

Lessons Learned *through* OBSERVATION

Candidates enrolled in the Principal's Qualification Program (PQP) Part I are required to complete a 20-hour observation component of a practicing school administrator in a school setting. The intent of the assignment is to have candidates observe leadership in action and then have the opportunity to reflect on what they have witnessed.

The Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario would like to thank the many principals and vice-principals who have agreed to volunteer their time to act as mentors and role models for PQP candidates. Without a doubt the experience has been an enriching one that has enabled the students to witness Catholic leadership from a different perspective.

All candidates must complete an online evaluation at the end of the PQP sessions. Students in Part II are asked to reflect back on their observation period in Part I and to comment on one valuable leadership lesson learned. Below are some of their responses.

"I learned to always be prepared to expect the unexpected and that every new experience will build up my ability to handle situations in the future."

"No decision needs to be made in an instant (unless it concerns the safety of a student). It is better to gather the facts, ponder the outcome and share the decision in a reasonable amount of time."

"I learned that it is important to remain genuinely concerned and empathetic to all people you deal with, both staff and students."

"I learned the leader of a school should always be visible, and know the parameters in which they have to work (i.e. collective agreements)."

"Listen, listen and listen."

"Showing appreciation for the hard work of others is extremely important to the success of the team efforts."

"I learned collaborative leadership always puts the students first."

"Be authentic."

"The process of editing the school agenda emphasized that when any material is being published in the school's name or sent home from the school, it is imperative that it reflects school and board policy and is released only after stringent editing."

"Leadership means continuous attempts at finding a positive way forward even when others are being rude, unreasonable, difficult or elusive."

"I learned that being an effective principal requires patience, fairness and relationship building skills."

"I learned how multi-faceted the role of the administrator is in Catholic education today. It's difficult to please everyone all the time. You must have a thick skin to be in the role because there is constant criticism coming at you."

"Be visible and know your students and your community."

"A valuable leadership lesson I learned was the importance of working as a collaborative community when making certain decisions. Making people feel that they are valued and their input is important goes a long way!"

"I observed that it was very important to gather as much data as possible before acting on a concern and when possible to take the time to reflect on the response so that all parties concerned are treated fairly."

"It is very important for the principal to have a personal relationship with students in their school, particularly the neediest, to fully understand the necessary interventions required to bring about success."

"I learned the importance of knowing what is taking place in your school and making this known by recognizing staff and their efforts."

“The one thing I learned is that the principal/vice-principal must be flexible and organized. There is a lot that happens in one day from parent/teacher meetings, special education updates, supervision, scheduling, paperwork and e-mails.”

“I learned that anything is a ton of work, but always worth it. I observed that my principal does not boss people around. Instead, he helps with whatever he can, really, really listens and then allows the person to come up with appropriate strategies or decisions. He always values input, even if he does not agree.”

“No matter what happens in the front office, the leader of the school needs to keep up the moral of the school. Staff can sense something is wrong if the leader acts differently. The amount of attention that is focused on the leader of the school is enormous. More than I thought.”

“During the observation component, I learned that the role of the principal is much more complex than it appears to others. The principal has numerous responsibilities and duties that often go un-noticed by the rest of the staff, but are essential in keeping the school running smoothly.”

“The most valuable leadership lesson was the importance of working as a team. Communication skills and collaboration are essential in this role. I also learned that you have to be a good decision-maker to be effective. You have to be thorough, respectful and fair to staff and students.”

“I learned that it is important to have the bigger picture in mind at all times. I also learned that the beatitudes must form my fundamental outlook.”

“During the observation period I learned that *calm is the new cool*. It is important to step back and get the big picture before jumping to any conclusions.”

“One observation I recall is the importance of monitoring the amount of paperwork handed out during staff meetings and to consider alternate communication methods.”

“Admit when you have made a mistake – don’t try to cover up.”

“I believe the most important thing I learned during the observation component was the complexity of the role. I was impressed by the complexity of building a Catholic community – thinking about all the partnerships and links that need to be considered.”

“I realized the importance of communicating with all stakeholders and taking the extra time to ensure that all stakeholders have been considered.”

“Be positive and see the best in people. This helps them to understand that you view them as a talented and skilled asset.”

“During the observation component I was able to witness how effective my mentor was in offering staff both pressure and support. She had very high expectations for staff members but at the same time it was apparent that the staff respected her and spoke very highly of her in terms of how she supported them.”

“I learned that one must always view situations from a variety of perspectives to get the whole picture. The best leaders also, ironically, make the best servants – since they share humility and patient service as key virtues.”

“Change takes time and patience.”

“The observation component helped me to realize the multitude of responsibilities of the principal and the importance of delegation.”

“A valuable leadership lesson I observed was that good leaders aren’t afraid to admit they can’t do something. They surround themselves with good people.”

“I learned the value of dropping whatever is on your plate in order to support your teachers.”

“A valuable leadership lesson I learned during the observation component was to model my Catholic faith values and to make decisions based on these values.”

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