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The Advent of Change

Time Is Running Out

December is the traditional month to celebrate the birth of Christ, family gatherings and much-needed holiday rest. In past Decembers this editorial has spoken of hope for the year to come and appreciation for our many past gifts. This year's message is not so merry and bright. Alas, time is running out for many of our principals and vice-principals who are worn to the bone by the burdens they are carrying.

Ministry and board initiatives continue to roll forward – each with another leadership role for the principal and vice-principal – daily physical education; professional learning communities; anti-bullying; literacy and numeracy. Meanwhile the primary distracter in the job, the Teacher Performance Appraisal model, is at least eight months from reform although support for change was unanimously endorsed by all education stakeholder groups nearly two years ago! The New Teacher Induction Program for new teachers will replace half of the performance appraisals with mentoring supports but the “low yield” appraisals for experienced teachers will be maintained until at least September 2006. Meanwhile the Ontario College of Teachers is dealing with its first cases related to the ill-conceived TPA model legislated by the previous government in 2001.

The Ministry of Education recently reported that the number of teaching vice-principals and principals increased from 5% to 15% between 1999 and 2002 while the total number of positions declined by 5%. (It will be interesting to see the current numbers when CPCO runs its 2006 census in January.) Principals and vice-principals who are part-time teachers carry a double-responsibility, not two halves of one job. However, classroom teaching is only one of three time-consuming activities that keep administrators from providing more of the instructional leadership that the government seeks. The other two activities are the supervision of students and the provision of preparation and planning time for teachers.

In a survey completed by 45 % of the membership last month, over 500 respondents indicated they provide more than one hour a week of scheduled supervision while nearly 600 indicated they also provided more than one hour a week of unscheduled supervision. Of these, nearly 200 respondents provided four hours or more of scheduled supervision while nearly 250 provided four hours or more of unscheduled supervision each week. Forty-seven per cent (47%) of all respondents indicated that their supervision time had increased since last year! In addition to supervision, 162 of the survey respondents (22%) indi-

cated they provide more than one hour of scheduled preparation and planning time for teachers each week. Nearly 100 of them provide more than two hours per week! Beyond preparation and planning time, 150 people indicated they provide more than one hour of scheduled instruction time while nearly 200 indicated they provide more than one hour of unscheduled instruction time per week. These trends will continue to increase as new collective agreements increase teacher preparation time while decreasing teacher supervision time.

In order to accommodate decreasing supervision time by teachers many principals have closed areas of the school such as libraries, gyms and portions of the school grounds. Some have been ordered to place themselves on yard duty schedules to ensure collective agreements are fulfilled. Student supervisors are being appointed in some schools to augment the declining number of adults available for supervision. Meanwhile new safety measures for anaphylactic students will be in force on January 1, 2006 and anti-bullying training programs will begin this spring to help teachers reduce bullying in schools. It's a good thing students will be trained as well!

In nearly every board there are principals and vice-principals on stress-related leaves. Long Term Disability claims are at an eight-year high in the CPCO Group Benefits Plan and younger people are frequently among those claimants. Increasing numbers of veteran administrators are calling the Telephone Legal Advisory number to access the Legal Benefits Plan for advice on professional and legal matters. Numerous candidates in the PQP programs are indicating their doubts about applying for vice-principal positions while many experienced classroom teachers are disinterested in seeking any positions of added responsibility. The 2003 CPCO census indicated 45% of members will retire by 2009 while 55% are in their first three years of administration.

In May 2005 the government announced 3,100 additional teachers for various programs and initiatives. We need to make a similar investment in school leadership. We need a provincial School Leadership Strategy beginning with an increase in the number of school administrators. Three hundred new vice-principal positions would be a great start for the province's future and a wonderful Christmas present for the leadership teams in our school boards. Time is running out.

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