

# And the Survey Said...

From time-to-time the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario surveys its members to request feedback on services provided or issues of concern to principals and vice-principals. In June 2009 one such survey was sent to 1,915 regular members asking them to comment on communications, issues and professional learning. The survey questions were developed in consultation with two of CPCO's standing committees, professional services and member security, and the professional staff at CPCO. Responses were received from 44 per cent of those to whom the invitation to participate was extended. The data will assist in planning services for members in 2009-10.

## COMMUNICATIONS

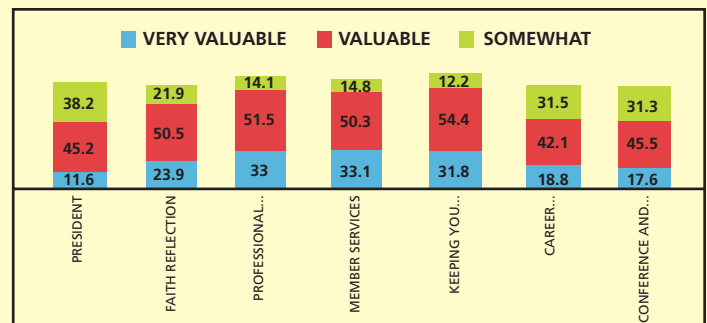
Keeping members informed of the work of CPCO and providing them with knowledge and resources that will impact on their work is an important service. A variety of methods is used to achieve this goal including face-to-face meetings in the form of consultations with the council of district representatives and the president's visits to local associations, as well as electronic and print media.

The council of district representatives (CDRs) meets in Toronto twice a year, November and February. At these meetings the CDRs receive information from the executive council and provide feedback on issues and services. They in turn take the information back to their local associations to share and discuss. The survey results indicated that email is the most common form of communication between the CDR and local association members (48.6 per cent). Just over 33 per cent of members reviewed the CDR agenda prior to the meetings. Almost 34 per cent of members indicated they were invited to give input to their CDR regarding the topics on the agenda. These statistics are much the same as those gathered in a similar survey in 2008. One exception this time has been the comments from vice-principals who feel disadvantaged because they do not attend the principals' meetings. Suggestions were discussed with the CDRs at their November meeting as to what strategies could be employed to ensure that vice-principals receive information and the opportunity for input in a timely fashion.

The annual visit of the president to local associations is increasingly important to members. Forty per cent indicated they always attend this meeting, a five per cent increase over last year. Vice-principals in some jurisdictions indicated that it is more difficult for them to attend the meeting with the president as they do not attend principals' meetings. The president's annual visit is an important avenue through which CPCO communicates directly to members regarding the services offered and the advocacy provided. The comments offered by members will be used to assist the president in preparing for his visits.

- *VPs cannot attend due to the meeting taking place while they are at school. Only principals attend.*
- *Very important for smaller boards to get the provincial perspective.*
- *It is not necessary to have these visits each year. Does this not cost us, the members, a lot of money to send this person around the province? Perhaps the president could visit half the boards one year and the other half the next year.*
- *They are always very informative and provide a "big picture" view of the principal's role and the provincial perspectives.*
- *Often repetitive, talking about services available from CPCO; would prefer "current issues."*
- *Enjoy the visits. Would like to know specifically what the president will be addressing at the meeting. That way, we can be better prepared. Like the personal connection that is made through his/her visit.*
- *Very beneficial. Opportunity to hear the provincial perspective on CPCO initiatives/issues and how CPCO provincial is advocating for members regarding Ministry proposals. Also the face-to-face makes northern members feel more in-the-loop, being able to identify and converse personally with the president.*

**Catholic Principal's Connection** is CPCO's online weekly magazine (e-zine). The intent of this communication is to keep members informed of what is happening in the province politically and professionally. Its succinct format permits the reader to scan the page quickly and connect with the information of greatest interest and/or need.



While all topics in the e-zine are of value, the respondents indicated that Keeping You Informed, Professional Learning and Member Services were most highly valued.

- *Online magazine is a good service.*
- *The weekly format is user-friendly, short and effective.*
- *Great. I have shared resources, and used them at meetings. I find that for me it works and other administrators ask where I get these items. I lead them back to the site.*
- *This communication ensures that I have an opportunity to stay abreast of what is happening in the province.*
- *I find the journal very meaningful. I look forward very much to reading the articles. I think it is an excellent tool to keep us connected and in tune with current topics and issues.*
- *I really like the articles, especially on faith reflection.*

The results for CPCO's quarterly magazine, **PrincipalConnections**, also received high ratings. Members are particularly interested in articles on legal issues and professional learning. Areas members would like to read more about in upcoming issues of *PrincipalConnections* include:

- » legal including case studies;
- » faith development;

- » wellness, work/life balance;
- » instructional leadership vs. other demands and responsibilities;
- » political action;
- » school climate/leadership;
- » literacy and numeracy initiatives;
- » professional learning communities;
- » principal workload; and
- » dealing with difficult people.

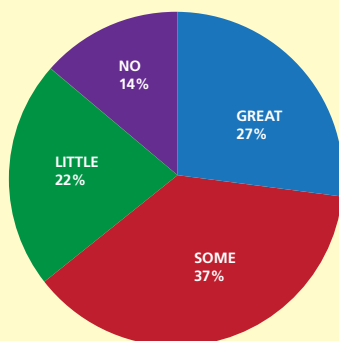
- *This magazine provides information on all current issues, upcoming events, new initiatives and information relevant to promoting excellence in Catholic leadership.*
- *This is a very professional magazine. I like the variety of articles. I would like more legal articles and articles about initiatives in schools.*
- *We need more dissenting voices, not just the ones that stroke the editorial ego.*
- *Keeps principals energized and updated.*
- *I love the magazine. It is the one thing that makes me feel connected to a larger association of people; perhaps that is just because of our remote location.*

## MEMBER SECURITY

The Member Security Committee posed three questions for the respondents.

### 1. Provincial Discussion Table

How have the post-Provincial Discussion Table (PDT) collective agreements impacted on your ability to manage your school?



- *Less decision-making, less control over my decisions, more responsibility, less resources, less motivation for staff.*
- *Too many to list, but all have impacted the role of the principal and have greatly increased principal workload; many principals are dangerously close to burn out!*
- *Constant roadblocks in planning for effective instructional strategies and daily PD opportunities. With the increase in planning time, the instructional time is fragmented and diminished. Scheduling works around planning time rather than instructional time. The issue is no longer what's best for the students, but rather what's best for the teachers. Inadequate funding does not allow for the hiring of specialty teachers, hence*

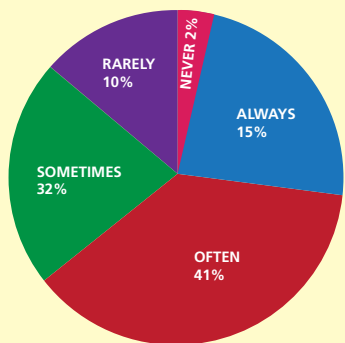
- *increased planning time adversely effects instructional time.*
- *The teacher contract has controlled any new initiatives and the manner in which professional learning can occur. Teachers will be receiving 210 minutes of prep and no more than 80 minutes of supervision. The principal is responsible for the safety of all students and therefore takes on extra duty. Annual learning plans are defined by OECTA as to how they should be completed; once again tying the hands of the administrator. In rural boards there are teaching principals, teaching a minimum of 350 minutes a week, yet we do not have planning time. There are benefits to being in a classroom, yet the needs of the school do not go away.*
- *The ability to ensure adequate and safe supervision is the biggest issue; the legal and moral responsibility I have in my role has become overwhelming.*
- *A great impact! Many items approved in the local agreement have been done so without consideration to implementation at the school level and the impact on the role and workload of school administrative teams. Workloads have needlessly increased. The result is very low P/VP morale, a tremendous feeling that we are not valued and that our professional opinions are not wanted. There is a definite "top down" senior administration approach with the powers of the principal greatly reduced and undervalued.*
- *Due to decreased on-calls, it is hard to maintain the level of supervision in the cafeteria. Also, based on the rate of teacher absence, due to both illness and school-related activities, supply costs will grow tremendously.*
- *There are so many things which impact negatively on principals' ability to manage schools. The restrictions on ability to meet with staff outside of school hours, the restrictions on time*

available for staff meetings, the restrictions on what teachers can be asked to do during their preparation time, the restrictions on how preparation time can be scheduled, the restrictions on what teachers can teach, etc. It is actually unbelievable how negatively these issues impact on the operation of the school and the ability to work on school improvement initiatives. It almost seems like the people involved in the development of the collective agreements have no idea about the actual working of a school.

- More time taken away from the critical roles of leadership and curriculum to put towards supervision and management!
- Great knowing what the expectations are for the next several years. Knowing there will not be labour disputes is great; fair and equitable settlements for all!

## 2. Tri-level Leadership

A collaborative team approach is essential in supporting effective leadership and it operates within a tri-level structure with school, board and provincial leadership. Leadership practices and competencies are distributed among members of school and system professional learning teams working together to accomplish goals. To what degree does your board reflect this type of leadership?



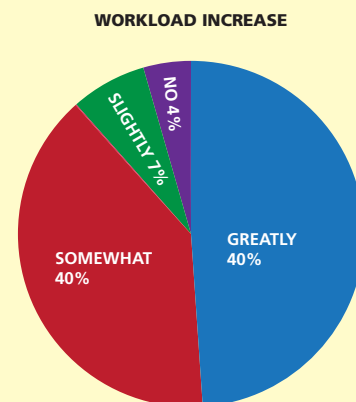
- Our school board senior executive believes in strong collaboration. They know that imposing change from the top is not an effective management practice. By collaborating with all stakeholders and empowering them in the process does get the job done as long as the principals' association and OECTA are on board and well treated.
- Pretty much top down. School team is able to work collaboratively towards ministry goals/board goals.
- Principals are told that they are part of the administrative team but find that we are more often told what to do or how to do it. This is not collaborative. The board tends to micro-manage too much and thereby fails to provide leadership in their own right because they do not have time to focus on shared leadership.
- The board is starting to ask us our input on matters more often.
- The teachers' union and the board support each other and have decided to dictate all aspects of leadership, curriculum, class organization, scheduling and supervision. Principals have no input.
- Our director has always spoken about collaboration and teamwork; therefore, this is nothing new!
- The board has paid lip service. Supervisory officers and the director were absent from the Catholic Leadership Framework

presentations at our board. Principals are ready to embrace a tri-level strategy, the ministry may be ready but our supervisory officers are not.

- Respect is inherent in tri-level leadership. The culture of my board does not embrace the philosophies of tri-level leadership and respect. Principals and vice-principals are often left out of the loop on major decisions that affect the school and system. The director seems to be adopting a top-down approach that you dare not question. Supervisory officers and human resources department are weak in their support of principals and vice-principals and appear to give in to union demands on most issues.
- We are given limited opportunity to provide feedback or input. Most times decisions are made by upper administration before we have an opportunity to provide input and rarely does our input change anything (although we are told that we are part of the administrative team.)
- The success of tri-level leadership depends on a director's ability to see the "big picture," to maximize the usefulness of principals, teacher-leaders and experts in various domains to work harmoniously at commonly held short and long term initiatives. Too often, Ministry or local initiatives are not logistically supported because the key board leader doesn't get it. This is not malicious in nature; it simply reflects an inability to pull the team together in an efficient and productive manner.
- They are very active in sharing the decision-making as it applies and consistently encourage us to take leadership roles at all levels.
- There is an effort being made to move towards this style of leadership, but it is unfamiliar to many in senior management levels.
- This board is very conscientious about seeking input from all parties affected by decisions. New initiatives are approached in a collaborative manner.

## 3. Principal Workload

Based on Ministry and board initiatives, how does your workload compare to a year ago?



- Each year the workload and demands increase. Collectively, over the span of 6 years, this workload has increased significantly.
- There always seems to be something else downloaded to the principals however as the years go by we get better at our jobs and develop capacity for this. Basically the job needs to get done and it does.

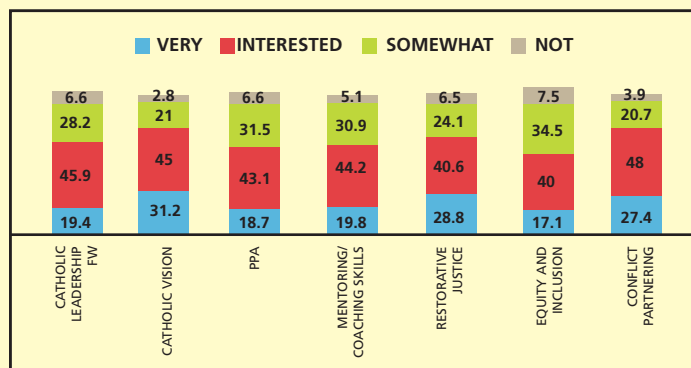
- Our board tends to want to “do it all.” Although this makes our board a leader in ministry initiatives, it is exhausting. Again we are not consulted, we are told what to do.
- I believe managing workload goes hand in hand with years of experience.
- Every day is an 11-hour workday.
- It is overwhelming and impossible to do.
- I have been in education for 32 years... an administrator for 18 years. I could have retired last June. I want to continue for another two years, but I am not sure I can humanly do it.
- I have no problem with the workload.
- Management issues do not go away when there is an increased expectation that you are leading student learning and achievement and spending more time in classrooms and in professional learning network conversations.
- Workload is what you make of it. I have found that as I gain more experience in the role it is easier to prioritize what is important from the “administrivia” of the board. I think it is essential to teach these skills to our new administrators and get people to recognize ways to integrate some of the initiatives expected because they are not going to go away.
- Even though there have been fewer new Ministry initiatives, the pressure to improve student achievement and close the gap is a huge burden because of the other distracters - staff/parent/student relationships, decreased teacher supervision/increased principal supervision,
- At some point in time, someone has to say enough is enough. There is a crisis in administration in that no one wants to do our job. Teachers who would make great administrators are encouraged and they laugh at us because they would no more

- do this job than fly a kite! They see the total lack of respect, lack of support and the hours of time that are spent supervising, writing reports etc. and they are much happier staying in their own classrooms, supervising 80 minutes a week and getting 240 minutes of prep time. What would you rather choose?
- It has increased but it is all for the good. Our board initiatives are centered around student learning and personalized teaching.
- Working as a VP in two schools equals two full-time jobs. Love my work but it can really be a challenge keeping up with things and continuing to make connections with staff.
- It is to the point where I must selectively abandon ‘mandated’ initiatives.
- As a new principal, I have little prior experience to compare my current situation with; however, I am very aware that my workload in a smaller school is far greater than that of administrators I worked with even as recently as five years ago in much larger schools. I do not anticipate a reduction in my workload in the near future. Ministry and board initiatives are changing constantly and it is a struggle to keep up with all that is new. My teaching staff faces similar challenges. There doesn’t seem to be enough time to master one new initiative before the next one is introduced.
- Every year brings new challenges; it is still the best job on earth.

CPCO is sharing the data provided in response to this question with staff at the Ministry of Education, our Catholic partner groups and with directors of education. The member security committee will use the data to further their plans to assist members in improving their terms and conditions within boards.

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Professional learning staff wanted to know what professional learning topics most interested CPCO members. Articulating a vision of our Catholic schools received the highest rating followed by examining restorative justice and conflict partnering. Equity and inclusion, principal performance appraisal and mentoring/coaching, were ranked lowest. When combining the scores of those who were very interested with those interested in the topic they all scored from 57 to 64 per cent.



The second question in this section asked what workshop format respondents preferred. When the very interested and interested scores were combined, the preferred delivery was the half-day workshop. The most unpopular time was summer institutes followed by after school from 4 to 6 o’clock and winter institutes.

The final question in the survey asked members to rank 12 potential workshop topics for CPCO’s annual conference. The results are as follows:

1. Dealing with Challenges in Catholic Education
2. Discipline and Safe Schools
3. Dealing with Difficult People/Conflict Resolution
4. Effective Use of Data
5. Legal Issues
6. Mental Health Issues in Our Schools
7. Effective Web Communication
8. Effective Written Communications
9. Time Management and Work/Life Balance
10. Emotional Intelligence
11. Understanding Social Networks
12. Retirement Planning

This data was used to assist the conference program committee and CPCO staff to determine the types of workshops to offer at the annual conference. Seven of the twelve topics listed have been incorporated into the program through workshops and keynote presentations.

CPCO would like to thank the members who took time out of their busy schedules to respond to this survey. We leave the last word to them.

- *Thank you for conducting this survey and asking for my feedback. CPCO does a fantastic job in communicating with its members. Keep up the great work!*
- *It would be nice to have professional learning take place in the north so we could avoid costs.*
- *New members need assistance and explanation. The level of initiation to CPCO needs to be improved to acclimate new membership.*
- *I would like to see CPCO set-up workshops with the Catholic Trustees' Association and Directors of Education regarding real meaningful dialogue.*
- *I think provincial representatives should know we have many twinned schools sharing P/VP's.*
- *CPCO needs to support members by allowing for networking to occur more frequently in various geographical areas. A meeting once a year when the CPCO president attends just isn't enough. There are too many changes taking place in education for it to be left to one meeting a year. Web conferencing needs to be occurring more frequently.*
- *I love my job and consider myself blessed and fortunate to be able to come to work each day. The half-time vp role represents*

*a significant stumbling block in the effective and efficient running of schools. If only one thing could be changed, I would have it done away with, and insure that the vp role is full-time in all schools regardless of numbers.*

- *More work needs to be done to help boards understand 'negotiating' in good faith.*
- *If the status of principals and vice-principals is not raised soon, it will become increasingly more difficult to get the right type of new blood we need to replace those retiring.*
- *I really find the association valuable and like the fact that if I need questions answered I could always call them.*
- *It is time that the government started getting serious about the mental health and well-being of its leaders in schools.*
- *Thank you for asking about my life as a principal as there are days when being valued is not always there.*
- *The role of the principal has changed so much over the past years. There seems to be so much more expectation and demand. The teacher's union is a major block to working with children and remembering what we are here for. It always seems to be "what is best for the teachers" not what is best for the students and this is a huge issue for providing the best for our students.*
- *Being a single administrator in a school, time constraints do not allow me time to access much outside of the work demands. There is so much being downloaded to administrators that it is difficult to stay on top of it all and have time to access the information provided.*
- *Perhaps I am tired but it is getting harder to encourage teachers to become principals. The job is extremely difficult and very stressful.*
- *This is a fabulous organization and you do an amazing job. I am proud to be a member!*

*Lifetouch introduces...*

**WOW!**

*School photography like never before!*



*Discover a new generation of portraiture!*

[www.lifetouch.ca](http://www.lifetouch.ca)

*Lifetouch*  
CANADA