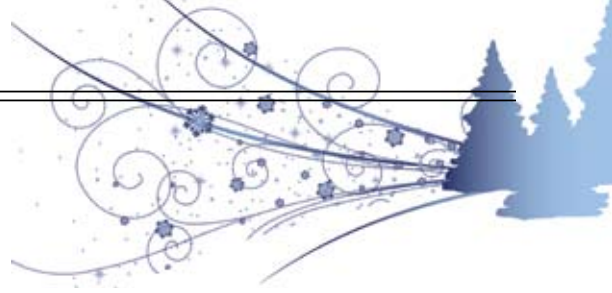




Joan Duckitt
CPCO President



All I Want For Christmas...

Christmas music echoes in the background and I wait for an inspiration to wash over me. I find myself humming (of all things) the tune of *All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth*.

My mind drifts. "All I want for Christmas is...better terms and conditions of employment for all principals and vice-principals in the province of Ontario."

The Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario has been calling for improved working conditions for principals and vice-principals since the submission of the *Role of the Principal Discussion Paper* in 2004. We called for training and support for newly appointed leaders, standards for personal services contracts and alignment of initiatives to reduce workload. It went on to say:

School boards must offer terms and conditions of employment that allow principals and vice-principals to undertake their responsibilities without fear of arbitrary discipline, demotion or termination. Bill 160 removed the right to retain seniority if they returned to the classroom. This loss, coupled with declining enrolment in the province, puts prospective school leaders at risk when they cross the one-way bridge to school administration. It is important for the government to address employment conditions if it wants good teachers to consider school leadership.

In December 2005 the Ministry responded to our submission and that of others in the document *Excellence For All (Leading Education)*. It proposed that:

Standards for personal service contracts be set in regulation; and a standard basis for performance appraisals be set for principals and vice-principals, reflecting common professional expectations. In addition, at a certain stage in the career of principals, a form of 'earned security' should be offered to those who have met performance appraisal requirements.

The standards for personal service contracts were intended to address issues of job security/protection, dispute resolution and due process. The last update from the Ministry (August 2007), reported that consultations were scheduled for the fall of 2007. We have yet to be consulted on the standards of personal service contracts. It remains to be seen whether these consultations will be part of the *Ontario Leadership Strategy*.

In a time of declining enrolment, when the *Ontario Leadership Strategy* challenges us to attract the best people to leadership in our education system, we continue to lobby for the opportunity

for good teachers to "try-on" the role with the option to return to teaching, if warranted, without penalty or loss of seniority.

Today across the province, principals and vice-principals continue to identify workload as the most significant issue facing them. This is also cited as a major deterrent for those discerning the role. We continue to monitor the allocation of vice-principals and full-time principals, and the use of funding in the administration line. We continue to ask for alignment of the many Ministry initiatives.

Thankfully, we *are* seeing the attention and support for newly appointed leaders that we called for in 2004, realized in the mentoring and coaching initiative. CPCO has played a key role in this initiative. We will continue to be available to support boards as they move forward with succession planning.

Work has begun on the provincial Principal/Vice-principal Performance Appraisal. At CPCO's suggestion, a working team consisting of the principal associations, supervisory officer associations and directors that mirrors the tri-level leadership approach of the Institute for Education Leadership has begun work on the "unsatisfactory performance" section of the appraisal. We have also begun discussing some minimum standards for terms and conditions of employment.

If the education sector is truly intent on increasing student achievement, lowering the gap and increasing public confidence in publicly-funded education, and recognizes principals as second only to teachers in impacting this, then the government and boards must address the working conditions of school administrators.

We welcome the attention that this government is giving to leadership in education as announced in its *Ontario Leadership Strategy*, and remain cautiously optimistic that our concerns as originally outlined in our *Role of the Principal Paper* will finally be addressed.

My mind floats back to my Christmas message. The words from the Christmas carols remind me of the silent night that the baby Jesus was born, of the innkeeper who missed the opportunity to see the greatness of His birth, of the star that guided the Wise Men to Him, and of the angels that sang at the awesome wonder of it all.

The carols seem to romanticize the birth of Jesus, presenting the event like a fairy tale. However, I know that to celebrate Jesus' birth also means to celebrate his life and death, and then to reflect on what that means in our lives. That is the true challenge of Christmas.

Have a blessed and safe Christmas.