

**In 2018, we celebrated our 20-year anniversary. Here is a short summary of our history.**

In 1997, then Minister of Education John Snobelen introduced Bill 160. The bill contained many changes to education finance, program delivery, school board management and the collective bargaining rights of teachers. It also removed principals and vice-principals from membership in the teacher federations, prohibiting their right to unionize or be included in a bargaining unit.

School leaders throughout Ontario were unnerved. What would this mean for us? How would we function without a federation? What protections would we now have? A group of those leaders began to meet, planning how to create an organization that would protect, advocate and include principals and vice-principals from both panels.

The decision was made to establish a professional association. The planning group, along with lawyers from Lerner law firm, organized a road show throughout the province. They met with principals and vice-principals from all 31 public district school boards, discussing the implications of their removal from the federation, debating the best way to move forward and offering their vision for an all-inclusive professional organization.

On December 13, 1997, in a meeting room of the Toronto Colony Hotel, the planning group passed a motion to create the Ontario Principals' Council. Four hundred school leaders signed up as members on the spot. We selected a logo and developed a plan to sign up more members.

One of the members of that organizing group was Rob Whetter, who became OPC's first President in 1998. "The vision of the new organization was to put Ontario principals in the forefront of educational change. We wanted the OPC to speak with a strong voice on educational matters with students, parents, government, stakeholder groups, the media and the public. The group decided on a Provincial Council format that would include an elementary and secondary principal or vice-principal from every public board in the province to serve as our Board of Directors."

On April 1, 1998, the OPC officially came into existence. Several key people played an integral part in its establishment – Jack Martin, Ken Sheppard, Rob Whetter, Leslie Hossack, John Judson, Doug Beffort, Sheryl Hoshizaki, Joan Mantle, Henry Mick, Brian McKinnon and Rick Victor.

We started out modestly, working out of the back of Thistle Printing in East York, with just 3 staff members. In September 1998, Mike Benson was hired as the first Executive Director. He expanded the staff to include an Office Manager, two Protective Services Consultants, legal support and a Communications Officer.

In 1999, the small team moved to 45 York Mills Rd in Toronto, renting a floor in a school offered by the Toronto District School Board.

Establishing a professional development program was one of the initial priorities, presenting both an opportunity and an overwhelming task. Ethne Cullen was hired to manage the Centre for Leadership, while Joanne Robinson successfully organized our first Odyssey conference, Charting New Waters, in 1998.

Joanne recalls the first days of setting up this part of the organization. "Our Members required numerous resources and supports, particularly when learning to operate in this new management environment. We started with locally-delivered workshops, which led to the development of the first Principal's Qualification Program offered by principals' associations in partnership with school districts. Since that time, we have provided workshops and online learning programs, co-authored books, organized annual conferences, developed resources, designed many more additional qualification programs, and trained school and system leaders in Ontario and around the world. Professional learning for leaders focused on improved student learning has always been one of our strengths and core priorities."

In 2000, we enhanced our advocacy work with our first Principal's Day at Queen's Park. Meeting with MPPs from all three parties, we wanted to make sure our elected officials were hearing from the people who run and manage schools on a daily basis. Our unique insights allowed us to share our concerns, raise issues, answer questions and be a resource for the MPPs who were making important decisions about education. Since that time, the annual advocacy day has become a very successful way to connect with our elected officials.

In 2002, the TDSB sold the school on York Mills and we were on the move again. Realizing that a lot of the work we do was centred in downtown Toronto, near Queen's Park, the ministry and other stakeholder groups, we moved to 180 Dundas St.

Also in 2002, we conducted a search for in-house legal counsel, hiring Allyson Otten and Sarah Colman, previously from Lerner's. The move allowed the OPC to provide a more cost-effective way of ensuring timely advice and direct representation and support for principals and vice-principals.

Sarah Colman explains the importance of the move to inhouse counsel. "We assist Members facing disputes with school boards; dealing with illness or disability; facing investigation by the College of Teachers, child protection services or police; and facing discrimination, defamation or harassment in their workplace. We also provide support to the Executive and Provincial Council, assist Districts in the negotiations of their Terms and Conditions of Employment and engage in provincial negotiations. As the OPC has become a more

sophisticated association, the addition of in-house counsel has brought significant benefits.”

In 2006, after the latest 2 rounds of teacher negotiations had reduced supervision time in and around schools, principals started reporting on the resulting negative impact. We were hearing a lot about how a school should safely be supervised. Research of school districts across Canada revealed that only two boards had some standards in place. But no formal standards existed for school supervision around appropriate ratios and other safety factors.

We brought together a group of OPC Members to develop a set of standards that could be used by all schools, providing an objective way to ensure supervision was safe and appropriate. Our Supervision Standards were released publicly in February 2007 and generated a significant amount of media coverage throughout the province.

In 2011, we were thrilled to host the 10<sup>th</sup> International Confederation of Principals Conference in Toronto, the first time the event had ever been held in Canada. 2000 educators from 40 countries gathered to hear keynote and featured speakers, attend workshops on a variety of topical issues, network with school leaders from around the world and enjoy the beautiful city of Toronto.

From the beginning, we knew that another key resource Members would need was legal and professional support. Colin Fleming has been a PST consultant for the past seven years. “In 1998, the OPC started with 2 Protective Services Consultants, answering calls from Members about issues related to their role. Since then, the department has grown to 3 Intake Consultants, 3 PST Consultants, a Benefits Consultant, Legal Counsel and General Counsel. On an annual basis, we talk to 1200 Members; conduct 15 legal issues workshops; attend over 200 meetings with school boards, the College of Teachers and Children’s Aid Societies. Providing legal advice, support, counsel and representation to OPC Members is a crucial role for our organization.”

Following years of intense advocacy and lobbying, in June 2013, the OPC, CPCO and ADFO reached the first provincial terms and conditions agreement specifically for principals and vice-principals. Representing the three associations, Allyson Otten acted as the Chief Negotiator for our Members. “After many, many months of talks, planning, strategy sessions and feedback from our Members, a historic agreement was reached that recognized the exclusive right of the three associations to represent all of our members and to take part in good faith discussions with the Crown and Trustee Associations on their behalf. The resulting provincial agreement was the first of its kind to recognize the unique needs and working conditions of every principal and vice-principal in Ontario.”

What do principals do? It was a question we discovered few people – including the parents in our schools – knew the answer to. John Hamilton took on this

issue during his year as President in 2014-15. “We engaged an external firm to conduct some research for us and learned that the role of the principal was not very well understood in schools. In response, we developed an Advocacy Campaign to educate our school communities about our backgrounds, roles and responsibilities.”

John and OPC staff member Peggy Sweeney travelled the province meeting with Members, providing supports and assisting principals and vice-principals with ways to advocate for their role in the school, all in an effort to develop better working relationships with our school communities.

For the past 20 years, we have developed dozens of materials for our Members – a website, The Register magazine and targeted professional learning resources on topical issues. Many of these communication pieces have won national and international recognition for their excellence, including awards from the Canadian Association for Communicators in Education, the National School Public Relations Association, The Tabbies and the KRW awards.

In addition to recognizing our own Members, we also wanted to recognize non-educators who have made a significant contribution to our sector. The OPC Outstanding Contribution to Education Award has been bestowed on 15 individuals including Dr. Fraser Mustard, Steven Lewis, Craig and Marc Kielburger, Samantha Nutt, Chris Hadfield and the Hon Murray Sinclair.

In December 2017, after more than a decade on Dundas St, it was time to load up the moving boxes once again. It was there that our organization flourished and grew from humble beginnings into the world-renowned association that it is today. With this growth, it became clear that a new office was needed to accommodate staff, professional development events and international visitors. Our new office at 20 Queen Street West meets all those goals.

As our organization continued to grow and evolve, it was also the right time to update our company logo to reflect our current brand identity, goal and mission. We chose to emphasize the “P” in the new logo, to highlight our dedication to serve the principals and vice-principals of Ontario.

In 2018, we are 20 years young. While we have accomplished much in our first two decades, there is still much more to do. As the role of the school leader changes, expands and becomes more complicated, it will be more important than ever for the OPC to advocate for, support and train the people who lead our schools.

Our goal is to help those leaders create the safe, positive, productive learning environment in which all our students can reach their potential.

*This article was prepared with contributions from several past and present OPC Members. We thank them for their time, and for sharing their memories and insights with us.*