

By **Marisa Celenza**, Editor

Canada's

Outstanding Principals™

Each year The Learning Partnership invites nominations for Canada's Outstanding Principals™ award. The completed nomination packages are very comprehensive and include an outline of the nominee's professional history; evidence of their instructional leadership; involvement in professional learning teams; partnerships with families and communities; their personal growth initiatives; supporting evidence for leadership and student achievement; and many letters supporting the nomination. This year's CPCO recipients of The Learning Partnership's Canada's Outstanding Principals™ award are: **Agnes Cudmore**, Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board; **Ron Curridor**, London District Catholic School Board; **Theresa Harper-Dube**, Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board; and **Joanne Lombardi**, Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board. All four nomination packages attest to outstanding individuals who are committed to the students and communities in their care. Following are highlights of their careers as reported in their nomination packages.



Agnes Cudmore

Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board

Agnes Cudmore stands as an instructional leader, a role model, a mentor and guide for her colleagues, teachers and students.

Agnes began teaching with the North Shore District Roman Catholic Separate School Board (now Huron-Superior CDSB) in 1979 at St. Mary's Catholic School in Blind River. Agnes has been a principal since 1992, serving in several communities: Sacred Heart Catholic School in Espanola; St. Mary's in Blind River; Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Elliot Lake; Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in Elliot Lake; and back to St. Mary's in Blind River, where she is currently principal.

She is relentless in tapping all the available resources, human and material, to support students. She ensures every adult in the school, including the secretary, educational assistants, student support worker, the caretaker, teachers and herself as principal share ownership and take responsibility for supporting students. Agnes and her staff are dedicated and committed to the success of every child in their care. They share the belief that kids come first and they focus on the well-being of their students. They share high expectations

for student learning, foster a passion for learning in the school and work together to help students achieve their potential.

Both Our Lady of Fatima and St. Mary's schools in Elliot Lake flourished under Agnes' leadership, when they participated in the Ministry's Turnaround Project. The Turnaround Project provided the framework, the resources and the time for teachers to collaborate and learn together to ensure maximum results for all students. Agnes' role as instructional leader was critical. Her action became purposeful and focused, designed to filter out distractors and ensure that no instructional time was lost or wasted, allowing teachers to do what they do best, teach. Divisional meetings were always task-oriented with teachers looking at student data to inform the instruction, trying strategies, bringing back evidence of student work and engaging in peer learning. During these meetings, the principal's role was to learn with and from the teachers, to encourage staff to take risks and be patient, to problem-solve together, to stay the course and not be afraid to fail. Above all, the principal's role was to ask critical questions to guide their reflection and action.

The balanced literacy program started at Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in Elliot Lake with the Turnaround Project was so effective that it was shared with other schools and adapted throughout the Huron-Superior Catholic DSB. It was a turning point for the board. Not only did they see improved student achievement results at Our Lady of Fatima, but also in other schools throughout the board.

Agnes is a strong advocate for Catholic education and works tirelessly to strengthen the connection between school, home and parish. In collaboration with the parish pastoral council, the school councils and the board administration team, she strongly supported the creation of a youth minister/parish liaison in the Huron-Superior Catholic DSB schools.

Sylvia Bertelot, an educational assistant at St. Mary's states:

Mrs. Cudmore is an industrious, dependable and caring individual who sets high goals and strives continually to reach these goals. She inspires and encourages all to perform to the best of their abilities. In the words of John Quincy Adams, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

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Ron Curridor

London District Catholic School Board

Ron Curridor is principal at Monsignor J. H. O'Neil Catholic Elementary School with the London District Catholic School Board. He began his teaching career with the York Catholic DSB. There he served as a math, science and assess-

ment/evaluation consultant, as well as a program resource teacher for both elementary and high school teachers. Ron has a master's degree in administration and curriculum from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto.

When Ron moved from the Greater Toronto Area to a county school in southwestern Ontario, he understood the value of relationships. He built strong interpersonal relationships with all staff, students, parents, the parish team and the broader community. In so doing, he was successful in shifting the school culture to one that is more student-centred and demonstrates a friendlier approach to teaching and learning. Learning, achievement and faith formation are at the core of the vision Ron has established with his staff. He has nurtured a culture of high expectations that all kids can succeed given the right resources and supports. Commensurate with this vision is the belief that teachers are the key educators in students' literacy and numeracy development and that teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that meets the needs of all students.

Superintendent Tamara Nugent notes:

As soon as you enter Monsignor J.H. O'Neil Catholic School there is evidence of strong instructional leadership. The quest for excellence is apparent in the displays of student-written work evident in every nook and cranny of the school. As the superintendent, I would often joke that I needed a GPS not for the purpose of finding the county school, but rather to locate the principal within the school.

Rare is the moment that you will find Principal Curridor in his office during the instructional day. Rather he is in classes mentoring and coaching teachers and students alike. If he is not in a classroom, he can be found in the meeting room pouring over provincial, district and school data, deep in dialogue with staff about individual students and how to stretch them to realize their God-given potential.

The creation of an excel spreadsheet with student specific data is an example of one of the many ways Ron structures the professional learning environment for staff. The ease of access to data enables the teachers to spend more time in the analysis of the data to develop precision, focus and personalization of the teaching and learning strategies. The breadth and depth of Ron's understanding of the curriculum, instructional practices and assessment and evaluation is remarkable.

When a new teacher was asked to identify the greatest support to her in her first year of teaching, she pointed to Ron and exclaimed, "The principal!" She continued to say,

He has helped me to feel competent and confident in my teaching and I endeavour to help students feel the same about their own learning.

Ron demonstrates faith commitment and strong leadership in building a collaborative Catholic professional learning community. He actively promotes a sense of collective responsibility by all, inclusive of teachers, support staff, students, families and the parish community. His knowledge of people's personal strengths and strategies to strengthen relationships is commendable.

Rev. Matthew George, the parish priest comments:

Ron has many personal qualities that help him stand out as a Catholic educator and administrator. He has an indefatigable air of positivism about him.

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Theresa Harper-Dube

Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

Theresa Harper-Dube is an authentic leader who is deeply respected by colleagues. She distributes her leadership in ways that command respect and achievement of outcome. She began teaching sciences in 1979 at

Regiopolis-Notre Dame Catholic High School in Kingston, Ontario in what is now the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic DSB. She was appointed curriculum coordinator at Loyola Community Learning Centre, Kingston in 1993. In this role, she acted as a department head and for the first time worked with adults.

Theresa began her administrative career in 1998 as vice-principal at St. Michael Elementary School in Belleville. She also served as vice-principal at Nicholson Catholic College in Belleville and at Regiopolis-Notre Dame Catholic High School in Kingston. Theresa embraced her role with a special passion for school improvement and student engagement. She also shared her expertise on a variety of system level committees on curriculum implementation, staffing, contract negotiations, assessment and evaluation, and performance appraisal. She participated with regional partners like the Eastern Ontario Staff Development Network to plan conferences. She has been a conference presenter and guest lecturer at Queen's University.

In 2005, she successfully defended her thesis *Trusting Our Leaders: A Study on Trust as a Variable in the Professional Relationship between Principals and Teachers* and received her master of education degree.

Theresa represents the finest qualities of an instructional leader and life-long learner. She is a founding member of CPCO's coaching and mentoring projects. She has delivered workshops across the province and participated in a two-part series of webinars with Curriculum Services Canada. She co-authored a provincial principal's coaching handbook titled, *Supporting Effective School Leadership: A Handbook for Implementing Mentoring for Newly Appointed School Leaders in Ontario* (2008). Theresa was the lead writer and coordinated a team of five administrators from her board to write, *Leading and Learning with Faith, A Handbook for Coaching for Professional Growth for Principals and Vice-Principals of the ALCDSB*.

Theresa has served as principal at Loyola Community Learning Centre since 2006. Loyola is an adult and continuing education school with four campuses in Kingston, Belleville, Picton and Trenton, Ontario. Her head office is in Napanee. Contractually, Theresa is also responsible for the education of 1000 federal inmates in federal correctional facilities in the province of Ontario. There are eight institutions in the Kingston area and the remaining facilities are scattered throughout the province. Theresa also works with a number of community partners that have helped her to achieve Loyola's current success.

It is important for Theresa to be a visible principal at all school sites. Despite geographical challenges, she visits each site each week and empowers staff to work collaboratively. She has been successful in making her staff see Loyola as one school despite its many campuses and the distance between them. She ensures that her teachers participate in professional development opportunities, as she wants her staff informed of the newest curriculum changes, strategies and theories. Theresa ensures that all her teachers have regular opportunities to meet together, review data and discuss their learning and implementation of strategies and monitor the outcomes. Under her leadership, students are achieving more, staff are committed to student achievement, and deep and abiding respect exists for students. She also provides professional learning opportunities for Correctional Service of Canada principals and teachers who come together from across the province to learn and share effective teaching strategies and programs.

One of the most compelling traits of Theresa as a leader is that she is compassionate and committed to students who struggle. Her students face many challenges in life and school. Many struggle with low self-esteem and self-image. Theresa works tirelessly to ensure that her staff are sensitive to the needs of their students by providing a welcoming and respectful atmosphere for these fragile learners.

Some of her campuses are in areas that have been significantly impacted by the economic downturn. She and her staff provide food for breakfast and lunch in conjunction with local agencies because they know many of their students cannot afford to eat. Staff decorate each campus and celebrate holidays with students because many of the students suffer from broken relationships and are alone. Students respond to their kindness by engaging in activities of community service and raise funds for various charities. The staff provide the example to the students, and the students respond with equal enthusiasm. It is noteworthy that those with the least give generously financially and in spirit. Theresa's spirit of service is evident to her staff.

Adult learners come from all walks of life and all have unique stories to tell. Theresa's leadership ensures that:

Graduation ceremonies at each Loyola campus, and in correctional facilities, are celebrations of accomplishment in the face of adversity.

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Joanne Lombardi

Huron-Perth Catholic District
School Board

Effective leadership is a reciprocal affair and improved student achievement is why I put my feet on the ground each morning.

Joanne Lombardi began teaching in 1984 with the London District Catholic School Board. She also spent one year with the Waterloo Catholic DSB. She taught primary and junior grades for 16 years and special education for five years. Since January 2006, she has been employed with the Huron-Perth Catholic DSB. She was a special education support teacher and then shared the special education coordinator and a vice-principal position for one year. Joanne has served as principal of St. James in Seaforth for the past three years. Joanne earned her master of education degree from OISE in Curriculum and Learning (Teacher Development). She is currently teaching the Special Education ABQ Part 1 course for Queen's University.

Joanne demonstrates her knowledge of current research and best practices by presenting at various board and provincial-level opportunities: *When Faith Meets Pedagogy*, the Leader's Learning Council, the Council for Exceptional Children Conference, York University and through her online teaching for Queen's University.

Joanne is truly a reflective practitioner and is never satisfied with the status quo. She demonstrates a determined sense of purpose in her efforts to serve the learning needs of a diverse group of children in an integrated school environment with professionalism, persistence, caring and compassion. Her communication style with students, colleagues and parents facilitates dialogue, and encourages and builds trust. She acknowledges the strengths, gifts and concerns of others, and promotes collaboration within the school community and system.

Joanne is a lifelong learner, constantly seeking to increase her awareness of the educational, political and social realities that impact education and to enhance her personal and professional knowledge and skills. Her long-standing and varied educational vocation has allowed her to have, and learn from, many experiences. She reflects deeply on what she learns, always moving forward in positive, proactive ways.

As the administrators' representative, Joanne is a valued member of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). She co-authored an article, *Peer-Mediated School-Based Program Proves Successful in Promoting Positive Social Skills* (Servais, M, Hall, C., Chadwick, C. & Lombardi, J.) for the Research Program, Thames Valley Children's Centre (Volume 5, Issue 3, September 2009).

Joanne contributed the following in her comments on leadership and students achievement:

Educational leadership can be analogous to conducting an orchestra. As with an orchestra, there can be found within an educational setting a diversity of musicians, a variety of concert events, and an eclectic audience. Not everyone who performs for the orchestra or attends a concert is there for the same purpose; not everyone has the same starting points or common goals. Yet somehow, by the time the last note of the concert has been played, all musicians and attendees have experienced something unique! It is a reciprocal affair between audience and orchestra.

As conductors try to get all musicians following the same sheet music, to the same tempo, yet with acceptance of each instrument's unique sound and each musician's unique style, so too must a school principal help each staff member and each student create beautiful music in an individual, yet also collective way. Just as it is not the conductor who makes the music, it is not the principal who improves student achievement. What we must do is create optimum learning conditions among students, staff and community in order to support student achievement.

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Congratulations to our Outstanding Principals for 2010.

These principals are excellent representatives of the Catholic principals of Ontario. The Gala Awards Dinner for Canada's Outstanding Principals™ took place in Toronto on February 23, 2010 at the Delta Chelsea Hotel. The evening honoured the achievements of the thirty-two 2010 Canada's Outstanding Principals™. Visit The Learning Partnership's website at www.thelearningpartnership.ca for further details about this prestigious award.



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Submissions should be 800-1600 words.
Images should be 300dpi minimum and in jpg, tif, or png formats.
Please do not reduce the size of digital images.

All contributions by our members are truly appreciated. CPCO reserves the right to edit all materials. Please understand that a submission does not automatically guarantee publication.

Deadline for the Summer issue is May 17th, 2010

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