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## The Ontario Leadership Strategy - From Advocacy to Action

The Ontario Leadership Strategy was launched in October 2008 for the purpose of attracting the right people to the principalship, and developing and supporting strong instructional leaders. This was part of the Ministry's commitment to develop a comprehensive leadership strategy as articulated in *Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education (2008)*. Such attention to leadership has been long called for by the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO).

Educators share a common commitment to improving student achievement. Research clearly shows that "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (K. Leithwood, et al, 2006, *Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership*, p.3). When the best candidates are attracted and recruited to take on school leadership positions and are supported in learning the multi-faceted and complicated role, everyone benefits.

The Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario has been very vocal about the steps needed to attract the right people to the role of school leader. Potential candidates cite the lack of job security and workload as major deterrents. CPCO has been calling for the Ministry to introduce a regulation that would allow new administrators to *try-on* the role of administrator with an option to return to teaching within a two-year period without loss of seniority. It remains to be seen if the Ministry intends to work with teacher unions to resolve this issue.

The Ontario Leadership Strategy's initiatives are to be phased in over the next three years. More information is available on the Ministry's website at [www.ontario.ca/eduleadership](http://www.ontario.ca/eduleadership).

In the fall of 2008 CPCO supported ten regional sessions focused on the roll-out of the mentoring program for newly-appointed school leaders and version 1 of the *Principal/Vice-principal Performance Appraisal (PPA)* document. CPCO has developed supports for Catholic boards regarding mentoring and has successfully held two symposia on the topic. A summer symposium is planned for August 2009.

CPCO also participated in a tri-level leadership work group in the fall, in an effort to make necessary changes to version 1 of the PPA. Version 2 of the PPA was released to directors of education in January 2009. Boards are encouraged to work through the process as outlined and give feedback to the Ministry throughout the remainder of this school year.

CPCO is pleased that version 2 of the PPA emphasizes the growth and support of the principal or vice-principal, and that the appraisal

cycle is every five years. The principals' associations insisted that in the rare case of an unsuccessful appraisal, the administrator be entitled to a fair and just process that allows for time, supports and opportunities to improve. Version 2 states that if the candidate remains unsuccessful after three appraisals, termination of employment could result. Again, we have called for a regulation to allow new administrators who prove unsuccessful to be allowed to return to teaching. Failing that we encourage boards to allow for this process in their local policies.

The CPCO professional learning staff and the Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association have developed a Catholic Leadership Framework and trained presenters to deliver sessions to Catholic boards during 2008-09. The Framework fosters the language of Catholic leadership and promotes tri-level leadership. It provides the basis for CPCO's mentoring supports, revised Principal's Qualification Program and the Ministry's PPA.

Another strategy in the Ontario Leadership Strategy is to share research regarding succession planning with school boards. An executive summary of the Institute for Education Leadership's study on succession planning appeared in the winter 2008 issue of *Principal Connections*. The research indicates alarming statistics about retirement and the crisis in leadership this will likely cause within the next two years. The study also identifies the factors that attract candidates to leadership and deterrents that prevent people from pursuing leadership positions.

The PPA tri-level work group is working with the Ministry to realize another initiative for year 1 of the Strategy; that is to develop a framework of effective practices on terms and conditions of employment for school administrators. CPCO believes that basic no-cost clauses such as recognition of local associations, the right to representation, board indemnification and just-cause clauses must appear in every agreement between boards and local principals' associations.

The Ontario Leadership Strategy outlines many noble strategies to support educational leadership in the province. In an effort to recruit and attract the best candidates to leadership roles, CPCO has strongly advocated for changes in legislation or regulation to address the issues of job security and the right to return to teaching for new administrators. We have also called for streamlining initiatives to tackle the heavy workload faced by principals and vice-principals. Without attention to these issues, a crisis in leadership will surely be realized in this province. None-the-less, CPCO remains committed to working with the Ministry in ensuring the success of the Ontario Leadership Strategy.