



L to R: Nelly Kelders, Steve Marshall, Marisa Celenza

## **MEET STEVE MARSHALL** Ontario's Deputy Minister of Education

Steve Marshall became Ontario's deputy minister of education on March 31, 2008. As deputy minister, he oversees a ministry with an \$18.8 billion budget and a staff of 1,700 that is focused on increasing student achievement, reducing the achievement gap for students who struggle and raising confidence in publicly-funded education.

Steve Marshall has spent his entire career in education. He started as an elementary teacher and principal in Australia working closely with all students to ensure they succeeded. He later accepted leadership positions in school boards and state governments in Australia; rising to chief executive of the Department of Education and Children's Services in South Australia. In this role he supported initiatives that improved literacy results and student retention.

In 2006 he moved to the United Kingdom to lead the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills with the Welsh Assembly Government. For two years he restructured the department and focused on reforms that benefited the education system at the school, community and national levels. These included new policies such as the *School Effectiveness Framework* and the *Pedagogy Initiative*.

Internationally he is regarded as an innovator and reformer in education. He holds a Master of Educational Administration and a Master of Business Administration from Deakin University. Currently he is completing a PhD at Melbourne University on school renewal with a focus on turning around low performance

schools in challenging circumstances. He speaks regularly at international education conferences.

Steve Marshall is a person who is passionate about his chosen career in education and making a difference to young people, to their outcomes and their well-being. He is also passionate about his family and the role that he plays in family life. Steve Marshall is married and has three children aged 15, 16 and 18 and two dogs. His children are completing their education in the publicly-funded education

system in Wales. As a citizen he cares deeply about equity and social justice and believes in relationships being central to the way that things get done. Steve Marshall is a person who thinks he is on the planet once and therefore the difference he makes is through the relationships he has. He feels lucky and blessed to be in the position of deputy minister of education in Ontario.

Steve Marshall's passion and dedication to the field of education are evident in his answers to our interview questions.

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**What are some of the differences you have observed between the education systems in Ontario, Wales and Australia?**

There are more commonalities than differences. The same sense of commitment and dedication of the teaching profession resides, no matter where you are in the world. If you choose to be a teacher or a principal and support education and teachers, that passion comes through. There are differences in nuances around policies, although fundamentally they are aiming for similar things. Improving literacy and numeracy and ensuring that students stay in school to complete their secondary education are common threads.

There are differences in culture that I have witnessed within Australia between the different provinces. Similarly in the UK there are differences in culture between Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. I gather there are differences in culture in Ontario between different boards and systems. Where the passion of teachers and leaders is enabled to flourish and grow, and is supported, you get a culture of optimism; a culture of belief that you can make a difference; and a willingness to go the extra mile. As opposed to cultures that might be undermined by a lack of cohesion about the purpose and importance of education. Sometimes there is a culture of them and us; between what occurs at the ministry and what occurs in a school. That does not help to build the type of alignment to a culture that enables the improvement that we are all after.

**What are your priorities for education in Ontario in the next three years?**

At the centre is energizing Ontario and reaching every child. It is about ensuring that the achievement levels of all of our students continue to grow while at the same time reducing the gap between those learners who are achieving most to least. Another priority is to ensure that the work we do enhances public confidence in publicly-funded education. I am going to ensure that we have alignment in our policies. I am going to build relationships and networks with principals, board directors, partners and unions. Surrounding those core areas will be other fundamental things that will help to energize education in Ontario. We need to build collaboration across government to support education. I will be looking at building partnerships with my colleagues in Children and Youth Services, the Ministry of Health Promotion and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities in a way which enables them to achieve their objectives, but with a focus on the student. I will be looking to deepen that collaboration across government and

wherever I can I will be open-minded, diplomatic, have a sense of humour and do as much good as I possibly can.

**What innovations would you like to see educators in Ontario tackle?**

It is probably too soon for me to talk about innovation in a precise way. Where I see innovation in a general way occurring, is particularly in the issue about how to close the gap. I do not believe there is an understanding of how to close the gap anywhere across the world. You will find that in certain classrooms, in certain schools and in certain clusters of schools, people have been able to make a real difference in closing that gap, but it is not done at a large scale. The innovation is how do we do that, how do we think our way forward, how do we invent and create new ways of approaching this dilemma, as opposed to just creating something which is an innovation, but in itself might be a distracter from our core purpose. If we innovate, it is in the context of improvement, to go deeper in our implementation, to go deeper in getting the results that we aspire to rather than just to create for creation sake.

**What do you see as the role of the principals' associations in Ontario's education system in the next three years?**

I envision a strong role for the principals' associations. It is paramount to our future that the voice of principals is heard in the development of policy and in providing advice about implementation of policy. Principals are community leaders, not just principals of their schools. I need to find ways of listening to the voice of the associations that represent them, supporting their role and making sure that things that emerge in the future are a consequence of our best collaborative thinking. Together with principals we can really create the type of future that is going to meet the aspirations of our community and the needs of education.

**CPCO is a partner in the Institute for Education Leadership. How do you envision this institute advancing the cause of tri-level leadership in Ontario?**

I am very committed to tri-level leadership. Aligning what occurs in schools, in boards and the ministry is critical. Therefore, it is looking at groups who can enhance that particular cause. First and foremost, it is the commitment to working that way. Then it is focusing that commitment around particular aspirations or dilemmas. If we talk about succession planning, then the ministry is already collaborating in a tri-level way about a

leadership strategy. The implementation of that leadership strategy has to be done at those particular sectors. It cannot be seen as just something that the profession owns or a particular body owns or a board owns or the ministry owns. It has to be us working together across those sectors to make a difference. Similarly we need to look at an opportunity of building the principal voice in a tri-level way through associations, but also through other mechanisms, where we are using our collective thinking about how to close the gap, how to reach higher and how to build public confidence. Respecting different accountabilities and different capacities to deliver our messages, we need to get these things tightly aligned in a tri-level way.



**Principal workload issues are a concern for school administrators. What advice would you give to principals and vice-principals to deal with work-life balance?**

“It is easier to say no, when there is a deeper yes burning within.” It is a matter of working out what your passion and priorities are. Most principals come into the role of principalship, because they really want to make a difference on a larger scale, across a school to the outcomes of learners and their well-being and to support teachers and therefore maximize the capacity of the outcome. They do that in the context of knowing that they are supporting families in their local community. This is really what motivates and drives principals, from my experience. Helping principals keep this as the main game and not to be caught by the distractions of a thousand things happening on a daily basis is one of the root challenges, but one of the great rewards when principals can actually achieve it. I have always worked on building the type of emotional maturity which enables me to say no to things, often with a smile. I am more strategic in endeavouring to do things where I am clearly going to have a more significant impact. When I am asked to take on a project, I have to decide whether it matches my personal vision and if it does and it matches the vision of the school, I take it on board. There are 168 hours in a week and any individual can only do a certain amount. Having your vision and your priorities established and being able to say no are critical. This is different from managing your time. On the well-being side of things, I could write a book for you.

Any principal worth their salt is not going to be productive in the long haul unless they choose to manage themselves. If they cannot choose to find a minimum of three time-slots of 30 to 45 minutes per week to exercise, they are a bad manager of self. If they cannot find the time to be home with their partner, their families and their personal circumstances, they are not a good manager. There are fluctuations of time where people will have to stay later, work

weekends or get in early; we all do in professional lives. If that becomes a habitual pattern and therefore other parts of a person’s life become undermined, then it undermines the impact of the principalship and the work they do. Principals ought to build appointments with themselves and their families into their schedules. They should understand when they are most productive and organize their workload in relation to that. They ought to feel confident in taking time to catch up with urgent and important activities that relate to family and other commitments that sometimes they will not be able to do unless they do it within the normal working day.

Balance is also in what you eat, good nutrition. It is about your professional

learning and investing in yourself to keep growing and learning. It is about learning how to be silent and to reflect. It is learning how to listen and not talk. It is learning how to control the adrenaline that runs through your system which says, “I need to hurry. I need to do more.” You can only do so much. This balance occurs through a combination of mentorship, experience, personal reflection and making mistakes, because you learn from the mistakes. If you are the type of person who worries about mistakes or who worries about too much, then invariably you will find yourself constantly on the treadmill of trying to do more and more and more. In the end people have to take a professionally and personally responsible decision of saying, “This is what I can do.” Principals need to role model good behaviour to others in terms of work-life balance.

**Succession planning in education is becoming an issue as more principals leave the profession for retirement. What suggestions do you have to encourage teachers to move into leadership roles?**

The role of the principal in promoting the profession is critical. At times there are unintended consequences for the way in which principals model or discuss the principalship. If teachers see principals scurrying from one meeting to another, rushing around the school, staying until midnight and not attending to personal well-being, then it is easy to understand why some will say, “This is not for me.” Principals have a professional responsibility to model the type of behaviour that says this particular job is absolutely rewarding, enjoyable, complex and challenging, but it is worth doing and you can find time for yourself. You can in fact choose to have life balance, albeit there are times when it might be up and down. We have a professional responsibility to nurture the profession for the future. We need to nurture young people who start in the profession. We need to coach and mentor them. We need to ensure that principals model and acknowledge the rewards of what it is to be a principal because quite often we can be tempted to talk about the things that are not the rewards, but the challenges.

**Keeping up with professional learning can be a challenge as there are so many demands on the life of a school administrator. What do you consider to be the key aspects of learning for principals and vice-principals today?**

Any professional learning that enables principals to develop practices and behaviours that are more inclusive is fundamental. We have a society that is diverse and a community that is very complex. Staff, parents and students coming into schools and classrooms require principals to be able to adapt, respond to, listen to and include in a non-judgemental way, people from a variety of backgrounds. Therefore professional learning should build a person's intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. The capacity to actively listen and counsel, to coach and mentor, to be able to manage oneself as well as another are other elements. Building on that bedrock are elements of instructional leadership: knowing how best to use student data for improvement; knowing how best to organize and arrange professional learning for teachers; and to do the instructional practices, which improve learning. This is a fundamental piece of every principal's toolkit for development. We are constantly learning new things about learning, about neuroscience, nutrition and fitness, and well-being. There are other aspects of content which can benefit the principal's ongoing learning. How best to use strategic resources for learning outcomes. How best to engage the community in the quest for supporting and improving schools. How best to network with colleagues to make a difference beyond one's own school and to see oneself as a professional educator, not just as a principal of a particular school and how to influence those agendas.

**What books would you recommend to school administrators as a must read?**

There are some classics which I have found personally very influential in the way I think about leadership, management and management of self. The first would be *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey. I think that is an excellent book. His son, Stephen M. R. Covey has written a book called *The Speed of Trust*, which is also excellent. Another business book I think had a profound influence was *From Good to Great* by Jim Collins. I have read a number of books around leadership and management, about personal well-being and management, and about nutrition that are all worthy reads. Victor Frankel's *Man's Search for Meaning* is another. Every day I read what I call inspirational reading. I will spend a minimum of fifteen to twenty minutes reading something that I find uplifting, which puts me into a mental frame of mind which nurtures my optimism and sense of being. Some people argue that you should read an hour a day outside of the normal work day. If you were able to do that you would get through a few books a week. If you did that over a year or several years and you were able to apply some of the lessons learned, imagine the impact that would have.

There should be a blend of fiction and non-fiction. Fiction that enables you to get into your imagination space, which enables a person's creativity to come to the fore, is important. We are

all creative people and it is through fiction that imagination can be explored. It can actually take you totally and utterly away from your present thinking and put you in a different place. That in itself can be quite exhilarating. However if you are reading something that is fiction, but brings a sense of despondency, of hopelessness in you, then I would urge you not to read that type of fiction, because it can only undermine a person in the long haul.

**How would you envision a graduate of Ontario's publicly-funded education system?**

They would be a confident person and would know that they have a pathway to the future, whether it is work or further learning. They would be articulate in a way which would enable others listening to them to know that they have received a good, grounded, well-balanced education from the publicly-funded education system. They would be diplomatic and polite. They would be respectful, capable of asking questions and putting forward a point of view. They would do all of these things in the context of having the basic knowledge of what it means to be a good citizen in today's modern economy. That is knowledge of mathematics and its importance, knowledge of society and history, and knowledge of self and personal well-being. The curriculum knowledge that we believe is important today will manifest itself in our students, where people see them and think, "I want this student to work for me. I want this student to be part of my team. I actually want to have a conversation with this learner because this learner carries their own sense of presence and self-identity."

**What advice do you have for school administrators as they begin a new year?**

Begin with optimism and hope that their individual efforts and support they provide to others is going to make a difference to the lives of the students in their care. Keep their own personal vision with them every day and in the actions that they take. Analyse student achievement data and know where they can add value to the work of teachers in a more precise or a more personal way. Reflect on the data and work further to support their staff to deliver well-being in outcomes for the learners.

**Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself or your plans as deputy minister of education that we have not touched upon?**

I love my move to Ontario and I find living in the city of Toronto very enjoyable. This is a very good education system. The educators who have been working tirelessly in recent years should be extraordinarily proud of belonging to a system that is world-recognized. Often people do not realize how successful it is because they are so busy working in it and on it. Coming from outside of Ontario, I have been well aware of its success and commitment for years and I am privileged to be a part of it. It is a privilege to be a leader. It is a privilege to be a deputy minister. I am so grateful to be a part of such a professional group of people.