child of my father's and my generation, school could be, and often was, a painful place. Everything valued by one's parents, everything that made up one's after-school life, was feared, misunderstood, occasionally ridiculed and always subtly undermined. Everything associated with the most significant

landmarks of human existence, everything that was most sacred, most poignant, most satisfying – all of that was somehow second- and third-rate.”

The above quote summarizes so much of what Abe has experienced and observed in public education in Ontario. It is from a Mennonite reflecting on their memory of school in Canada at the turn of the last century. Abe is a first-generation immigrant and moved to Canada from a Mennonite Colony in Mexico as a six-year-old. School was not a safe place for him. Racism and systemic barriers kept him on guard and he never completely felt engaged.

Abe strives to identify and implement strategies to eliminate barriers that stem from racism and systemic inequities. Through education, information sharing and relationships founded on trust and respect, he is changing the narrative. As a classroom teacher, he championed for the disenfranchised and marginalized. As an administrator, he continued the work, through the development of programming focussed on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Currently he works with a special project involving multiple districts, the Ministry of Education and the Mennonite Central Committee. The program (Tu Puente) focusses on sense of

belonging, value and purpose through student achievement.

Equity, diversity and inclusivity have been Abe's focus for his entire career. He is com-

mitted to these precepts and has championed them in every position he has held. He looks forward to working with his colleagues and leaders from across the province, and on the

EDI Advisory Committee, as the OPC continues the journey toward these values.



**Matthew Webbe**

Matthew is an elementary principal with the Toronto DSB, with 20 years' experience as an educator both internationally and in Canada. As a Canadian born male of Afro-Latinx heritage, his lived experiences afforded him a unique set of challenges that persons of multi-

heritage and diverse identities face in and outside of the education field. Having these personalized experiences of race and identity allows him a connection and understanding of another's experience and the thinking that sits behind that experience.

Matthew wanted to be part of the EDI Advisory Committee as he believes that his social, academic, volunteerism and professional experiences can provide important insights into developing effective processes and programs for realizing greater equity, inclusion and diversity within the OPC. He has experience in program and policy reviews

at the Ontario College of Teachers and the TDSB that apply up-to-date knowledge to problems, issues and concerns affecting diverse groups and the historically under-represented.

A piece of advice from Matthew: "Diversity and inclusion require preliminary work to identify imbalances, loopholes or unequal starting places within schools. Diversity is viewed as quantifiable by measuring who is represented in an organization. Inclusion is measured by qualitative data, noting personal attitudes and people's perceptions of how welcoming an organization is." ▲



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Creating space for students and families to share their story and question our thinking and practice towards anti-racist leadership.



# Anti-Racist Leadership Through Vulnerability

Creating space for stories other than your own

*My drive to become an educator is rooted in my experience as a 10-year-old political refugee arriving at the*

doorsteps of my first school in Toronto. I am here today because individuals saw my potential, valued my perspective and challenged me while I learn and now serve.

As I continue to cut through barriers with my dominant and marginalized identities, I am aware of my privilege, and that there are students, staff and families, specifically from racialized communities, that do not have the same opportunities as I have had due to systemic oppression manifested in our daily school practices.

At the start of this past school year, a parent requested a meeting with me, as the school's incoming principal, to

discuss her son's experience within the system as a Black student with an individual education plan (IEP). She wanted us to acknowledge implicit biases, held by individuals in the system, which can impact daily practices in supporting her son.

The mother felt that meetings she had been a part of generally focused on special education strategies without affirming identities and lived experiences in a system built for some to succeed over others. She wanted us to see her son, our student, and his potential including the families' high expectations, and the needed staff's high expectations.

It takes vulnerability to listen to a story that challenges your practice.

It takes even greater vulnerability to ensure the follow-up action from that story is visible in your school community. Brene Brown, in *Dare to Lead* (2018), defines vulnerability as taking action when there is "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure."

Stories are powerful catalysts to problems of practice and change. Looking at the school-based demographic data based on the 2017 Toronto District School Board student and parent census, we noted that 35 per cent of our student population self-identified as Black. However, our Black students were over-represented (65 per cent) in IEPs.

I started to visibly document my own learning, unlearning and small moves



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Register to participate in our upcoming online professional learning offerings.

## PDC Module 13

### Leading Well-Being in Your School

November 14 – December 19

Application Deadline: October 31

## SEAQP

January 10 – June 30, 2021

Apply by December 20

## PDC – Module 7

### Professional and Challenging Conversations

January 9 – February 13, 2021

Apply by December 26

## PDC – Module 14

### Leading the French Immersion Program

January 9 – February 13, 2021

Apply by December 26

## SEAQP Online

March 26 – July, 2021

Apply by March 5

## Wellness for School Leaders

September - November, 2020

1:00 – 2:00 pm

## SOQP Winter Session

### Module 1

February 6, 2021

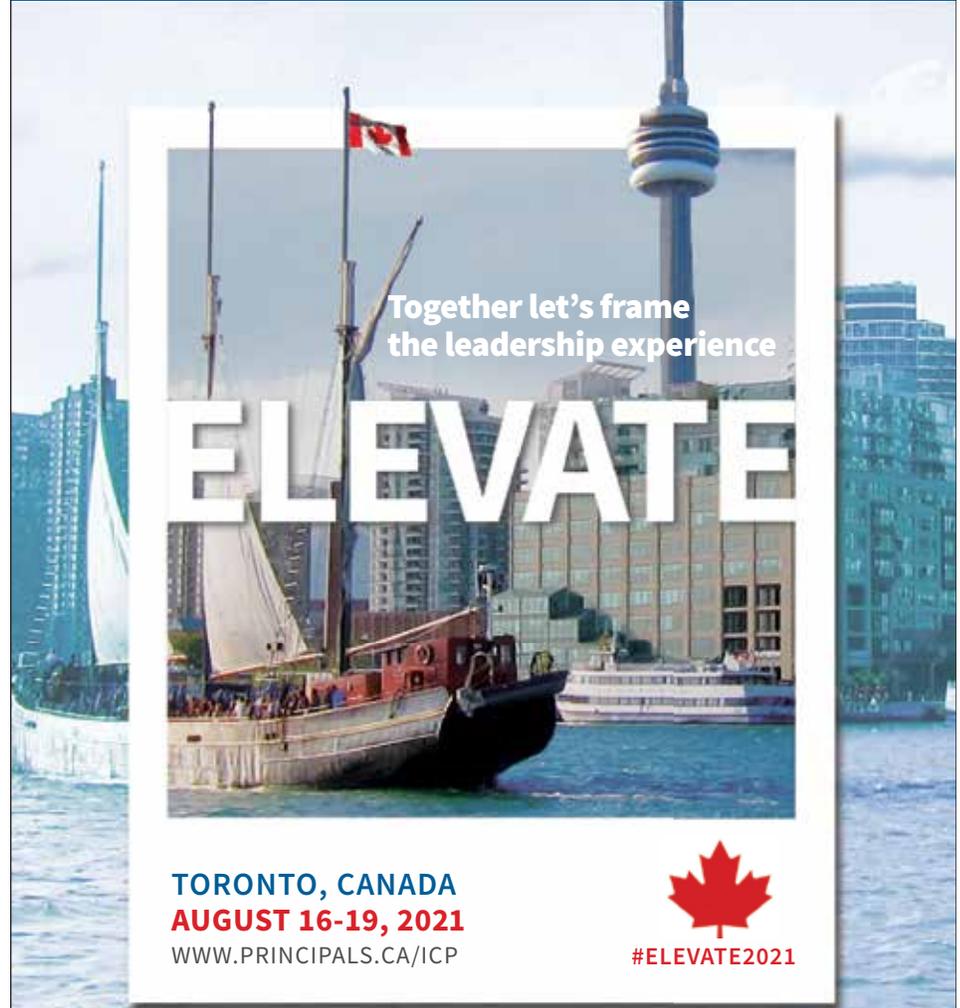
### Module 3

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For more information on the events and courses listed, [visit our online events calendar](#).

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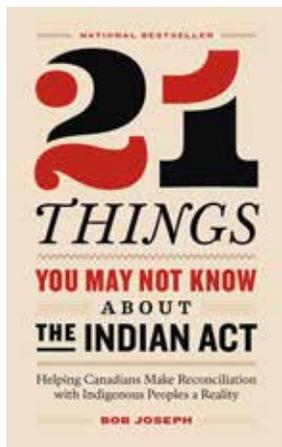
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## 21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act: Helping Canadians make reconciliation with Indigenous peoples a reality

By Bob Joseph, member of the Gwawaenuk First Nation  
 Indigenous Relations Press  
 ISBN: 978-0-9952665-2-0

“I think it is critical that non-Indigenous Canadians be aware of how deeply the Indian Act penetrated, controlled and continues to control most aspects of the lives of First Nation” (Joseph, pg. 4).

Naming and addressing anti-Indigenous racism are critical elements of ethical leadership. To move this work forward, it is imperative that educators first seek to understand the legislation that works to limit, impede and harm the Indigenous peoples of this land.

In *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act*, author Bob Joseph of Gwawaenuk First Nation takes you through 21 key policies and prohibitions within the *Indian Act* that support the forced assimilation and erasure of Indigenous peoples. These include the reserve system established under the control of the Department of Indian Affairs; women denied status, which severed them from home communities; cultural ceremonies declared illegal; and establishing and maintaining the Residential School system.

These rules and regulations, as well as the ideology upon which they were created, have been the foundation for many harmful stereotypes and harsh discriminatory practices that still exist today.

The book provides an overview of the *Act* and historical elements that some in-

dividuals may have been denied access to during their educational careers. Since 1876, the *Act* has shaped, controlled and constrained the lives and opportunities of Indigenous Peoples.

It is these rules and regulations, Joseph explains, that have been instrumental in Canada’s ongoing genocide of Indigenous people, according to the United Nations definition. These policies have contributed to the loss of land, knowledge systems and language.

In his book, Joseph calls for the dismantling of the *Act*. He states that the initial intent of the legislation was extinguishment, and if there is a collective commitment to reconciliation, then it stands to reason the oppressive legislation must be altered: (2018). A Nation to Nation relationship that focuses on self-government, self-determination and self-reliance is the only way forward.

The author calls on all Canadians to review and remain committed to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action](#) (2015) and to build relationships that honour the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples as outlined in the

[United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous People](#) (2007).

As leaders in education, we have a moral and ethical obligation to identify and dismantle systemic barriers and racism. To move this work forward, we must first gain a deeper understanding of how these are constructed. We must create opportunities for ourselves and others to examine personal ideology, interrogate bias and engage in learning that challenges our thinking and informs a change in practice.

*21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act* is a resource that provides foundational information upon which to do this. This awareness helps school leaders and educators identify and name the discrimination and oppression faced by Indigenous students and families, so that we may be active in addressing and dismantling barriers. The book engages the reader in reflection that informs acts of reconciliation and active allyship. It is a resource to guide educators towards a stronger knowledge base as we develop ethical leadership that includes anti-Indigenous racism. ▲

Michelle Evans and Erin Elmhurst work with Indigenous Education, ESL & Outdoor Education with Durham DSB.

[@DDSB\\_Indigenous](#)

✉ [Erin.elmhurst@ddsb.ca](mailto:Erin.elmhurst@ddsb.ca)



**Further Reading to Support Learning**  
[United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect](#)

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