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CPCO Executive Director

EDITORIAL

"THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL" – A PREVIEW

By the end of September the Minister of Education will present a discussion paper describing long anticipated changes affecting the role of the principal. Minister Kennedy and his staff have been developing this paper for the last 12 months while reviewing reports and recommendations from the provincial principal associations and other stakeholder groups.

In October 2004 CPCO submitted its 46-page consultation report following field research that included a lengthy online survey completed by 950 members. Papers were also submitted by the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) and the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO). The CPCO paper followed an interim report on workload (April 2004). In November 2004 the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (C.O.D.E.) submitted its Report on Principal Workload to the Ministry after a month of regional meetings with principals around the province.

At the Education Partnership Table in June 2005 Minister Kennedy outlined four overall goals for his forthcoming discussion paper on the role of the principal. He stated his intention to increase the ability of principals and vice-principals to act in their capacity as instructional leaders. He addressed the issue of job security in the context of attracting and retaining school leaders. He indicated that there would be ongoing support for the preparation and continuous development of current and future principals and vice-principals. He said he would increase the voice that principals and vice-principals have in the education system and that he would review the definitions and responsibilities in their positions.

The Minister previewed a number of initiatives to support the four overall goals. Many of these items were recommended by the principals' councils and C.O.D.E. First and foremost the Minister intends to revise the onerous teacher performance appraisal model. Initial changes will affect the appraisal of new teachers with a shift in focus towards support and mentoring. Redundant forms and processes will be removed in the appraisal of experienced teachers while more support will be given to building collaborative, professional learning communities.

The Ministry of Education will streamline its information requests and coordinate its initiatives with other events in the school year calendar. Another initiative will be a pilot project on report cards and reporting periods. The Minister is also considering a reference group of principals in the field who would advise him directly on the implementation of initiatives.

The Minister indicated that grants for rural schools have already increased funding for principal and vice-principal positions by three per cent. The salary benchmarks were brought up to current levels and increases have been scheduled to cover four years as was done for teachers' salaries.

The Minister will develop regulations to provide standard requirements for the employment contracts of principals and vice-principals. The provincial councils have also suggested that new administrators be given a trial period after which they are allowed to return to the bargaining unit.

The Minister will review the appraisal of principals and vice-principals and the length of their assignments in the context of their role as leaders of school communities. The Minister expects principals to communicate and work closely with students and parents to ensure that needs are met. In the same vein he will work with school boards to ensure that schools have sufficient budgets to acquire resources.

The Minister is looking at the use of other personnel to accomplish some school level management tasks. This initiative may include the use of school business managers and changes in the duties of some support staff. The Minister will also review the role of principals and vice-principals in the overall management structure of school boards.

The fundamental purpose of all these initiatives is to increase the opportunities for student success. If they are successfully implemented principals and vice-principals will have the chance to focus on instructional leadership in schools.

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat is moving forward with many projects including a partnership with CPCO, OPC and ADFO. The project will provide training for principal learning teams to support the professional learning communities in their schools. One hundred and eighty principals will be involved in the first year of the three year project called Leading Student Achievement: Our Principal Purpose. The project will focus on literacy and numeracy strategies, assessment literacy, mentoring, professional learning teams and emotional intelligence. At the secondary level the Ministry has set a goal to increase graduation rates to a 90 per cent level. While the Pathways program will provide much needed support, the 90 per cent goal may ultimately require a change in the organization of secondary curriculum and the credit system.

September brings another school year but this year is extremely important for the government and the education system. The government has prioritized education and funding has been increased at all levels to provide the opportunities for success. As the government prepares for an election in 2007 the achievement of its education goals will determine future policy and funding decisions. With the potential for labour peace during the next three years, the onus will be on all educators to focus their attention, energy and skills on improving student success.

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