

Canada's Outstanding Principals

2008

Each year The Learning Partnership with the The Canadian Association of Principals (CAP) and in association with the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management (University of Toronto) recognizes the contributions of leaders in education by presenting the Canada's Outstanding Principal award. This year four of our CPCO colleagues were among the 30 winners of this prestigious award. Winners are selected from all provinces and territories on a representation by population basis. They are nominated by their respective provincial associations and are chosen by a national selection committee. The winners were recognized at a Gala Dinner on Tuesday, February 26th at the Delta Chelsea Hotel in Toronto. Congratulations to the following four

CPCO principals: Anthony Ceelen, St. Andrew Catholic School, Halton CDSB; Dr. Dina Dalia, St. John's College, Brant-Haldimand Norfolk CDSB; Darlene Kennedy, Catholic Central High School, Windsor-Essex CDSB; and Dan Trainor, St. James Catholic Elementary School, Niagara CDSB.

The 30 recipients of this award participated in a four-day executive leadership-training program at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management from February 24 to February 28, 2008. This program is designed to foster executive leadership in education. The conference provided the opportunity for the award winners to discuss their experiences with leaders from the private and

public sectors from the education, social, cultural and business communities. They also had the chance to meet and share ideas with academic scholars from the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. This forum focused on how principals can make a profound difference in changing the context in which teachers and students learn, through discussion about new ideas for reforming and bringing innovative change to the current school system.

All four of the CPCO candidates showed outstanding leadership in their respective schools. Following are comments taken from the nomination packages of each of this year's winners.



Darlene Kennedy

Catholic Central High School, Windsor-Essex CDSB

Darlene started teaching when she was very young, just out of high school, but left after a few years to do mission work. When she came back into education several years later, she did not have any ambitions to lead a school. However, when one of her colleagues had the opportunity to pick a small, core group of teachers to start a new school, his first choice was Darlene. Her ability to organize, solve problems, attract teachers and students, soothe anxious parents and confidently stride the minefields between the politicians and the educators, made her invaluable. Darlene earned a master's degree in counselling. Her thesis addressed grief counselling for adolescents. Soon she was convinced that if she were going to continue to help run the school, she would need some "papers" so she pursued her principal's qualifications.

Over fifteen-plus years in educational administration, Darlene has been vice-principal of two high schools and principal of two others. In every setting, she was beloved by staff, students and parents.



However, it is in her present posting at Catholic Central High School (CCH) that Darlene's career has come full circle. She is back doing mission work. In her inner city school, she is able to hold close, on a daily basis, a thousand students and their families, teachers, support staff, neighbours and central office personnel - all who are lucky enough to come within the circle of her very long

arms. It does not matter to Darlene if you are a grade nine student, the new night custodian, the chairperson of the board, or an irate neighbour, you will be treated with respect and compassion.

However, it would be unwise to mistake her compassion, as weakness. Darlene has “a will of iron.” She wants her students to do well and she expects her staff to work hard. She models the behaviour she requires of others. She is supportive in times of trouble and unstinting in her praise for every achievement. Turkey dinners for 1,000 people, Christmas presents for every new Canadian student and fundraising dinners for hundreds of people are only some of the annual events that are part of the life of Catholic Central.

Darlene will tell you that these are all the work of her wonderful staff, but she is the catalyst. She is present at every event of importance to teachers and students. They know she is there and they want to do well to please her. The same can be said for the people who clean the school, keep the boilers operating, find the funds for new programs and buy “extra” books and computers. No one can say “no” to Darlene.

Catholic Central High School has a high ESL enrolment representing families from over 20 cultural and foreign language backgrounds. As a vice-principal at CCH, Darlene provided the guidance, impetus and influence to develop the only full service English as A Second Language secondary school program in Windsor and Essex County. Darlene is an untiring advocate for her English Language Learners. She interviews and meets every new student and establishes a sincere personal relationship with the students and their families. Her genuine care and concern for them transcends language barriers and cultural differences. Darlene keeps a closet of donated uniforms for those students that cannot afford the cost and often quietly overlooks their registration fees. She has initiated many programs at CCH to assist her students including a Food Service program, a Dramatic Arts program and a very successful Athletic program.

Darlene’s favourite book is *The Little Prince* and her favourite quote is, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” Darlene sees everyone from her heart and they respond in kind; she is the essence of leadership.

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Anthony Ceelen

St. Andrew Catholic School, Halton CDSB

Anthony Ceelen has been principal at St. Andrew Catholic School for the past two years. In that time, he has exemplified himself as a person of faith, vision, commitment and leadership. He is dedicated to providing spiritual, intellectual, social and physical growth for all students. His positive enthusiasm motivates the staff, students and community to become excited about and involved in new initiatives. St. Andrew was selected as a School on the Move by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat as having achieved notable improvement in student achievement as demonstrated through their EQAO results.

Anthony has implemented many changes at St. Andrew. He has turned it into a Living School where students are physically active through Daily Physical Activity (DPA), intramurals and in an after school volleyball camp. Students also participate in healthy snacks and lunches as part of the Living School program. His vision for improved student achievement begins with an environment in which students have sufficiently nourished their bodies, so that their minds can work efficiently. He was instrumental in beginning a breakfast program for students. His interest in environmental issues has turned St. Andrew into an ECO school. Students participate in a Green Team that works to conserve energy, decrease waste and recycle.

Anthony’s passion for literacy and numeracy is evident in his unwavering focus on student achievement. To achieve their goal of having all students reading by Grade 3, Anthony played an



integral part in the development and implementation of programs such as the All Star Reading program, the Big Brothers and Sisters Tutoring program and the Essential Skills program, which takes place after school. His innovative and creative timetabling allows teachers to be released from the classroom for job-embedded professional development, to meet with consultants that are regularly brought into the school or to meet with their professional learning team. Anthony is always available to teachers with his extensive knowledge in the areas of assessment and evaluation.

Anthony strives to create a culture within the school community that fosters the worth of all staff members and students. His staff receives an e-mailed Week at a Glance (WAAG) bulletin that in addition to highlighting the upcoming week’s events, is used to thank staff for their contributions, no matter how small. He

always involves staff in key decisions. He recognizes students' accomplishments through monthly "RAD" assemblies, where he awards prizes to students for their "Really Awesome Deeds" and celebrates their contributions to the community.

Anthony clearly understands the important role that active parents play in the education of their children. He maintains open communication with them and continuously invites them to participate in school activities and to become involved as volunteers.

Outside of the school, Anthony has participated on several board committees in the area of literacy and numeracy. He was the

founder of the Provincial Catholic Cup Volleyball Tournament that hosts student teams from other boards.

A parent wrote:

Mr. Ceelen literally "waltzed" (he danced with the departing principal on her last day at the school) into the hearts of our family! Knowing that he sings on his way to school every morning, we are confident that he will continue to make life better for many people!

Contact Anthony Ceelen at Ceelen.Anthony@hcdsb.org.



Dr. Dina Dalia

St. John's College, Brant-Haldimand Norfolk CDSB

Dr. Dina Dalia is a life-long learner. She obtained her Ph.D. in Educational Administration from the University of Toronto. Before this, she was awarded two Master's Degrees: one in Educational Administration from Brock University in 1992, the other in French Language studies from McMaster University in 1984. Dina was the only administrator to receive the Premier's Award for Teaching Excellence in 2007.

Dr. Dalia has been employed by the Brant-Haldimand Norfolk CDSB since 1980. For the first nine years, she was a teacher of French at St. John's College, where she had also been a student. She progressed to department head of Modern Languages, then to a two-year posting as French Language consultant and finally, as a principal for the last 17 years. She was an elementary school principal for seven years and has been the principal of St. John's College for the past 11 years. St. John's boasts a thriving and positive environment. This is due to Dina's ability to institute a deep cultural change: change in attitude, pride, compassion and student success. St. John's is now a friendly place where students and staff have similar goals and can work together within a respectful and safe environment. Dina engaged the entire school community in formulating a new Mission Statement, a Vision Statement and a Code of Human Relations.

She developed a service program for students that involves many different projects. She and her husband are in the 13th year of organizing Mission Trips to places of disaster in the United States and Canada. On these trips, approximately 30 to 40 students provide clean up and repair service, do roofing and painting, and bring items of clothing to the people in these areas. Dina and her husband organized the first completely student-built home in North America for Habitat for Humanity. She initiated a service program for students with the St. Vincent de Paul Society that has been ongoing for the past nine years. After the war in Kosovo, she and other community members sponsored five displaced families, who are working and successful in the Brantford area thanks to Dina's and her students' intervention and support.



Throughout the school year, students fundraise for cancer, United Way, Nova Vita's women's shelter, the food bank, Alzheimer's Coffee Week, Christmas baskets, Lenten water projects for third world countries, AIDS awareness and a variety of local projects. For the past three years, Dina has worked with Why Not City Missions to organize a New Year's Day hot meal for homeless and less fortunate community members. She provides a home-cooked meal, personal care items and clothing for all those who attend.

Dina instituted several new programs for students at St. John's College. These include a food technology program, a hair styling/cosmetology program, a horticulture program and a video broadcasting program. She is now advocating for a technology wing for her students. She also spearheaded a campaign to design and fund refurbishment of the school chapel. It now provides a beautiful setting of serenity and prayerfulness within the school.

During her career as an educator and leader, Dr. Dina Dalia has not only championed the importance of education, but more importantly has extended that education to enrich and empower the lives of others. Lifelong learning and mentorship are cornerstones of her professional life. Many new initiatives and programs not only at St. John's College, but also across the board, have Dr. Dalia's signature or influence. Her leadership with the Brant-Haldimand Norfolk CDSB has provided direction and support for the staff and students in her charge. As a community leader, she has taken her faith and belief and put into practice that which she so dearly holds as a core value: service to others.

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Dan Trainor

St. James Catholic Elementary School, Niagara CDSB

Dan Trainor has been a student, educational assistant, teacher, resource teacher, vice-principal and principal with the Niagara Catholic DSB. His various roles within the board give him a unique perspective as an administrator. For the past two years, he has served as principal at St. James Catholic Elementary School in St. Catharines. In this short time, he has promoted community building and parent involvement through activities such as a family BBQ, a family movie night, a pasta night, a trivia night and invitations to participate in monthly liturgies prepared by the students. At Christmas the school held a family night, where families celebrated their children's gifts and talents displayed through music, drama and art. St. James was chosen as one of the pilot schools for the Niagara Catholic Regional School Council Parent Reaching Out Project.

Whenever Dan deals with students he has an intuitive sense of each individual student's needs and helps them build their self-confidence. As a school leader with a background in all aspects of education, he campaigns tirelessly on behalf of the students and families of students with special needs. He is able to bring the needs of the student to the forefront of any discussion. Dan is willing to employ a variety of strategies and work with many agencies to ensure that the school day is productive and enjoyable for all students in his care. Two letters of support from parents of children with special needs illustrate this quality. Both of their sons had been enrolled in the private Arrowsmith School for students with learning disabilities. The boys made tremendous strides in this program, but the school did not reopen for the 2007-08 school year. These parents shopped around both the public and Catholic school boards for a placement that would meet the needs of their sons. The boys had flourished in an environment of only 10 students and the same teacher for the past three years. Dan welcomed the boys into his school and assured the parents that he would personally see that they adjusted to their new school. One parent wrote:

What we found (at St. James) was a culture of respect and acceptance. It quickly became clear to us that Dan walks the talk. He assured us that our son would be made to feel welcome and valued, and he has. Dan takes the time to visit him in the classroom, talk to him and listen to him. He monitors him at recess and reports to us on how he is coping socially. Dan makes us feel like our son is



the most important student in the school. Dan appears to have unlimited time and energy to devote to us. The most surprising thing we have found is that this attitude is consistent throughout the school. The teachers are warm and responsive as are the kids. Our son decided to try out for the cross-country running team this year, which was a huge and pleasant surprise for us. He had never had the desire to compete in anything before, let alone join a team. Although his running is slow, he was accepted on the team and allowed to race at the meet. Dan, knowing that he would be one of the slow ones, closely watched the race to be sure our son would not become discouraged. When Dan saw that was happening part way through the race, Dan joined him and finished the race. Now our son is keen to practice and do better next year.

At the system level, Dan has been instrumental in organizing the board's "Speak Out" public speaking program for the past 10 years. He has served as chair of the Junior Curriculum Council for the past two years. Dan also sat on three subject councils, the elementary program council and the 150 Plus Years of Catholic Education Committee.

Dan often demonstrates his leadership through service to others. He leads by example and all that he asks in return is for his staff and students to do their very best. He is an inspiration to the people who are fortunate enough to work with him.

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Congratulations to the four CPCO recipients of Canada's Outstanding Principal Award 2008. They now join the previous winners in the National Academy of Principals. Throughout the year, these outstanding principals will continue to act as champions of the program. They will also participate in ongoing discussions about leadership issues through an online forum and will be involved in mentoring colleagues in their home schools. Thank you to those who took the time to contribute to the nominations of these four outstanding principals.