



# 2007-08

## A Great Year for “Whines”

Any good trial lawyer will tell you that one should never ask a question to which the answer is not already known. This same adage also proves valuable in the arena of political advocacy. I must confess that I was not quite prepared for the response when I challenged one of our prominent education partners to give me his assessment as to how principals and vice-principals were viewed by senior administrators and government officials. He responded pointedly, “Honestly, principals are often viewed as a bunch of whiners.” A number of responses came to mind but it was his opinion and, as such, not subject to debate. Instead, I chose to use the comment as an opportunity for introspection as to where we find ourselves ten years after our April 1, 1998 birth as an organization.

The current role of the principal (which likely will have changed again by the time this article reaches your hands) barely resembles my job description on that fateful day when I signed away my union rights and leaped headlong into a world of political and, by extension, personal uncertainty. In all fairness, I do not think that senior administrators of the day knew quite what to think of the newest members of their *management team*. Terms and conditions varied from personal service contracts and comprehensive consultations to one page statements placed in mailboxes with no discussion at all. We fought to shed the vestiges of unionism yet really had no specific horse to hitch our wagon to in the management world. It was from this turmoil of the Harris years that CPCO was born.

As I look back over the last ten years, I cannot help but be struck by the irony that the plight of principals and vice-principals is set within the context of remarkable gains in the education community as a whole. Primarily, the level of student achievement has increased and more students are graduating than ever before. The subtle shift in focus from teaching practices to learning practices has paid great dividends. As an aside, CPCO can be proud of the fact that we have come to be recognized as leaders in the development and implementation of professional learning programs. Parent engagement and community involvement are on the rise and our relationship with our Catholic partners is undergoing a welcome resurgence. Teacher collective agreements now arguably provide our front line workers with fair compensation and the time required to meet the many challenges of new initiatives. For principals, however, how much has really changed?

I guess this is where the *whining* starts. CPCO does not have a full-time government relations officer to lobby on behalf of our

members. The little time that we spend with politicians and government bureaucrats is generally spent consulting on issues with which we have questions or concerns. I would also note that we are very cognizant of the fact that it is imperative that our comments and concerns be set in the context of student achievement if we are to have individual and organizational credibility. Our other reality is that, if you examine the terms and conditions under which we work carefully, not much has changed since 1998. This is not a financial discussion but rather a commentary on the gray world in which we continue to find ourselves. New vice-principals leave the protection of their union jobs with the same trepidation that I did ten years ago. Responsibilities continue to scaffold, family pressures grow, personal wellness declines, and principals and vice-principals ask with all due respect, “When is it our turn?”

Now, lest you think that it is my intent to end my term of office on a negative note, I offer the following observations as a direct commentary on the hope that 2007-08 may turn out to be a great vintage year for *whines* after all.

- Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne has made a point of being available to CPCO. I am hopeful that she will be of assistance on a few key items of concern that we have shared with her. It is also worthy to note that she continues to publicly voice her support for Catholic education in Ontario. I am gratified to see the term “publicly funded education” now replacing “public education” in government publications.
- Deputy Minister Steve Marshall has recently committed to give principals a voice at the commencement of policy thinking. I am pleased with his acknowledgement of the importance of the role of the principal and their day-to-day concerns.
- Our Catholic partners at ECCODE, OCSCOA and OCSTA are eager listeners and have often advocated on our behalf. I am convinced that future improvements to the role of the principal lie in these partnerships.
- Government bureaucrats are slowly but surely breaking down ministry silos and speaking in terms of alignment and consolidation. CPCO is taking a lead role in these consultations.

It is evident that good schools do not exist without good principals. It is equally evident that we have very many good schools. I wish all of you a well-deserved summer break and I look forward to next year’s vintage *whines* with guarded optimism.