



By **Nelly Kelders**, Member Services Director

# You Were Saying...

In today's electronic world there are many ways to stay attuned of the latest in news and information. Blackberries, cell phones, wireless laptops, blogs, electronic newsletters, email, surveys and chat rooms all add to our ability to receive instant communications about the world around us. It also means that the office or job is always within reach. Gone are the days of "It's in the mail." or "How was I suppose to know?" Everything seems to be at our electronic fingertips. Just how useful is all this information and data that swirls around us? More importantly how do we compete for the precious little time people have to access the various forms of communication? Some people prefer hard copy while others want everything delivered electronically. Some want their information delivered on a regular basis while others would rather receive it less frequently. Meeting the needs of all is not an easy task for the communicator. However, at the end of the day, everyone wants to be kept informed. There in lies the dilemma.

The Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario through its Communications Committee conducted a review of the communications offered to its members. The intent of the survey was to gather data to determine which forms of communication are most effective and useful to our members. The feedback will assist in forming plans for improvements in how information and knowledge is communicated to the membership at all levels.

This survey was conducted in February 2008 and more than 730 members responded to the 24 questions. The largest group of respondents was the elementary principals who made up just over 50 per cent. Secondary vice-principals were the next largest group with a response rate of 17.5 per cent. More than 60 per cent of those who completed the survey have seven years or less of experience in school administration. The survey was completed by members of all but one association, thus providing a provincial perspective of views.

The first series of questions dealt with communications between the local representative on the CPCO Council of District Representatives (CDR) and his/her members. One of the responsibilities of the CDR is to act as a liaison between the local association and the CPCO Executive Council. The majority of members indicated that they did not receive or were not aware of the information being distributed following the November 2007 Council of District Representatives meeting.

The following are samples of comments on how members perceive the CDR communications.

*"Often it is not the way that you communicate the info it's just simply that the day gets too busy to read all of the communications*

*by the CDR. E-mail is still for me the best means of communication. A hard copy would be a good idea as I would be able to read this later in the evening."*

*"I believe our reps are doing an excellent job!"*

*"We meet as a group only a few times a year. So if we are waiting for a meeting to receive info it is usually too late. I think the info usually gets lost in the shuffle."*

*"I think the council does a pretty good job at getting the information out to its members"*

*"In our board, secondary representation has seemed to have been left out. Our elementary counterparts dominate our representation."*

*"Perhaps an executive summary could be sent to CDRs the Monday after a meeting which they could then share with their membership."*

*"I really appreciated the summary that was given from the CDR meeting. It ensured all info could readily be communicated."*

*"With new CDRs every year, it might be a good idea to give them direction on how to communicate to their local membership."*

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One of the functions of the president of the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario is to visit members in their own associations. These visits allow the president to share information about the work of CPCO as well as seek input and feedback from members on a variety of issues important to them. The members viewed this annual visit as important. The following are some of the comments received regarding the president's visits.

*"It is always nice to have the president visit our local association. Being in the north, it is a great way to feel "connected" and a part of everything that is taking place in southern Ontario on a daily basis. His/her visits also provide an opportunity to be informed and updated on the association's priorities, issues of concern, service and advocacy."*

*"It is important for the group to feel acknowledged by the larger group. We need to hear that we are not alone in our work."*

*"It is always nice to get a provincial perspective and have the opportunity to ask questions relevant to our area. I would strongly recommend that this practice continues."*

*"It is important for the president to visit each school board to appreciate the diversity as well as commonalities of the various regions. The meeting also provides an opportunity for local*

members to share face-to-face the needs of the local members as well as to be informed of provincial level activities.”

“I like hearing directly the issues of concern and being able as an association to give voice to our local issues and see where CPCO may stand.”

“Leadership from CPCO is vital if we are going to grow as an organization. To hear from the president is extremely important.”

“It is so important for the local association members to have contact because each association has unique issues which need to be heard and expressed.”

“It is always good for the person in charge to hear directly from members... hear the passion behind their concerns and see just how many members share the same thoughts, vision etc. Numbers on a piece of paper do not always have the same effect.”

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Every Wednesday an electronic magazine (ezine) is published and sent directly to members through email. Members may also access the ezine through the CPCO website. The intent of this communication is to keep members informed of issues, advocacy, opportunities and professional learning that may be relevant to them. More than 95 per cent of members indicated that they read portions of or the entire ezine each week. When asked to comment on this form of communication members provided the following statements.

“It is easy to access and readily available when I have time to read. It keeps an important link to the issues and is extremely informative.”

“Excellent. Good use of technology. Very good summary of CPCO business and professional information. Regular and consistent publication. I look forward to the updates.”

“I just don't have time to read it. I don't have time to read the Ministry and Board documents as well. Work load issues!”

“It saves paper therefore it is a better way to communicate with people. I do like the hard copy though as it's easier to pull old articles to use with staff members.”

“I don't always have time to go through the links to read the entire articles, but I almost always scroll down and read the introduction, then when there is something I really need to know about, I link to it. I really appreciate this format!”

“I like the opportunity to pick and choose those items that are of personal interest. I particularly like the president's journal and the faith reflection piece. Don't stop including this item in the magazine. Many times the reflection piece is of significant value and worth for me on a personal level. I enjoy reading each entry. It provides me with an opportunity to “reflect” on many faith issues in my own life.”

“I appreciate this format as it allows me to read it when I have the time and it keeps me informed about the work CPCO does. A professional learning piece for me.”

“It is an excellent communication device. It's always up-to-date and pertinent to Catholic principals and vice-principals.”

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Principal Connections is CPCO's quarterly magazine that is sent directly to the homes of its members. Members are invited to submit articles to the magazine. It can also be accessed electronically through the CPCO website. The entire issue or selected articles are read by more than 90 per cent of members. More than 70 per cent of members have also indicated that they share the issue or articles with their staffs. The following comments were offered regarding Principal Connections.

“This is a valuable communication tool. I often carry the current issue with me until I am done reading it. It keeps me informed of the new trends and concerns about our profession and about the field of Ontario education.”

“The topics of the articles are usually around topics that impact on what is happening in my school or system which make them of high interest to me. I value this resource and look to it for ideas and suggestions.”

“Some interesting and useful reads! From the latest issue, I have saved the article on balanced day. This is something I'd like to bring to my staff for consideration.”

“I love receiving a professional publication which is so relevant to my everyday tasks! It's great PD for me!”

“I enjoy reading the articles written by principals and vice-principals. I also like to read about legal issues. Good information is shared and it is nice to see what schools are doing down South.”

“I really enjoy reading about school initiatives and how they were implemented by practicing “real” principals.”

“I have used many articles to share with colleagues on leadership, to share with school council on actions within our province and to share with teachers to support a more global knowledge of events and activities. It supports my work and initiatives.”

“Valuable resource and something I look forward to. I like the commentary by the president and executive director in particular for the most current information around and about the province.”

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The final area members were asked to comment on was the CPCO website. While the majority of participants indicated that the site was easy to navigate, more than 40 per cent said they rarely visited it. They recognized the value of the information available on the website in both the public and private sections. They offered the following comments.

“Our Board has subscribed us for the Administrator's Toolkit and I use that frequently. It's especially valuable for a beginning principal! Thank you!”

"E-mail arrives at me so I have to go to the website. Hence the best way for me to connect and keep up to date is via e-mail magazines."

"It is a wonderful resource. I am the one who has to go online more often!"

"It is difficult to find the items you might be looking for quickly."

"I have very rarely accessed it due to the pace of the job."

"I don't use it much, but it is a valuable resource to have available."

"A user friendly valuable resource for Catholic administrators."

"The website is a valuable tool. I use it regularly as I go about my daily tasks."



The CPCO survey ends with a question asking members for general comments so that they have the last word. This is what they had to say about the various forms of communication.

"I think every effort is made to maintain open lines of relevant and current communication and to make it available to members in a variety of ways."

"For such a large organization, CPCO does a commendable job reaching all of its members. Thank you for the continued hard work."

"The CPCO does an excellent job trying to communicate with its members; we just don't have the time to take advantage of everything that is available to us. The magazine is the one resource I use most frequently and I save the e-mails for future reference."

"I believe that our communications protocols and strategies are awesome. We are a very 'together' association because of this."

"CPCO executive does a very good job in keeping its members informed of what is happening within the organization as well as the developments of the Ministry that impacts the P/VP."

"Whenever I need to get information there are places I can go to find what I need. Communication is a strength in our organization."

"I am very new in the role but I like the idea of regular communications so that I know what is going on with administrators elsewhere."

"Keep up the great work to meet the many administrators across the province. The many ways you communicate with us can reach every member effectively in their best learning style."

## Share Your Story...

CPCO invites submissions to its quarterly magazine, *Principal Connections*. We are always looking for good news stories from our members across the province. Share your experiences, strategies and celebrations with your colleagues.

- If there has been a special event in your school or school community of provincial interest, tell us about it.
- If you or a colleague has received special recognition, spread the news.
- If you are especially proud of a staff member, a student, a project or a unique program, let us know.
- If you have met a special or difficult challenge in your school, your colleagues would like to hear about it.
- If you have read a book that you think would be of interest to the membership, send us a book review.
- If you know about an exciting story happening in the school of one of your colleagues, tell us. We'll follow up on your lead.

Articles should be approximately 700 words and pictures (minimum 300 dpi resolution) are always a great addition.

There are a number of ways to submit a story or article. You can write it yourself and e-mail it to [editor@cpco.on.ca](mailto:editor@cpco.on.ca). Don't have

time to write? Let us know and we can arrange to do an interview by telephone or in person if you are located close to the GTA. Some people prefer to submit the information in point form and ask us to do the writing.

Tell us your story through photos. Send us the pictures with a description of the activity. We truly appreciate all contributions by our members. Please understand, however, that submission does not automatically guarantee publication and we reserve the right to edit all material.

The deadline for articles for the fall issue of *Principal Connections* is July 4, 2008. If you have any submissions, questions or suggestions regarding *Principal Connections*, contact the editor through the CPCO office.

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Toll free: 1-888-621-9190

E-mail: [editor@cpco.on.ca](mailto:editor@cpco.on.ca)

**Happy writing!**