



The Institute for Education Leadership  
L'Institut de leadership en éducation

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# SUCCESSION PLANNING EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The researchers looked at demographics to develop the following profiles of principals:

## English-language Principals

- As of 2005-06, there were 4,385 principals in Ontario schools.
- Eighty-three per cent were in elementary schools, 17 per cent in secondary schools.
- On average, principals are 50 years-of-age.
- They have close to 25 years of experience in education.
- As of this year (2008), 37 per cent of elementary school principals are eligible to retire.
- Almost 50 per cent of secondary school principals are eligible to retire.
- By 2011, 69 per cent of Catholic secondary school principals will be eligible to retire, and 61 per cent of elementary school principals.
- Two-thirds of elementary school principals are women.
- Forty-four per cent of secondary school principals are women.
- From 2009 to 2017, 10 to 15 per cent of principals will be eligible to retire over each successive three-year period.

## French-language Principals

- There were 393 principals in French-language schools in Ontario in 2005-06.
- Seventy-eight per cent were in elementary schools, and 22 percent in secondary schools.
- On average, principals are 46-years-old and have 19 to 20 years of experience.
- Almost 50 per cent of these principals will be eligible to retire beginning in 2018.
- Sixty per cent of elementary school principals are women; 60 per cent of secondary school principals are men.

Recent studies have predicted that 80 per cent of all elementary and secondary principals practicing in Ontario in 2001 will have retired by 2009. In view of the fact that principals and vice-principals are critical to the development of excellence in teaching and in the schools, this prediction is alarming.

In response, Ontario's Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) in partnership among principals' associations, supervisory officers' associations, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) and the Ministry of Education, commissioned a study to explore succession planning in the province.

Over the past several years the IEL has established the Leadership Framework for school and school system leaders, not only in Ontario but internationally. This study is the touchstone of that initiative.

The purposes of the study are to determine:

- demographic profiles of the current cadre of Ontario's educational leaders;
- succession-planning practices in a sample of Ontario school boards, and in the literature;
- factors that motivate people to aspire to education leadership; and
- barriers that discourage people from applying for and assuming leadership roles in education.

In 2007 there were approximately 17,000 members of the Ontario College of Teachers who held principal's qualifications and about 56 per cent were 50 years-of-age or older. A surprising number of those who hold principal qualifications, however, do not apply for leadership positions. This has resulted in a shortage of well-qualified potential candidates for these positions in many areas of the province.

Especially in rural boards, a number of leadership positions have been reduced due to declining enrolment, creating a situation where there are fewer opportunities for advancement to senior administrative positions. In some areas, distance and the necessity for relocation also complicate the issue, both in terms of acquiring qualifications and in subsequent placement.

The research examined succession-planning practices by interviewing representatives from 20 school boards - French, English, public, Catholic, urban, rural, large and small. A total of 153 French-language principals, vice-principals and supervisory officers, and 1,220 English-language counterparts completed online surveys to highlight their boards' succession planning policies and practices as well as their opinions on what motivates and discourages potential leaders.

This document summarizes these survey results and identifies major observations. It also suggests strategies that can be adopted to strengthen succession planning and leadership development.

The study indicates that among the reasons educators are motivated to become principals or vice-principals are: contributing to student growth and achievement; making a difference in the lives of others; providing instructional leadership to staff; working as an agent of change; working with parents and the community; contributing to system-wide initiatives; and being challenged and stretched professionally. Catholic school administrators also identified the board's vision, mission and Catholic education values as motivators.

Practicing principals and vice-principals identified major disincentives as: managing and implementing changes the province mandated; the availability of resources; and the time demands of the job.

It is interesting to note that the management of change was an incentive for some and a disincentive for others.

Additional potential barriers identified in an Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) study include the loss of seniority if an administrator decides to return to the classroom and the pressure of administrative duties that impinge on their mandate to be instructional leaders.

In a similar study by the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) time-management issues was a key disincentive. The participants identified four tasks that took them away from their central role as instructional leaders:

- supervision of students during personal time because of collective agreement issues;
- responsibilities such as EQAO, teacher recruitment, transportation and health and safety concerns;
- the overload of initiatives coming from the Ministry and the board that do not take existing initiatives and school improvement plans into consideration; and
- duties downloaded due to the cut in consultant and supervisory officer positions.

Ontario's French-language school boards identified four additional obstacles to succession planning.

- The effect of certification requirements limits the pool of qualified people.
- Candidates can only be selected from the field of education.
- There is a shortage of qualified teachers.
- The fact that most teachers do not want to apply for leadership positions was cited.

Additional factors for all groups included:

- job stress;
- community issues of poverty, lack of family supports, difficulty of satisfying parents – all of which divert attention from instructional issues;
- inadequate funding and resources;
- limited ability to exercise autonomy;
- costs associated with earning qualifications; and

- difficult management/union relationships.

School boards across the country are experiencing similar succession-planning problems and have been looking at best practices not only from the field of education but from business as well. Some school board practices to address the shortage of school administrators include:

- recalling retired principals to fill vacancies;
- developing leadership standards/qualifications to select and hire administrators (Ontario, B.C. Alberta);
- adopting mentoring, coaching and induction programs to encourage applicants (Ontario);
- requiring potential principals to complete leadership courses (Ontario);
- giving potential leaders leadership roles within their schools and school system to develop their skills;
- granting teachers a two-year leave of absence to try leadership positions and then allowing them to return to teaching without loss of seniority (Quebec); and
- making qualified teachers vice-principals, regardless of a school's size, to give them leadership experience (Saskatchewan).

The need to recruit people from diverse backgrounds that reflect the community they serve was emphasized. This includes a balance of men, women and minorities, especially visible minority candidates.

Some common mistakes in succession planning were identified by the *Conseil des ressources humaines du secteur culturel*. They include:

- failing to tell people they are being considered for a leadership role, so possible candidates leave before they are offered a new job;
- underestimating the talent that exists within the organization to help with succession planning;
- being close-minded about who could fill a position;
- concentrating on specialized, not general competencies;
- waiting for potential candidates to identify themselves; and
- failing to offer adequate training and professional development.

Looking at the practices of a number of different Ontario school boards, the following suggestions and advice are provided.

1. In developing their human resources management plans, boards need to give attention to the diversity of their population to ensure that they are reaching out to hire and build capacity in young people who represent their community. Such outreach strategies should include attention to providing for a balance of young men and women and to the establishment of programs to promote education as a viable career for young men. This notion applies equally to outreach to minority and particularly visible minority communities.
2. As the paradigm shifts towards a more balanced accountability framework, leadership training focused on collegial and collaborative approaches will need to take precedence. An intergenerational difference in approaches to leadership has been identified. Younger, newly-appointed administrators have expressed a clear preference for engagement and a more democratic work place.
3. Boards need to give attention to how they can balance the administrative responsibilities for managing a school so that principals can devote more time and resources to their key responsibility, that of instructional leader. Some jurisdictions seek to streamline operational procedure. Other jurisdictions (e.g., the U.K.) have introduced additional roles in the school office to take responsibility for and manage many of the administrative tasks. Both approaches have merit and should be explored further, with this caution: if consideration is given to adding administrative support to school offices, attention must be given to clearly delineating the nature and scope of these responsibilities, lines of authority need to be established, and resources must be provided to train principals in the best ways to use these additional resources.
4. There is a need to establish and maintain a comprehensive, systematic and consistent database about school and system administrators across the province.
5. In order to further facilitate succession planning, the study identified a need to talk directly with two specific groups: those who aspire to become principals but have not yet taken their qualifications, and those who have their qualifications and have potential leadership talent but have chosen not to pursue an administrative career.
6. This study provides important information on the current state of succession planning and highlights many areas where school boards must concentrate in order to provide strong and vibrant leadership in our schools in the future.