

Developing Partners in Education

Seventh in a series of mini discussion papers prepared for the Education Partnership Table to permit wide input to the direction of education in Ontario.

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The Ministry of Education has been striving for a new relationship among all the groups that make up the publicly funded education sector based on the 'new three R's': Respect; Responsibility; and Results. There should be common respect, mutual responsibility-taking, and agreement about results: in other words a real partnership. While the word 'partnership' has been much in use before, genuinely creating a partnership to take the place of prior years of conflict requires substantial change that does not take place easily or without groundwork. This paper is one of several setting out proposed government policy changes to ensure that the conditions exist for such a partnership to thrive.

Leading Education

NEW SUPPORTS FOR PRINCIPALS AND VICE-PRINCIPALS IN ONTARIO PUBLICLY FUNDED SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

There is a need for many leaders in education and many forms of leadership. The signal leadership role is undoubtedly undertaken at the school level by principals and vice-principals, who effectively guide publicly funded education at the point where it is actually being delivered. They are the single most significant influence upon students, after the individual classroom teachers.

Principalship is undoubtedly more challenging now than at any time in Ontario's history. Our schools have

a wider range of student abilities and needs to deal with than ever before. Much more is expected from education by individual students, parents, and society at large.

The inherent level of difficulty for principals was artificially raised by provincial policies of the last decade that saw a very high volume of changes, while at the same time, supporting resources decreased. At the very time when extra demands were being made upon local school administrators, they had been squeezed by a reduction in both supervisory staff above them at the

board level and local support staff working alongside them at the school level. Between 1996 and 2002, the number of principals working part-time more than doubled, from 7 to 15 per cent, while the number of vice-principals in part-time positions increased from 5 to 13 per cent. Under those trying conditions, our 7,500 principals and vice-principals made a tremendous contribution in preserving the best possible learning environment for students. The strain of the last decade has taken an unfortunate toll however, which is reflected in record numbers of retirements leading to a high proportion of new and less-experienced principals and vice-principals.

On the other hand, there has probably never been a time when the role of principals and vice-principals has had the potential to be so rewarding. Much has been achieved in the past two years, but the McGuinty government recognizes that the ultimate success of most of the work required to improve publicly funded education for students hinges on full agreement and enthusiastic implementation at the school level by principals and their staff. This, in turn, depends to a good extent on increasing supports to principals so they can fulfill their role. That is why one of the earliest initiatives of the new government was to turn to principals and their associations to learn how conditions can be improved. While we have made some progress to date, we believe it is now time to articulate a comprehensive strategy to strengthen school leadership.

Our overall objective is to support principals and vice-principals in meeting all the challenges of school leadership today. The strategy is reflected in five goals:

- Ensure conditions exist that permit principals to perform their key function as the “Instructional Leader” in our schools;
- Provide the highest quality training and support possible to principals and vice-principals, both in advance and throughout their careers;
- Increase the input principals and vice-principals have within the education system;
- Improve respect and security for the roles of principals and vice-principals; and
- Better define the role, powers, responsibilities and obligations of principals and vice-principals to ensure coherent and consistent expectations.

FREEING UP PRINCIPALS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

The principal, as the facilitator of a caring learning community, is one of the most cogent descriptions of modern principalship.

At the core is the Instructional Leader, who sets or sustains a successful education environment and cultivates leadership within the school. The shared leadership model is the most apt for the school setting. The principal needs to be able to be the catalyst for

development, and for sustaining a professional collaborative environment within the school. The concept assumes ongoing two-way collaboration with teachers as professionals, of whom much can be expected. Recent work (Leithwood 2005, Marzano et al. 2005) reinforces the critical role of principals in shaping teachers' work and skills, and in affecting many of the practices and policies that, in turn, can help to improve student outcomes. It is becoming clear that the new role of principals is to focus relentlessly on teaching and learning, and to do so through the development of other leaders in the school.

There is also the related leadership role within the broader learning community, particularly in engaging students, parents and the nearby community to see themselves as an integral part of education decisions and processes. The education endeavour takes constant awareness and agreement to have the support it needs to succeed, and the principal is a particular touchstone to ensure education's moral purpose stays front and centre. A critical perspective comes from Michael Fullan of a "system thinker in action", wherein all contributors need to be oriented to the level above them, as well as their own immediate responsibility.

The need for unique leadership specifically suited for schools is widely shared in education. Principals, parents and teachers agree the role cannot be reduced to its management aspects. In order

for the Instructional Leader to be viable, principals require adequate time from amidst a variety of competing demands.

The ministry has worked with school boards to help create an overall positive working environment and to normalize relations with staff, but much more can be done, specifically to relieve principals of certain pressures.

Initiatives to Lessen Administrative Workloads

Increased staffing. New resources to offset past cutbacks for programs and staff have been provided in each of the past two years. There have been an estimated 11,000 additional staff placed in publicly funded schools in the past two years, for an overall 6 per cent increase, to reverse the trend of recent years. Vice-principal positions are up by nearly 3.4 per cent and the number of supervisory staff has been increased by 5 per cent up to the end of 2004-05, compared with 2002-03 figures. Funding of \$50 million has been dedicated to ensure the positions of principals, secretaries and custodians are fully funded for all rural schools. Additional staffing will arise from the government's four-year plan for improving education.

Streamlined procedures. The Intensive Support Allowance (ISA) system has been suspended and will be replaced by a simplified process. The tests of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) have been reformed to halve the demands it makes on the school's

time. Subject to Legislative approval, The Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) will be reformed to make it more meaningful and manageable, with a focus on teacher development. Proposed legislation will be brought forward with amendments to the TPA for new teachers while the TPA for experienced teachers will also be redesigned.

Pilot projects will be carried out to evaluate whether less onerous methods of reporting can be implemented that will still meet parents' needs for timely and helpful information on their children's progress.

Single Report Project. The ministry will work with boards to strive towards a single report and dramatically reduced the number of information requests, including the elimination of any unnecessary reports. Each need will be evaluated against the value that it brings. Principals will be seconded to act as independent monitors of the process, reporting to the wider school community to ensure it is accomplished in a reasonable time frame and in a way that is most beneficial to the school site.

Support Function Evaluation. The ministry will work with school boards on a range of measures, such as the use of enhanced administrative support for some business functions, clearer support on health and safety functions, bussing coordination and support for relationships with other key staff, such as head custodians.

Initiatives to Improve Instructional Excellence

The ministry is proposing to bring forward legislation this spring to expand the number of professional development days, so that, if approved by the Legislature, principals will have sufficient time to work with their staff.

A \$1.7-million study of mentoring programs across the province was undertaken last year, and a \$15 million New Teacher Induction Program is being implemented this year. These initiatives will provide a formal program of support for beginning teachers. Some 16,000 teachers have been trained in the most effective literacy and numeracy methods in the primary and junior divisions and some 800 Student Success teachers are being trained in high schools. These teachers will be available to help principals as part of a team to achieve improved results.

Other Initiatives

Through a Provincial Stability Commission and other measures, the ministry will immediately create the means for cooperatively addressing common issues arising from provincial dialogues and those reflected in collective agreements by school boards and federations. The first of these will be ensuring supervision that assures student safety at all times at no additional costs to either school boards or the province.

Similarly, a Student Success Commission will be initiated to work

with school boards and federations at regional and local levels to ensure the best deployment of staff for supporting the gains for struggling students that were agreed to in provincial dialogues.

Improved school-based budgets.
The ministry will work with principals and school boards to ensure the right balance is struck between services from boards and discretionary local control over funds. A new fundraising policy will also ensure that funds do not need to be raised for education essentials.

Parents and Community contact.
The Ministry will increase support and resources to boards to facilitate increased support for parents and school councils. A Parents' and Principals' Task Force will examine the best ways to ensure a smooth interface at the school level, based on mutual respect and mutual responsibility-taking.

School Safety. A review of the *Safe Schools Act* will clarify principal responsibilities and discretion under the Act. Additional programs are being put in place to support safety in school.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

The ministry will support the creation of an Institute for Education Leadership to deliver professional development for principals and vice-principals. This institute will build on the efforts of principals' associations and school boards through a "virtual" model that will allow us to retain the best of what exists today.

The institute would provide a framework for supporting school leaders not only with training, but with programs to support wellness and provide authoritative research, while stimulating discussion on leadership issues.

As part of their development, education leaders would be able to participate in activities that address their own growth needs, whether they are beginning, established, or experienced principals. Vice-Principals face specific challenges that are inherent to their position. There will be provisions made for training, development and support specifically for them in their unique role.

The institute will co-ordinate the range of initiatives that have been brought forward to support principals (literacy-numeracy, student success, healthy schools, safe schools, etc.), and ensure there is an overall co-ordinated support.

A new program to provide principals with similar challenges and priorities with opportunities to regularly collaborate across boards will be instituted, and exchange programs to collaborate with colleagues in other jurisdictions will also be supported.

The Institute will work with the standards of practice and the Ontario College of Teachers' Principal Qualification Program to ensure it is the most relevant and effective possible, and to address new areas required for modern principalship, such as cultural competency.

The ministry will also support a Principals' Mentoring program that will allow experienced principals, whether current or retired, to encourage and support the development of principals in their first five years, and potentially to act as ongoing advisors.

ENHANCED SAY FOR PRINCIPALS AND VICE-PRINCIPALS

Principals need to have a strong voice in education affairs. The ministry proposes to sponsor a Minister's **Principal Reference Group** to initially help oversee principal reforms and, subsequently, to be invoked as needed to provide school-level perspective. The concept is for principal associations, boards and others to help identify principals, who are at different stages of their careers and in different circumstances around the province, to participate.

This role would supplement, and in no way replace, the important ongoing bilateral relationships and discussions between the ministry and the principals' associations, but would ensure a front-line point of view is heard on all reforms affecting principals. Over 150 applications have already been received from various sources.

The ministry will also propose a protocol for the better use of Principals' Councils as real reference groups for decision-making at the board level.

PROFESSIONAL RESPECT AND SECURITY

Principals enjoy a justifiably high status in public esteem, alongside other professionals such as nurses, doctors and the teaching profession itself.

Despite general public perception, principals have felt a diminishment in their status as pressures have mounted. However, the government will work to restore a high level of system respect and provide for additional security for the position. A Premier's Award for Excellence is being established to acknowledge and celebrate school leadership.

The removal of principals and vice-principals from teacher federations by the previous government has had several ramifications. One is the reliance on personal-service contracts and the element of uncertainty that it has created for principals.

The ministry proposes that:

- Standards for personal-service contracts be set in regulation; and
- A standard basis for performance appraisals be set for principals and vice-principals, reflecting common professional expectations.

In addition, at a certain stage in the career of principals, a form of "earned security" should be offered to those who have met performance appraisal requirements.

The ministry also proposes that the boards should provide “assured assignments” to schools for principals for five years, subject to a review after two years. This reflects the research about the cycle needed to have the most leadership benefit and about the negative impact upon students and principals alike of frequent reassignment. Principals should also have the right to be consulted about reassignment.

In its reforms of the College of Teachers, subject to the approval of the Legislature, the ministry would ensure that principal representation is maintained or expanded and participation will be such that peer review by other principals is possible.

The ministry will look at various ways that teachers could be supported by teacher federations while pursuing a principalship.

Currently, the role of the principal and vice-principal is set out in legislation in terms of specific duties, powers, and responsibilities.

DEFINITION OF THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

The ministry will establish a principal’s Task Force to review the current legislation and regulations, and report back to the Minister with recommendations on changes that need to be made to support current needs.

The report will then be reviewed by a Working Table to arrive at the best outlook possible within the sector before bringing forward a legislative consolidation of the role with up-to-date interpretation.

CONCLUSION

The success of our reform efforts will depend on strong leadership teams in all of our schools. Our intention is to help create the conditions that will enable school principals to be a major force for new levels of achievement in all schools across the province.