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Connecting the Dots...

Education journals and studies over the last decade have repeatedly cited the evolving complexities of the role of school principals. While quick fixes to this challenge seem to have eluded most, there is a renewed acknowledgement that principals must be supported in their roles by supervisory officers (SOs) and directors of education in ways that include curriculum leadership. At the Ministry of Education there seems to be continued energy promoting tri-level decision-making founded in authentic positive relationships as a foundation for continued growth in student success and well-being.

To compliment and recognize the importance of developing these types of relationships, the Ministry has embarked on several initiatives. The new principal/vice-principal appraisal (PPA) system, clearly presents recognition of the importance of the relationship between appraiser and appraisee (whether it be SO and principal, or principal and vice-principal) when it states:

The progress and success of all students in Ontario schools is contingent upon the cooperation and mutual support of school and system leaders. In order to embrace the dynamic needs of the learners in our schools, innovation and a willingness to work together is paramount. This is the basis for the Ontario Leadership Strategy and the underlying spirit of the principal/vice-principal performance appraisal system.

Appraisals are based on the *Ontario Leadership Framework* and the Ministry's *Five Core Competencies*. The PPA document describes respect, value and affirmation as necessary ingredients in promoting strong, effective school leadership. It also sites collaboration, mutual trust and co-operation as key conditions for the success of the appraisal system.

A system, less focused on to-do lists and checklists and more on discussion and problem solving, the new PPA is crafted for appraiser and appraisee to be in communion with one another. Through conversation and reflection, they attend to the unique needs of individual schools and their communities' challenges as well as the development and professional growth of the appraisee. Fr. Jim Mulligan, in his book *Catholic Education: Ensuring a Future*, describes what it means to be in communion with one another.

Spirituality of communion means the ability to think of our sisters and brothers as Mystical Body who "are a part of me," and whose joys and sufferings, needs and friendship I share.

Spirituality of communion is hospitality – making room for the other and sharing his/her burdens, resisting the selfish temptations, which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. (p142)

Another initiative connecting the importance of relationship with student achievement is the Ministry's newly released *Policy and Procedure Memorandum (PPM)* on principal/vice-principal terms and conditions of employment. The PPM recognizes the importance of relationships as it mandates good faith bargaining in all future negotiations by local boards with principal groups.

By focusing on principal leadership development and succession planning, I believe that these ministry initiatives present future-focused opportunities to mould a direction that blends both secular ministry expectations and requirements, with sacred elements of our own Catholic traditions and practices with regard to respect, value, affirmation and dignity of work.

The authentic development of leaders in Catholic education is of paramount importance in order for Catholic schools in Ontario to be fully alive. There is no doubt that nurturing the dynamics of the leadership team of director, superintendent and principal creates fecundity for the work of the Spirit and the development of our fullest potential. Cooperation, collaboration and connection are vital parts of the evolution of effective school leadership; fuelling hope and contributing to an effective publicly-funded education system in Ontario.

In an effort to recruit and attract the best candidates to principal leadership roles, CPCO will continue to advocate for changes to address the issues of job security and the right to return to teaching without loss of seniority for new administrators. None-the-less, CPCO remains committed to working with the Ministry in ensuring the success of the *Ontario Leadership Strategy*.

The dots of leadership development and advances in thought concerning the role of the principal are becoming very apparent on the provincial scene in Ontario. The challenge remains for local boards to connect the dots and add colour to give life to the unfolding picture.

Spring and in particular, Easter is a time to reflect on Jesus' death and resurrection and the hope that this brings to us as a faith-filled people. Take time for yourself. Renew your commitment to be people of God's light and love. May you continue to embrace the passion of possibility in your schools.