

For the Love of Learning

Volume III: The Educators

Chapter 12 - Section D: Leadership

In a society undergoing radical and fundamental changes, people have become more demanding of their educational system and more likely to challenge authority. Educational leaders are caught in the midst of this shifting world, at a time when the public is increasingly vocal about perceived shortcomings of the schools.

Up to this point, we have said little about those who are charged with leading and managing schools and school systems. In this section we examine the crucial and challenging roles of principal, department head, and superintendent or supervisory officer.

We describe their roles and examine what we know about successful educational leadership. We look at the criteria for selecting school leaders, describe the way they are now prepared, and make recommendations for the future.

Principals

The job

Principals are charged with leading and improving schools, making a difference to the school and its students - but to do so, they must rely on (and mobilize) the talents and skills of others. At the same time, these leaders have to follow provincial and local policy directives, respect the professional opinions of other educators, acknowledge the primary role of parents, understand and respect various community values, and be conscious of making effective use of tax dollars. In carrying out their responsibilities, principals influence their schools, but are also influenced by them.

There are approximately 4,800 principals in Ontario, and some 3,300 vice-principals. In 1992, according to Ministry data, they were paid, on average, slightly more than \$75,000.⁽³⁸⁾

The position of principal is indeed challenging, requiring an ability to balance many priorities and demands. As outlined in the Education Act, formal responsibilities have changed very little, but expectations, and the context in which principals work, have changed dramatically over the last ten to fifteen years.

The official duties, laid down in the Education Act, are of both an instructional and an administrative nature. The former category includes supervising the instruction in the school and advising and assisting teachers. Principals are responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching in the school. Administrative duties centre on care of the students, especially in regard to their safety, ensuring that they are properly supervised whenever the school is open to them, and responsibility for the school's physical facilities.

Principals are the key to linking the school to the rest of the educational system, to other schools, and as

to supervisory officials and other school board personnel. As well, the principal plays a crucial role in linking the school to the community, not to parents only, but to business, labour, social agencies, neighbourhood residents, and others with a stake in education. As stated in the Education Act, the principal is to "promote and maintain close co-operation with the residents, and with the industry, business, and other groups and agencies of the community." Principals must be sensitive to community and parental values, even when these differ in some ways from the principal's own.

Given our emphasis on school-community connections, this Commission particularly stresses the principal's role in guiding and co-ordinating the school's relationship with the broader community.

The principal's working day is characterized by many interactions, and a wide variety of contacts. These may include conversations, meetings, or phone calls with school board personnel, teachers, support staff, students, parents, school neighbours - the list goes on. This means that good principals can think on their feet and carry out several tasks simultaneously.

In a large school, it would not be unusual for a principal to be a member of two dozen committees, operating at the board and school level. Because in their drive to cut costs in recent years, boards have reduced the number of curriculum co-ordinators and consultants, principals have assumed greater involvement in board-level curriculum work.

A second characteristic of the principal's work, which appears to contradict the specifics of the job description under the Education Act, is that it is open-ended and not regimented by the school clock. This, combined with the huge variety of tasks already described, means that the principal exercises a degree of discretion in choosing what to do and how to allocate time.

What is not always fully appreciated is that the choices the principal makes are a dominant, if not the dominant, factor in shaping the school learning environment. His or her personal style and professional priorities inevitably create a ripple effect that influences the activities of the school staff and their perceptions of themselves.

Some principals, uncomfortable with delegating responsibility or uncertain of their staffs, choose to focus on the managerial, administrative dimension of the job, which can easily consume the entire working day. There are more than enough meetings to attend, enough paper to move, and more than enough mini-crises that require a response. However, a managerial orientation may lead the principal to neglect more important, but less immediate, dimensions of the job - leadership in curriculum, for example. And that certainly does not engage teachers in school management, often resulting in a "vision vacuum" for staff.

A third factor is that principals work at the point where the interests of various educational stakeholders intersect. Teachers see principals as the primary presenters and enforcers of board policies, the people who introduce Ministry initiatives, and who are most responsible for shaping the quality of the teacher's professional life. Principals carry out this work while remaining members of the same federation as their teachers, whose professional practices they must assess.

The principal is the first board representative parents encounter and, therefore, often the first person to hear about any concerns they have regarding the school, the quality of its teachers, and the state of their child's education. To the school board, the principal is the front-line administrator and its most potent local public-relations person.

The result is that as principal, one person is simultaneously colleague/supervisor, agent of the board/member of staff, union member/member of management, and bureaucrat/educator. Given competing pulls and pushes, it is hardly surprising that principals frequently land squarely in the middle, and need remarkable diplomatic skills in order to perform effectively.

Finally, the working life of the principal is one of professional isolation. Unlike teachers, the principal has no peers in the school, and therefore lacks sources of informal collegial assistance and support that teachers can find over a staff-room coffee. A principal who needs help or advice can, of course, call another principal or the superintendent, but too many calls of this order can easily be interpreted as a lack of self-confidence or ability.

While this is not a comprehensive description, it is meant to give a sense of the nature of the job, of its importance to the school, and to indicate the personal qualities and professional preparation required to be an effective principal. This province's principals will be crucial in initiating and maintaining any of the educational restructuring and reforms we are proposing.

What is good school leadership for the 1990s and beyond?

In the 1990s, the role of principal has taken on multiple dimensions: efficient administration and good instructional leadership are vital, but principals need, as well, to understand processes of change, and must create and sustain organizations in which the best teaching and curriculum flourish. Education practitioners and writers have been influenced by the business world, which urges an educational system that is more responsive to a society in transition, and they have identified many factors that seem to be important for school leadership.⁽³⁹⁾

Leaders are increasingly expected to "challenge, inspire, enable, model, and encourage."⁽⁴⁰⁾ In collaboration with the teachers, principals formulate a vision for the school, develop consensus about goals for improving it, set clear expectations, and ensure that staff are supported in their work. The ideal principal might be capable of creating organizational theorist Peter Senge's vision of the "learning organization," where people continually expand their capacity to create results, where new patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is high, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.⁽⁴¹⁾

The principal plays the crucial role in extending the school community:⁽⁴²⁾ as the boundaries between schools and their external environments become more permeable, principals spend more time with parents and community members. Although they may not always be successful, today's good school leader tries to create school organizations that foster a collaborative work culture and support links with the parents and community, always keeping the focus on improving instruction and curriculum.

If reports from teachers and parents are reliable (and we believe they are), the older form of leadership, in which the principal acts as the "captain of the ship," often in an authoritarian manner, is still practised by many principals in Ontario. However, in today's world that kind of leadership is less effective.

Participative leadership should never be confused with the laissez-faire approach: a good leader takes responsibility and is accountable for what happens in the school, actively involving others through both pressure and support. That kind of leader does not need to rely solely on hierarchical authority to get things done, but affirms the crucial role teachers and the community have in the success of the school.

Although flattening the hierarchical structure and governing by consensus may slow decision-making, the challenge is to maintain administrative efficiency in a participatory framework.

As instructional leaders, principals need knowledge about teaching, learning, assessment of student learning, and evaluation of school programs, as well as skill in supervision and collaborative planning. As guides for constructive change, they need a clear sense of direction, an understanding of how to bring about change in schools, and the interpersonal skills to mobilize teachers, parents, and students. As administrators, they need skills in budgeting and in solving on-going problems with minimal disruption to the teaching and learning processes of the schools.

When the school opens its doors to involve parents in their children's learning, the principal and teachers need sensitivity and knowledge of community values and culture, and sufficient creativity to be able to involve these groups in ways that will benefit the students.

As we have noted throughout this report, schools have several, often-competing, purposes, but the primary focus should be on students. The quality of teaching and of learning provides the touchstone for all school activities and, therefore, is the basis on which leadership is judged. Although principals are the link between schools and the larger education system, and between schools and their communities, their top priority must always be the learning environment in the school itself. With all the competing demands on them, good principals will always find time to be in classrooms to talk with teachers and students.

Preparation and continuing education of principals and vice-principals

Principals are increasingly expected to provide collaborative, change-oriented leadership. Management researchers believe that leadership skills can be learned; they recommend that prospective leaders broaden their base of experience, learn through education and training, and develop "people skills" from working with and carefully observing a wide variety of people.⁽⁴³⁾

Throughout our report we recommend a variety of changes, some of which involve more decisions being made at the local school level. These obviously will affect the role of the school principal, who may have greater decision-making power, and will be engaged in new and different tasks. The skills required of principals and vice-principals will therefore have to be reviewed, as will preparation and professional development programs. As we describe later in this chapter, the changes require a similar review of the responsibilities of supervisory officers, and of the preparation required for those positions.

Current preparation:

Ontario is unusual in requiring all principals and vice-principals to hold a certificate, gained by successful completion of a Ministry-prescribed course. The essential paper qualifications a candidate must have for the two-part course are described in the Education Act, and include a valid Ontario Teacher's Certificate, teaching experience in Ontario, and at least half of the coursework for an M.Ed. degree.

Candidates now pay a fee to take the principal's course, formerly offered by the Ministry of Education; it is given at several of the faculties of education and at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The Ministry sets the objectives of the two-part course and lays down the number of hours required; it issues the certificate on the recommendation of the course director or the dean of the faculty of education delivering the course.

How courses are presented at different universities varies within Ministry guidelines. The elements include readings, guest speakers, and written and oral assignments. According to one prospectus, "success in the course will hinge on the extent to which candidates play an active role in the course, and the professional growth experienced by the person consistent with the image of the effective principal."⁽⁴⁴⁾

Nonetheless, the most important criterion for successful completion of the course may be attendance. Although there are substantive criteria for recommending certification, which are explicitly stated by most programs, and we assume that all candidates complete required assignments, it should be noted that failure in the course is virtually unheard of.

Assignments usually include working on leadership skills, chairing sessions, and completing various writing tasks. A partial completion of a practicum (a planned, practical experience related to the core objectives of the Principal's Qualifications Program, during a school year, under the supervision of an experienced practising educator) is necessary as well.

The current situation has some disadvantages. Many professional educators see it as overly regulated and bureaucratic. Some faculties of education no longer offer the principals' courses, for a variety of reasons; some simply see few advantages or incentives for them to continue to do so.

This situation may hamper candidates who do not live within comfortable commuting distance of a facility that offers the courses (especially the already hampered candidates in northern Ontario). Setting up distance-education courses would require some alteration to collaborative and participative elements, but teleconferencing, or preferably videoconferencing, could overcome this problem.

Although the courses seem to touch on all the areas we identified as important, their length (fewer than 30 days) gives little time to develop the substantial knowledge and skill required.

On the other hand, the principal certification courses also provide certain advantages over other forms of administrative preparation. In their practice components, the better programs offer opportunities for aspiring principals to take on significant practical school improvement initiatives in their own schools, linking the practical work with the theoretical frameworks they are learning.

Another advantage of the courses is that they bring together talented personnel and future education leaders from all over the province. Given Ontario's diverse population, and the tendency in large boards to promote from within, a common professional learning experience in which colleagues actually come together is valuable in breaking down insular school board tendencies. (This could be arranged if the courses were given through distance education.) Course participants often comment that one of the most valuable parts of the experience was the opportunity to meet and share ideas with educators of different backgrounds and from different places.

Are principals' certification programs necessary?

Given that few jurisdictions, in Canada or elsewhere, require this type of program or certificate for promotion to the position of principal, are such programs really necessary, or could Ontario's school administrators be better prepared in some other way?

An examination of jurisdictions that do not require formal preparation for leadership candidates appears to show that the result is principals who are often unprepared for the position.⁽⁴⁵⁾ They try to learn on

the job, but the job is now too complicated. Given the current growing responsibilities of schools, and the complexity and importance of the principal's role, we do not recommend this as an alternative.

Rather than requiring a government certification course, many jurisdictions require that vice-principals and principals complete a graduate education degree - usually a master's degree in educational administration - before they can be appointed.

There are advantages to this system. If universities controlled the programs, they might be encouraged to work more intensively with school boards and principals' associations to develop courses and requirements appropriate to current and future educational leadership roles.

However, the province would lose control, and universities, under the rubric of university autonomy, usually resist attempts from other groups to influence their programs. As well, universities generally are opposed to doing specific skill training for a particular professional role.

Although universities that reject the current model would welcome the graduate studies alternative, on balance we do not see that alternative as sufficient. We believe, however, that in place of the current requirement that at least half the course work for an M.Ed. degree be completed, candidates should complete an M.Ed. This would ensure the theoretical and academic knowledge, which could be supplemented through the principal course.

Broadening experience and outlook:

One of the persistent difficulties with programs for reform in the training of administrators is the tendency to improve managerial behaviour in ways that are far removed from the ordinary organization of managerial life. Unless we start from an awareness of what administrators do, and some idea of why they organize their lives in the way that they do, we are likely to generate recommendations that are naive.(46)

Made 20 years ago, this comment is valid today. That is why we believe that the principal certification course should be supplemented by systematic efforts to broaden the experience and outlook of candidates or of those who have just moved into vice-principalships. Some school boards do encourage such efforts, but they should be available to all aspiring principals. In particular, we see four strategies as having particular value.

First, internships or job shadowing should be part of the formal preparation program, as should opportunities for systematically and critically reflecting on experiences during these assignments.

Second, exchanges outside education should be encouraged, especially in a business or a social service context. This will foster knowledge of other organizations, including their needs, contexts, and strategies, and, ideally, lead to greater appreciation of how the educational system appears to those who are not inside it.

Third, internship or secondments should be available in a number of different educational settings, especially for candidates whose experience has been geographically, culturally, socially, or economically limited.

Fourth, there should be an organized rotation of vice-principals to different schools and different positions - for example, in curriculum development - to enable them to get a wider perspective on the principal's responsibilities.

We also believe that the principal certification courses ought to be rigorously and thoroughly evaluated, not by the Ministry, but by an external review team composed of both practising administrators and academics. Such reviews would ensure that courses address current issues, and take account of the specific needs of different sectors of the publicly funded system.

We recognize that courses currently have advisory committees, with membership drawn from various educational constituencies. However, we do not believe that they carry out rigorous evaluations of the type we are recommending. We believe that review teams should have no continuing connections with the courses and programs they are evaluating, and that they should always include at least one person from outside Ontario.

Recommendations 82, 83, 84

*We recommend that an M.Ed. degree be a requirement for appointment to a position as vice-principal or principal.

*We recommend that the provincial courses to prepare candidates to become principals continue, but that they be regularly evaluated, starting immediately, by an external review team, composed of practising principals, supervisory officers, academics in the field of educational administration, and at least one member from outside Ontario. The review should be rigorous, to assess how successfully the course addresses the skills and knowledge required, as well as the needs of the system. Continuation of any courses would depend on a satisfactory evaluation.

*We recommend that school boards create a variety of structured experiences through which aspiring and junior administrators can learn leadership skills. Such experiences would include internships or job shadowing, exchanges outside the education field, secondments to a number of different educational settings, and organized rotation of vice-principals to different schools.

We believe that these recommendations retain the benefits of the current system, while providing additional training that could substantially improve the preparation of administrators, and ensure that they are ready and able to tackle the challenges ahead of them successfully.

Finally, we need to consider the needs of school principals and vice-principals who have held their positions for some time. Although principals' refresher courses exist, there is no requirement that school leaders take them. We believe that they must take part in serious professional development, to update their knowledge and broaden their perspectives, and to exchange ideas of current issues with colleagues.

Continuing certification of principals, like that of teachers, should be linked to participation in professional development. We recognize that many school boards limit a principal's appointment in a particular school to five years, but we go beyond this to recommend that continuation as a principal or vice-principal in any school should be contingent on evidence of on-going participation in professional development.

Recommendation 85

*We recommend that appointment to the position of principal or vice-principal be for a five-year term, continuation of the appointment to depend on evidence of participation in, and successful completion of, professional development programs satisfactory to the employing school board, and on satisfactory performance.

Department heads

Before we turn to the role of supervisory officers, we want, however briefly, to discuss the vital role played by department heads in secondary schools across Ontario.

The department head is involved in curriculum leadership and in teacher development and, especially in larger schools, it is impossible to conceive of quality teaching and learning taking place in the absence of heads of departments: principals would be overwhelmed with committee work and out of touch in many subjects; teachers, particularly more recent ones, would be deprived of experienced support; and programs would suffer from a lack of cohesion and continuity.

Through their department affiliations, many teachers participate in subject councils and other discipline-based professional organizations. These organizations provide valuable professional development opportunities throughout the province.

While we believe that the role of the department head is necessary for purposes of administration and subject focus, we note areas that should be improved.

Ontario's 800 or so secondary schools have about 9,100 department heads, who make an average salary of approximately \$67,000. A closer examination of these numbers reveals some schools in which the department head is also the sole subject specialist or works directly with only a few teachers. We think that some economy is prudent in regard to the number of departments each school feels is necessary. In many schools, departments might be organized by broader categories than is now the case (see Chapter 17 for a fuller discussion of this).

We also believe that more cross-pollination of concepts and methods across the curriculum would be beneficial for both teachers and students. Secondary schools can use such cross-disciplinary links to reduce the fragmentation and isolation that often accompany departmental structures. Other organizational strategies that cut across department lines include having a team of teachers take responsibility for a group of students, or setting up school-wide task forces to work on issues such as revising report cards or rethinking scheduling procedures. Retaining departments and a subject orientation for administrative and teacher-support purposes should not preclude flexibility in curriculum and school organization.

Recent and proposed curriculum reform suggests the possibility of regrouping some subjects into broader categories. This might mean, for instance, that a department of science could include what are now separate departments of biology, chemistry, and physics; in smaller schools, a department of mathematics, science, and technology might incorporate what are now several very small departments.

We noted earlier the importance of supportive, school-level professional communities. In secondary schools, the department tends to be the professional community of greatest significance to shaping teachers' attitudes about teaching and students.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The challenge is to build department and school communities in which the focus is on developing strategies to foster student learning.

In the section of this chapter devoted to teacher evaluation, we expressed concern about the lack of an evaluative role for department heads, particularly in relation to teachers in their own departments. We find that opposition by the teacher federations to "teachers evaluating teachers" is misplaced in this context.

We look to department heads to provide substantive, curriculum leadership in secondary schools, and it is difficult to see how they can do this thoroughly without evaluating the quality of teaching on a

departmental basis. The evaluation by a department head should be recognized as complementing that by the principal. We also expect that department heads will help new or struggling teachers in their departments.

Given the changes already experienced in secondary schools, as well as those we recommended in Chapter 9 in regard to secondary school programs, we suggest both a review of the role of the department head, and some provision for professional development programs specifically targeted to them, so that department heads can perform their varied roles more effectively.

Recommendation 86

*We recommend that in the light of recent and proposed changes in the nature and organization of secondary school programs:

- a) the role of department head be reviewed, with a view to reducing the number of department heads where appropriate;
- b) responsibilities of department heads include supervision and evaluation of teachers in their departments; and
- c) appropriate professional development be provided for department heads.

Supervisory officers (SOs)

Their role

Supervisory officers or superintendents, including the director of education, the board's chief executive officer, are the senior administrative level in school boards.

In 1992-93, school boards employed 901 supervisory officers; in 1993-94, that number was 864. Presumably, the reduction was due to downsizing efforts to control costs.

The Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association (OPSOA) estimates that the average salary for 1994 is approximately \$90,000 to \$92,000. Ministry figures for 1993 show that 97 percent of supervisory officers earn \$84,000 or more (as do all directors); slightly more than a third of directors earn at least \$114,000.

Some of the expectations of supervisory officers can be found in the Education Act, which states that the supervisory officer's prime duty is to bring about improvements in the work done in classrooms, by inspiring teachers and pupils and by "assisting teachers in their practice."

Background of the superintendency in Ontario

The hierarchical structure of Ontario's education system was established by Egerton Ryerson by the 1870s. His system was "characterized by massive centralization and external regulation through a primarily unitary system of administration staffed by a professional corps of public servants."[\(48\)](#)

For many years, responsibility for supervision was exercised primarily by a team of provincially appointed inspectors, charged with maintaining quality by inspecting the work of teachers. In Catholic schools, supervision was handled by both the church, for religious instruction, and the Department of Education, for secular instruction.

Inspectors' classroom visits, a source of considerable tension for teachers, were intended to evaluate teachers, examine the progress of students, and be sure that the prescribed curriculum was being taught.

Judgments were usually based on explicit criteria related to an approved way of running a classroom. Teachers were expected to follow the set curriculum, and to keep order in their classrooms.

With the consolidation of school boards in the late 1960s, responsibility for supervising teaching was shifted to the school boards, and the corps of provincial inspectors was eliminated. The term "supervisory officer" replaced the old "inspector," and by 1974 the Education Act specified details of examinations for the certification of supervisory officers.

Although responsibility for teacher supervision was transferred to the local supervisory officers, their visibility in the classroom has diminished as they assumed extensive administrative and political tasks.

What supervisory officers do

Several research studies in the late 1970s and the 1980s showed that there was great variety among supervisory office jobs, but that there were some common themes. There is no single way to capture what supervisory officers do: researchers and supervisory officers themselves have used lists of tasks, job profiles, or reports of "a day in the life of..."

One study, by a three-university Ontario team, reported that tasks ranged from the mundane ("chairing a committee, or developing a board policy on pediculosis") to the visionary ("building an organizational consensus about the kind of education we provide and the values we hold"); it also included "briefing trustees," "salary negotiations," "arranging the purchase of property for an outdoor education centre," and "acting as a last resort in dealing with irate parents."[\(49\)](#)

In larger boards, supervisory officer positions could be grouped into general categories, each involving somewhat distinct duties: director of education (the CEO), business (responsible for the financial aspects of the board), central office (responsible for curriculum, personnel, or special education, and so on), or area (responsible for supervising a group of schools). In some boards, these are combined. A somewhat surprising finding was that the nature of work done by supervisory officers across Ontario in different boards was more similar than conventional wisdom would suggest: being an supervisory officer "in the North" or "in this board" meant dealing with different issues, but the tasks and skills needed were not all that different.

Supervisory officers are responsible for liaison with schools and with the community, and through the director, with trustees. They are involved in planning, personnel management, resource allocation, collecting and disseminating information, public relations, evaluation of principals, and day-to-day management and operations. The typical supervisory officer works in what often appears to be a fragmented and disjointed manner, with many interruptions, dealing with problems and crises as they arise.

The brief the Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association submitted to our Commission confirms that supervisory officers are expected to deal with an astonishing variety of problems and challenges. They describe incumbents dealing with trustees, the public, the media, parents, teachers, other staff, the Ministry of Education and Training, and other ministries and government agencies, businesses, colleges, and universities. In fact, the only way supervisory officers can accomplish any of their objectives is by working with others. Interpersonal skills are obviously critical for success in the job.

Usually, the supervisory officers who have direct contact with principals and teachers are the area

superintendents, who have responsibility for a group of schools. Central office supervisory officers, especially in the larger boards, are somewhat more removed from direct contact with schools, because their work tends to be determined by system needs more than by local school needs.

The position of supervisory officer can be stressful, with long hours and frequent evening meetings, but much of the stress is caused by the surrounding controversies: supervisory officers are caught in the centre of conflicting positions and demands. Trustees, the community, the media, other supervisory officers, the schools - all these people and groups put pressure on school board administrators.

A particular source of tension is the confusion and overlap between the roles and responsibilities of trustees on the one hand, and supervisory officers on the other; the latter have been greatly affected by changes in the roles of the former. Although distinctions are made between policy-making (the responsibility of trustees) and operations (the responsibility of supervisory officers), the distinction does not seem to apply to the actual activities of either group. Trustees have become increasingly involved in the day-to-day work of schools, dealing with a range of issues previously left to the professionals. The lack of clarity about respective roles and responsibilities creates on-going problems for both trustees and supervisory officers. We address this issue further in Chapter 15.

Impact

What impact do supervisory officers (SOs) have on education and schools? Members of the public, and many teachers, question what SOs do and whether it makes any difference to schools. Even if the role of the SO is clarified, many observers are not convinced that there would be much effect if some supervisory officers disappeared.

Nor does research make it much easier to assess the impact of supervisory officers. In one study, SOs themselves were not convinced that elimination of their roles would have a great deal of effect on educational programs, but did believe that board-wide co-ordination would suffer.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Research by Peter Coleman and Linda LaRocque in British Columbia compared more and less successful school districts (as measured by student achievement tests), concluding that frequent interaction between schools and central office (school board) administrators is related positively to school success, and is particularly helpful to schools trying to make changes or improve their programs.⁽⁵¹⁾ Karen Seashore Louis found that central office administrators can help schools achieve desired change by protecting them from too many rapid policy shifts, providing resources, cutting down on excess rules and regulations, and maintaining frequent communication with schools.⁽⁵²⁾

Recent experience in some Ontario school boards (e.g., Halton and Durham) seems to confirm such results. Reports from these boards suggest that when supervisory officers provide leadership focused on clear directions when they ensure that school personnel develop the knowledge and skills they need, when they link schools with other schools, with the research community and with other resources, and when they keep attention on monitoring results, there seem to be real payoffs in terms of schools attaining their goals.

Although it is not possible, on the basis of the research, to make definitive judgments about the contributions of supervisory officers, there are suggestions that at least some of their work (drafting reports, initial phone calls, correspondence, regular meetings of some task committees) could be done effectively by less highly qualified employees.⁽⁵³⁾ In many boards, however, such assistance is not

available, and if tasks cannot be handled by a secretary, the supervisory officer must do it. Such arrangements seem an ineffective and inefficient use of personnel.

Skills required by supervisory officers

The skills required for supervisory officers are similar to those required of principals: creating and sustaining a focus on instruction, guiding change, administering, and linking to the community. Supervisory officers have more extensive managerial responsibilities, with greater emphasis on relating to the broader community, to the Ministry of Education and Training, and in dealing with political issues and trustees. The scope of action is greater, but the possibility of being distracted and unable to set and follow priorities also seems greater.

It seems that for successful leadership in the 1990s and beyond, supervisory officers are being asked to

- ensure quality programs and high standards;
- meet the needs of students and parents;
- demonstrate fiscal responsibility by improving quality with fewer resources;
- create alliances; and
- focus on results.

However, there appear to be a number of problems with the career paths of school board administrators:

... many of the skills that supervisory officers considered vital were ones that they were unlikely to be exposed to in any systematic or developmental fashion. The career path followed by the majority of supervisory officers was marked by a high degree of uniformity and by narrowness of experience. Supervisory officers were frustrated by the heavy demands of the role, and by the difficulty of finding time and opportunity for professional development.(54)

The duties of supervisory officers, as well as of principals, have expanded dramatically. With the Commission's emphasis on community alliances, both groups will be expected to establish links with other school boards in sharing arrangements, and with local businesses and community organizations. Aspiring educational leaders should be encouraged to broaden their experience, rather than spending virtually all their working lives in one school board.

Preparation and training of supervisory officers

As we have noted, the appointment, duties, and responsibilities of supervisory officers are found in various sections of the Education Act. Generally, all supervisory officer candidates must have a Master's degree in education (or its equivalent); a valid Ontario Teacher's Certificate; seven years of successful experience as a teacher, at least two years of which were in Ontario; and one of seven other qualifications, the most common of which is an Ontario principal's certificate.

Candidates for superintendents of business and financial affairs are required to have somewhat different qualifications.(55)

A principalship is not formally a prerequisite for becoming a supervisory officer, and it is sometimes possible to be promoted through the consultant/co-ordinator path, a practice that, if encouraged, should result in the appointment of more supervisory officers with curriculum expertise.

Because of legislation that restricts senior levels of administration to those who have Ontario teaching certification and experience, however, it is unlikely that any out-of-province person could become a supervisory officer. There also appears to be a trend in large boards to "train and promote our own." Smaller boards will, of necessity, hire from other Ontario boards.

The current promotion ladder seems to be somewhat closed (both at the board and provincial levels) and comfortable. The people being promoted may fit the culture of the particular board because they are used to it, but they will also have to provide innovative and appropriate leadership in a rapidly changing environment. If a good understanding of the process of change and the need to be sensitive to differences is important in leadership positions, people in the province might be well advised to look critically at the current systems.

The pattern of promoting "those who look like us" has resulted in ranks of supervisory officers that are disproportionately male (80 percent), although the teaching profession is female dominated. Until recently, this was considered normal, and the "old boys' system of promotion" might still be in full force if the Ministry of Education and Training had not required that 50 percent of positions of responsibility be held by women by the year 2000. Already, it is clear that some boards will have difficulty in meeting the requirements of this mandate on time.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Although the Ministry does not report on the ethnic or racial background of administrators, a glance around administrator meetings suggests that minority groups are very much under-represented. Efforts must be made to develop, support, and promote educators from minority backgrounds.

The Commission strongly supports both the employment equity initiatives of the provincial government, and the anti-racism initiatives of the Ministry of Education and Training, both of which would be expected to have an impact on the appointment of supervisory officers.

We suggest that there must also be incentives to encourage school boards and prospective administrators to consider broad experience, in different school boards, and in fields outside education, as a desirable background for senior administrators. We believe that at least some of those appointed should have worked outside education at some point in their careers. As well, we suggest that the current restrictions on those eligible to take the supervisory officer course be adjusted, to allow persons from outside Ontario to become SO candidates. Doing this would allow fresh perspectives to influence the system.

Prior to the introduction of the Supervisory Officer Qualifications Program (SOQP) in 1990, candidates completed written and oral examinations aimed at assessing, first, their knowledge of the Education Act and Regulations, and, second, their ability to apply this knowledge and experience.⁽⁵⁷⁾

However, there was a feeling that the examination was not appropriate, because it did not seem relevant to assessing how well aspiring supervisory officers would actually perform on the job. Some candidates complained that they could not get information about the examination process. There was a high failure rate; in fact, in most years, more than half the candidates failed.⁽⁵⁸⁾ No preparation or training was available except for study groups formed by the candidates themselves. Many people felt that the old system was not much more than an artificial hurdle, but many also felt that the preparation was excellent for what the job entailed.

The Supervisory Officer Qualifications Program, now offered in place of the old examination process, is designed to focus on relevant skill development. Program modules are offered on a cost-recovery or

profit basis by various providers; and if there is not sufficient enrolment to cover costs, the program is not offered. It is given in a number of modules by school boards, universities, or by teacher federations under contract to the Ministry of Education and Training, according to Ministry guidelines.(59)

There is a program for educators in the Roman Catholic system, and one is offered in French for those from the French-language system. Both are slightly modified to take account of different priorities and needs in those systems.

The current course was outlined by the Ministry in 1990, and is now being revised. The model was designed to assist program planners to develop a course that will be of value to supervisory officers as they carry out their responsibilities.(60) The course is built around three program areas:

- skills (personal and professional development, and integrative practice skills);
- knowledge (system perspective and the theoretical foundations); and
- a practicum that involves participation in a realistic supervised activity, working as an intern in various administrative settings.

How well does the SOQP prepare people who want to be supervisory officers? Feedback from participants suggests that it is an improvement on the older system; in fact, their ratings of at least one program are highly positive. Some academic observers, however, suggest caution, expressing particular concern about a lack of rigour in the program. Course content is defined and specified by the Ministry, which also conducts program evaluations. Originally, these were to be conducted by external teams, but apparently because of cost, the plans were dropped and evaluations are being done by Ministry staff.

On the basis of the guidelines, as well as in curriculum material from one program, the course appears to address the skills and knowledge needed by supervisory officers. As in the case of the principal's course, however, it would appear to be difficult to cover the content adequately in the time available, if sufficient time is given to analysis. It is not clear whether such issues have been addressed in the Ministry evaluations; although no solid data are available, it may be that the quality of the SOQP varies depending on the provider.

Given some uncertainty about the new program, as well as its relative newness, we suggest that programs be evaluated by a team external to both the providing agency and the Ministry of Education and Training. It should include practising supervisory officers and academic researchers in the field of educational administration, with at least some members from outside Ontario. As we suggested in relation to the preparation program for principals, the continuation of the SOQP should depend on satisfactory evaluations of the courses by the review teams. It is obviously important to ensure that senior school board administrators are well trained for their positions.

As with the preparation courses for principals, we know that Supervisory Officer Qualification Programs have advisory committees, with membership drawn from various educational constituencies. But, again, we suggest more rigorous evaluations of the programs, by review teams who are not involved with the programs they are evaluating, with the inclusion of at least one person from outside Ontario.

Even more important than the formal qualification programs, however, is the need to broaden the base of experience for potential supervisory officers. We believe school boards should provide and encourage exchanges and other opportunities to work in varied settings, including those outside education. In making opportunities available, school boards should pay special attention to issues of gender and

minority-group representation, to ensure that women and persons from minority groups get the practical experience needed for senior administrative positions.

Although such provisions should result in better-prepared supervisory officers, we believe that new opportunities would also benefit from carefully structured support in their initial months in that role, as Fullan, Park, and Williams recommended in 1986. We believe that newly appointed supervisory officers should continue the kind of learning that takes place in the SOQP, and we suggest that they be provided with release time during the first year in order to do so.

Current supervisory officers also need opportunities for professional renewal and upgrading to ensure they are able to deal with difficult issues and to appropriately support others in the educational system.

Recommendations 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92

*We recommend that school boards review the responsibilities of supervisory officers in light of the changes in governance and organization recommended in this report, with a view to reducing the number of supervisory officers as appropriate, as current incumbents retire and, if necessary, changing responsibilities assigned to supervisory officers to suit changed organizational needs.

*We recommend that the Supervisory Officer Qualification Programs continue, but be regularly evaluated, starting immediately, by an independent review team, which would include supervisory officers and academics in educational administration, as well as some members from outside Ontario. The continuation of programs should depend on a satisfactory evaluation from this team.

*We recommend that requirements for admission to the Supervisory Officer Qualifications Program be adjusted, to make it possible for school boards to appoint administrators from outside Ontario as supervisory officers.

*We recommend that school boards provide current and aspiring supervisory officers with increased opportunities for varied experiences, both in and outside the educational system, including exchange programs with government and business.

*We recommend that newly appointed supervisory officers be given a minimum of 15 days release time during their first year in the position, for participation in structured professional development activities such as:

- a) working with other supervisory officers to increase their understanding of their new roles;
- b) taking part in a study group or series of workshops with other newly appointed supervisory officers.

*We recommend that supervisory officers be appointed for a five-year term, with a continuation of the appointment dependent on successful participation in professional development recognized by the employing board, and on satisfactory performance.

Conclusion

Rather than suggesting a radical new approach to teacher education and administration, we are recommending in this chapter that Ontario take seriously the ideas and innovative proposals that have been made over the past ten years. It is time for rhetoric to be followed by reality, and for the exceptional programs and schools that can be found across the province to become the norm.

Ontarians need a well-articulated and coherent approach that links selection, preparation, certification, and on-going professional support, for all educators. Considerable progress has been made toward achieving this goal, but progress is uneven.

We believe that one key to ensuring a consistently high-quality approach is a more thoughtful framework

for planning, evaluating, and accrediting professional preparation programs, including pre-service teacher preparation, professional development, and certification courses for principals and supervisory officers.

But even more important, in our view, is a fundamental shift in thinking about teachers and their professional contexts. For too long, educational reform initiatives have focused on curriculum and student assessment as though these areas could be understood in isolation from the teachers involved. George Radwanski, for instance, in his 1987 report, barely mentioned teachers, although he was recommending radical changes in organization and programming. All too often, even when the need for professional development is recognized, it is mentioned as an afterthought.

We believe strongly that it is time for teachers to have a stronger collective professional role through an independent College of Teachers. With the College, control of professional standards will be transferred from the Ministry of Education and Training to the profession itself. Teachers will have greater autonomy, and also greater responsibility, with input from others in the community, for deciding on entry requirements, accrediting programs, and generally determining the standards for professional teaching practice.

At the school level, the leadership of the principal is critical for success, but the principal is only effective by mobilizing the efforts of others, including teachers, students, and parents. And it is at the school level that teachers and principals can work together to continue to improve their programs and their teaching.

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