



# PrincipalConnections

Winter 2024 • Volume 28 • Issue 2

The magazine of Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario



## FINDING HOPE

---

**ANNE WALSH**  
*Come to Me*

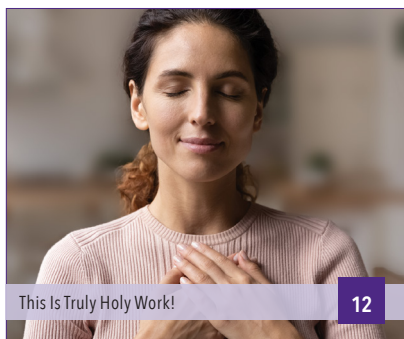
---

**TAREQ HADHAD**  
*Peace, Chocolate and Second Chances*

---

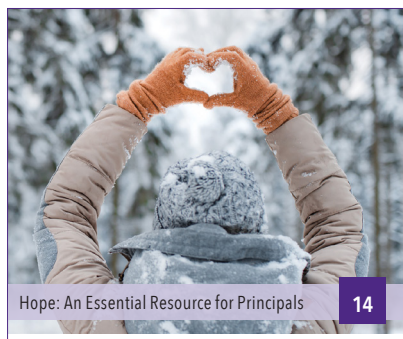
**JOSH FULLAN**  
*Walking to Belong*

# IN THIS ISSUE



This Is Truly Holy Work!

12



Hope: An Essential Resource for Principals

14



The Transformative Power of Hope

16



Blackness and Belonging

22

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

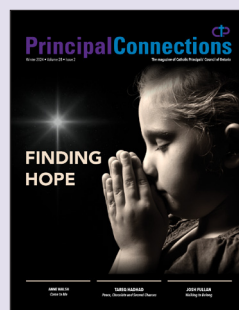
- Come to Me | 6
- Walking to Belong | 8
- This Is Truly Holy Work! | 10
- Peace, Hope and Second Chances | 12
- I Am Not From Here | 15
- The Changing Profile of the Canadian Student | 18
- Hope: An Essential Resource for Principals | 20
- Blackness and Belonging | 22
- The Transformative Power of Hope | 24
- Bottom-Up System Change | 28
- The Journey of the Forcibly Displaced Student | 31
- Food or Rent? What Would You Choose? | 34
- Finding Hope Through Life Promotion | 36

## KEEPING YOU INFORMED

- Good Things to Come | 26
- Bring Light to Those in Darkness | 38
- Teens Ending Abusive Relationships | 40
- Why Educators Need to Talk About Sex Trafficking | 44
- A Space to Tell Our Stories | 46
- The Third Path: A Framework for Hopeful Leadership | 48
- Acts of Service, Love and Hope | 50
- PrincipalBot: AI Supporting Special Needs Education | 52
- Multilingualism: A Powerful Tool To Build Community | 54
- Black Heritage & Excellence Series 2024 | 56
- Serving Our Students With Severe Learning Disabilities | 60
- The Path to Healing and Restoration | 62
- Connector, Activator, Artist, Teacher, Learner | 64

## IN EVERY ISSUE

- From the President and the Executive Director: Beacons of Hope | 4
- From the Editor: Meet Them at the Crossroads | 5
- Connecting Voices | 59



Cover design by Erika Futuyama

We thank all those who contributed to this issue. Please note, however, that the opinions and views expressed are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily those of CPCCO. Similarly, the acceptance of advertising does not imply CPCCO endorsement.

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40035635

CPCCO assumes no liability or responsibility for any inaccurate, delayed or incomplete information, nor for any actions taken in reliance thereon. The information contained about each individual, event or organization has been provided by such individual, event organizers or organization without verification by us. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission of CPCCO.

Copyright ©2024 Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario. All rights reserved.



## EDITORIAL, ADVERTISING & SALES

- Deirdre Kinsella Biss**, Editor  
dkinsellabiss@cpcco.on.ca
- Carol Anne Jeanson**, Copy Editor
- Erika Futuyama**, Graphic Designer  
efutuyama@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 25
- John Nijmeh**, Advertising Manager  
events@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 28
- Juleen Anderson**, Marketing & Communications Manager  
janderson@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 38
- Gaby Aloï**, Manager of Corporate Operations  
galoi@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 26

## CORPORATE, PROGRAMS & SERVICES

- James McDade**, President  
president@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 22
- Tilia Cruz**, Executive Director  
tcruz@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 44
- Nancy McDowell**, Accountant  
nmcowell@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 29
- Elizabeth Creelman**, General Counsel  
djoseph@cpcco.on.ca
- Antonella Rubino**, Support Services Advisor  
arubino@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 40
- Rukshi Athulathmudali**, Support Services Advisor  
rathulathmudali@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 27
- Michael Young**, Support Services Advisor  
myoung@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 41
- Damien Joseph**, Paralegal  
djoseph@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 42
- Luciana Cardarelli**, Coordinator and AQ Registrar,  
Catholic Leadership Development Services  
lcardarelli@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 37
- Jan Murphy**, Assistant Coordinator,  
Catholic Leadership Development Services  
jmurphy@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 24
- Vanessa Kellow**, Administrative Assistant,  
Catholic Leadership Development Services  
vkellow@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 31
- Will Wang**, Communications & Technology Officer  
wwang@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 30
- Maria Cortez**, Administrative Assistant, Operations  
mcortez@cpcco.on.ca | ext. 32

Principal Connections is the proud recipient of the following awards:



We would like to acknowledge that the CPCCO office is on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario  
Suite 640, 10 Carlson Court  
Etobicoke, ON M9W 6L2

1-888-621-9190 toll free • 416-483-1556 phone  
info@cpcco.on.ca • blog.cpcco.on.ca • www.cpcco.on.ca



CPCCOofficial





## FROM THE PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

James McDade, Tilia Cruz

# Beacons of Hope

The responsibilities of Principals and Vice-Principals extend well beyond the simple daily administrative work. Our most important role is to be beacons of hope for our school communities. We help students overcome obstacles and motivate them to succeed. Our sincere dedication to creating a sense of belonging and helping every student make the journey from barely surviving to genuinely thriving is at the core of our Catholic mission. We are uniquely positioned to impact the lives of students facing significant difficulties. Our Catholic teachings show us we are obligated to create a community of belonging and we have the awesome privilege of being called to this work.

One of the most critical aspects of this work is creating a school environment where every student and family feels valued and included. This begins with a commitment to equity and inclusivity, ensuring all students have access to the resources and support they need. You do this work daily when you help to implement programs and initiatives that provide meals for students experiencing food insecurity, when you offer counselling and mental health services and create partnerships with local organizations to support students and families in crisis, and when you collaborate with your staff to ensure the best possible learning environment for all our students.

Principals and Vice-Principals play a vital role in cultivating a positive school culture and fostering a community of inclusivity. This involves setting a tone of compassion, respect, encouragement, accountability and forgiveness. By modelling these values and fostering a supportive atmosphere, we can help students feel welcomed, safe and respected.

Building strong relationships with students and guardians is a key component of helping our students thrive. When students know their school leaders genuinely care about their success and well-being, they are more likely to engage in their own education and

strive for excellence. We show we care by being visible and approachable, listening to students' concerns and celebrating their achievements, no matter how small.

As school leaders, we also need to advocate for policies and practices that support all students, especially those who are most vulnerable. This includes promoting professional development for teachers and staff on issues such as trauma-informed care, cultural competency and restorative practices.

Ultimately, the work of school leaders is driven by the belief all students have the potential to succeed. This hope is not just an abstract ideal but a powerful motivator that guides every decision and action and is firmly grounded in our Catholic values. We are called to be steadfast advocates for our students, working tirelessly to remove barriers and create opportunities for growth and success.

As beacons of hope, we have the responsibility to foster a sense of belonging and help students transition from surviving to thriving. Through compassion, dedication and a commitment to equity, we can make a lasting difference in the lives of our students, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to reach their full God given potential.

We hope this Advent and Christmas season can be a beacon of hope for all our Principals and Vice-Principals, guiding us towards a renewal of faith. May the act of decorating your homes, seeing Christmas lights and engaging in our festive traditions bring light to your days and create hope and warmth for you and your loved ones.

We wish all of you a very Merry Christmas.

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans. 15:13*



## FROM THE EDITOR

Deirdre Kinsella Biss

# Meet Them at the Crossroads

The Irish word ‘trasna’ means ‘the crossing place.’ Physically, the word embodies the act of moving from one place to another. Spiritually and emotionally, the word signifies transitions and new directions. Trasna describes the place where many of our students find themselves. They face challenging living and learning conditions, with survival often being their only reality.

Our classrooms are home to many needs and student circumstances. Struggles and hardship affect the well-being of our student refugees, the newcomers to our country, students who are homeless, pupils who face situations of food scarcity and poverty, those who are victims of trauma and those who suffer from lack of family and community support. These students are entrusted to our care. So, we are called to be more than educators, we are called to be dealers of hope. We meet these students at their ‘trasna.’ And it is here, at this crossroad, that we provide welcome, foster a sense of belonging, celebrate our differences and help students find a path where they can thrive. Hope is at the heart of our mission.

**Build supportive communities.** Anne Walsh begins our *Finding Hope* issue with a special Christmas message for Catholic school leaders. She reminds us that we become the way for those who struggle in our community. She invites us to be “yokes” for one another, by providing support, making the load lighter and meaningfully encouraging others.

**Strive to understand cultural differences.** Lisa de Gara’s article addresses the changing demographics in Canada’s classrooms. She discusses the everchanging immigration patterns in our schools and invites us to take a good look at where our schools will be 15 years from now. The way we welcome our newcomers is key. A concerted effort must be placed on understanding cultural differences, language and way of life.

### **Foster a sense of purpose and a sense of place.**

Belonging is both a choice and a practice. It is about the emotional ties we have to people, as well as the ties we develop to the places we occupy. *In Walking to Belong*, Josh Fullan reflects on the power of walking your local neighbourhood, a well-being practice that allows students to investigate, develop and deepen a real connection to their community.

## *Hope is the sacred space between now and not yet.*

### **Conduct a hope audit.**

Psychologists Rebecca Hudson Breen and Denise Larsen encourage us to intentionally look for hope in our schools. Effective school leaders make it their practice to notice, identify

and communicate the signs of hope they see in their communities. Connecting with others, celebrating positive moments, engaging in hopeful interactions and sharing successes are leadership strategies that strengthen community bonds.

**Recognize the power of your own story.** Tareq Hadhad is an inspirational TED Talker and the founder of Peace by Chocolate in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. His story is about hope, second chances, adaptability, resilience and the importance of community. He details his journey from Syria to Canada as a refugee, the adversities he experienced and the importance of believing in and sharing your own story.

Hope is the sacred space between now and not yet. It is a transformative, positive force that helps people envision and create a future they wish to be part of. Hope helps us to face and endure challenges, to manage stress and anxiety and to move forward. Faith builds communities and hope get us through the toughest of times. During this Christmas season, may your days be filled with love, peace, hope and endless possibilities.

Let us be the light for others.

# Come to Me

By Anne Walsh

**O**n December 25th, we will celebrate the feast of wonder, Christmas. On that day, we will remember and celebrate the Incarnation, Gospel taking on human flesh in a stable in Bethlehem.

In our Catholic Christian understanding this means much more than to simply recall. To remember is to soak in the fact that as we recall, we move deeper. When we remember, an event is still happening, or a person is still with us. It is still present. If we have this perspective, even though we know that God took on human flesh once and for all in Jesus, God continues to take on human flesh through you and me, the Body of Christ.

This has a particular significance for our Catholic school communities. We are called to be communities in which God continues to take on flesh in and among us. We are called to be Christ for one another, and particularly for those who are most vulnerable, who struggle most, who are the weakest, the most abandoned, the least understood.

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 11 verses 28 to 30, we read:

*Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

This is a description of what life in our Catholic schools might look like and feel like, if we are consciously living that invitation to be the body of Christ for one another.

These Gospel words speaks of a "yoke." A yoke is not a burden; it is tool that makes a burden lighter or easier to bear. A yoke can take one of two forms. One makes work easier by distributing the weight of a burden over the shoulders and down the arms. Another connects one animal or person to another, thus making the burden easier and lighter to bear.

In this Gospel passage, Jesus never promises to take away the burdens of life. He does promise to make those burdens easier and lighter.

Catholic school, and those of us who serve as leaders in Catholic schools, are called to be a yoke. Everyone who walks through our door is burdened in some way. Sometimes, we can see the burdens. Often, we cannot. Sometimes the burdens can be carried alone, or with minimal support. But the very reason we exist as Catholic schools is to be a yoke, to uplift, encourage and give meaningful support to those who carry burdens, whether they be heavy or light.

When we define love as "being a yoke for those who carry burdens," love takes on new meaning for our Catholic school communities. A yoke is a handy, practical piece of equipment. You and I are called to be practical, handy individuals and communities.

# *“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

What does that look like in practice? It has to mean that we SEE people. Just as Jesus made a conscious choice to see those He met who were burdened, sick, infirm, excluded or struggling, so must we. The first step in becoming a yoke for those who need us is we must see them.

The second step is to ACCOMPANY them. To really accompany those who struggle or who are on the margins of our communities, means we must have courage. We must have courage to stand against some of the accepted norms of our day or our society. We must make a conscious choice, having seen those who are most marginalized, to go out to where they are, to listen and to walk with them toward healing and wellness.

The third, and perhaps most challenging step, is to BUILD COMMUNITIES of love that enfold all, particularly the most marginalized, and become the yoke Jesus speaks of in the Gospel. We become the way that those who struggle, whether for a short time or a long time, are assisted to carry their burdens. We make life a little easier and the world a little brighter.

The fourth step is TRANSFORMATION. It is interesting that in this Gospel passage Jesus does not promise to take away the burden. What he promises is a way to make the burden lighter. You and I, no matter our role in the Catholic School community – administrator, teachers, students, support staff, maintenance staff, bus drivers, educational assistance, board members and all others who make up this wondrous community that

witnesses the Gospel every day – we must become the yoke that Jesus promises to those who are burdened. New life is possible. Jesus promises that.

Because of Christmas, because God took on flesh once and for all in Bethlehem and continues to take on flesh today, love is practical. Love is becoming a yoke.

Many people picture love as a warm, cozy feeling. Sometimes, that is true. However, in its very essence love is a decision, a choice that has practical consequences. In our Catholic schools, love can look like listening to a troubled parent. It can look like lowering the sink so a person with physical challenges can reach it. It can look like the myriad of programs and services we provide that express our concern for the vulnerable and through which we become the yoke that Jesus promised them.

This year, as you prepare to celebrate Christmas, take time to give thanks for those who have been a yoke for you and through whom Jesus became flesh. And, perhaps, take a long, loving look at your life in the Catholic school community and recommit to being a yoke for those who carry burdens. Through you, the promise of Jesus, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” takes flesh. [CP](#)

---

**Anne Walsh**

Co-ordinator of Partnerships in Mission  
Redemptorists of North America

# This Is Truly Holy Work!

By Jody Carrington



Hope is such a nice word. I've always thought that. You tend to hear it a lot in the holiday season – the hope we have for peace on Earth, for the children we teach, for the joy we might be able to share around a family dinner in celebration of a holiday. The truth is, so many of us feel quite hopeless these days.

I wish this wasn't true, but I've also learned this – you can't address what you don't acknowledge. Humans

like it best when things are “fine,” and the thought of things being hopeless does not feel “fine.” In fact, the most common response to the question, “How are you?” or “How are things?” is “Fine,” followed closely with “Busy.” However, most of us are not “fine.” Researchers are resoundingly reporting that many of us in human services professions are feeling things like overwhelm, burnout and hopelessness at rates never seen before. Reports of depression and anxiety are increasing in

those we teach and teach alongside. This is led by many in popular culture to suggest that we are in a “mental health crisis” in North America.

Before I lose you in this very “hopeless” beginning, stay with me.

As an educator or parent, it can feel futile to teach in a time where the way kids have access to and process data has remarkably shifted since 2006. Which happens to coincide with the introduction of the smartphone. Despite this reality, I have never been more hopeful about the critical importance of educators and their ability to not only teach but find themselves in one of the most important professions of all time.

Here’s why: I don’t think we’re in a mental health crisis, I think we’re in a very understandable human response to a loneliness epidemic. In the run of a school week, educators spend more waking hours with children than their primary caregivers do. So, schools have evolved into the place where people gather to celebrate and where people land to grieve when there’s big loss.

Here’s where the even greater part of the hope part comes in. There are so many humans in this world who need whatever you have in this moment. And I promise you, it’s enough. When we get overwhelmed, burned out, spread thin, the thing we lose access to the quickest is our ability to truly see another, acknowledge contributions or see how tough life can be sometimes. Understandably, we become very internally focussed, trying to manage internal dialogues and responsibilities. We start to lose touch so quickly to the regenerating, life-giving force of truly seeing those we love, we lead and we teach.


I’ve had the sacred opportunity to interview Tareq Hadhad, the creator of *Peace by Chocolate*, and the author of an article in this *Principal Connections*. I forget sometimes, in the business of raising my own children, navigating aging parents, being a community member, and trying to keep my marriage together that there are so many people around me with stories that would simply take my breath away. It is so easy to get focussed on all the things going wrong – that we so quickly lose room for hope.

As you step into this holiday season, consider these few things, particularly if you’ve lost your hope.

First, I learned this little truth back in graduate school: misery loves miserable company. Misery does not love optimism. Pay close attention to who you’re spending your precious time with. This includes who you’re following on social media, who you’re sitting beside at staff meetings and who you invite to share a meal with around your kitchen table. As humans, we are wired to mimic those we surround ourselves with the most. Choose wisely.

Secondly, drop your shoulders. I mean it, in this moment, drop them. Then wiggle your toes and relax your jaw. Most importantly, let your gut out. I often talk about this critical truth: the body keeps the score (also the title of one of the best books about trauma out there). Without even thinking about it, our bodies prepare us to be on guard for all the things coming our way. What we must do, purposefully, is give our bodies the message that we are safe in the moments when we are. If left to our own devices, our thoughts tend to focus on all the things not going well and we often don’t have the space to process the day because we’re always prepping for the next onslaught. Slow it down on purpose and I promise you will feel more prepared and connected.

Finally, I don’t want you to miss it. Simply, by the profession you have chosen, you are woven into the trajectory of so many lives – many of which, you will never even know your remarkable impact. You serve humans, who often have a difficult time, especially the ones who need you the most, acknowledging you. If you’ve been teaching for five minutes or 50 years, I promise, the students you can conjure up in your memory, they and their families think about you 10 times as much. This is truly holy work.

In this season of hope, my hope is that you will do these things – surround yourself with good people, drop your shoulders and know just how much you matter. I can’t think of more deserving humans than those of you who do your best, every day to walk our most precious commodity – our next generation – though some of their most important transitions. From the bottom of this mama’s heart: thank you. 

---

**Jody Carrington**

PhD Clinical Psychologist, Speaker,  
Best-selling Author of *Feeling Seen*  
Host, Apple Podcast, *Everyone Comes*  
*From Somewhere*



# Peace, Hope and Second Chances

By Tareq Hadhad

***Tareq Hadhad and his family fled Syria during the civil war after their family chocolate factory in Damascus was bombed. They lived as refugees in Lebanon for three years before moving to Canada in 2016. Tareq had completed four years of medical school in Syria but stopped due to unsafe conditions. In Lebanon, he provided medical services to those in need. After arriving in Canada, Tareq began studying for a Bachelor of Science in Biology at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish. In 2016, the family reopened their chocolate business in Nova Scotia, which now employs both newcomers to Canada and residents. More than \$600,000 has been donated to charities by Peace by Chocolate. Tareq became a Canadian citizen in 2020.***

Our story may be known to be about chocolate, but it is also about our dreams, my family's resilience and the power of having a beautiful community around you. My family's journey from Syria to Canada reflects a capacity to rebuild and thrive despite adversity along the way.

In Damascus, my father started a thriving chocolate factory that became a beloved brand shortly after. For decades, our family believed that business is an act of service, and we mastered the art of chocolate making. It started mainly to spread happiness to our communities with each sweet creation. However, the outbreak of war in Syria turned our world upside down. We were forced to leave everything behind including our cherished business and seek refuge in Lebanon where we spent three years.

Our decision to resettle in Canada over eight years ago was filled with uncertainty and fear. As refugees, we arrived in a new country with a different culture, language and way of life. Although integration seemed a lot easier for me than my parents, we still felt the heaviness of the journey on our shoulders with many shocks. Despite these challenges, we carried with us so much passion for making chocolate (and peace!). With a determination to rebuild our lives and give back to this

country that has done everything to make us feel we have arrived at safety and peace.

Antigonish, a small and beautiful community on Canada's East Coast, welcomed us with so much love and open arms. The support we received from the local community was incredible. Community leaders and volunteers started a local organization called SAFE, which stands for Syria-Antigonish Families Embrace, and formed committees to assist with integration, education, housing and transportation, making our transition from Damascus to Antigonish heartwarming.

Starting Peace by Chocolate was no small feat. We faced a lot of hurdles. It all started when we were trying to set up our first small factory, secure funding and navigate the complexities of starting a business in a new country and a remote community. Our initial setup was very modest, beginning in a small kitchen corner, then a basement room and eventually a small shed built by the community that was bought with a \$10,000 community interest-free loan. Because of these very humble beginnings and our belief in the power of our story and the quality of our products, we started taking on more opportunities that drove us forward.

Peace by Chocolate is not just a business. For us, it is all about people, mission and purpose. We always wanted to stay away from the busy corporate world that focuses too much on the numbers and forgets the people who show up every day, believing in the bigger picture of communities being built with determination and passion. Our chocolates are symbols of peace, hope and second

chances. And that's why we believe in the Canadian dream. We wanted our chocolates to be ambassadors of our journey and to integrate into our newly adopted country.

Today, Peace by Chocolate offers a wide variety of high-quality chocolates, including unique flavours like maple cream, Nova Scotian blueberries, Newfoundland sea salt and honey lavender. Our vision has always been about spreading a message of peace and hope while creating a positive social impact in the communities we serve. We know the importance of social corporate responsibility, and we take it at heart in everything we do.

Our journey, like many immigrants, was filled with countless roadblocks and systemic challenges. Adapting to a new culture, understanding a different financial and taxing system, and launching a business in a foreign land were daunting tasks for us as newcomers. However, the support from the Antigonish and Nova Scotia communities, and the whole country, helped us overcome these obstacles. I still remember when we first launched our one-page website right before Christmas 2016. We sold out everything we could make in the small factory in less than three hours! The community's involvement in providing essential non-monetary support played an essential role in our successful transition. We needed to feel that we belonged, and the community was there for us every step of the way.

Newcomers often face culture shock, a normal reaction to the new and unfamiliar surroundings. I asked my family to recognize it without shame. Initially and as always in the immigration journey, excitement dominates, with



everything seeming perfect. Over time, challenges like integration, waiting for permits or devalued skills can cause anger and sadness. In our journey, culture shock had multiple stages, but we overcame those by building connections. Adjusting to a new culture takes time, and it may take years to feel at home again after being uprooted. We realized that some conflicts between our original culture and Canadian values are normal, and that caused some feelings of uncertainty. Some people adapt quickly, while others take longer.

Our family's involvement with the school community has helped a lot. It's been one of the main parts of our integration journey. The lessons learned from the Antigonish community leaders and the support system they created have been very useful. These experiences strengthened our belief in the power of community and empowered us to continue giving back.

Through Peace by Chocolate, which is the result of people and passions coming together to advocate for a cause, we aim to inspire others and highlight the incredible sides of humanity, the importance of community support and resilience for every newcomer. Our marketing strategy centres around the power of storytelling, wearing our values proudly on our sleeves and celebrating inclusivity. This helps us connect with people on a deeper level and promote cohesion and cultural understanding. Because in the end, peace is for everyone.

The first campaign we created was in recognition of diversity. We created a large collection of over 24 different chocolate bars that celebrate peace in different languages. Peace is a conversation opener. By sharing our journey of fleeing war, finding refuge and rebuilding our lives through chocolate, we hope to uplift and contribute to a deeper sense of belonging for those who lost the sense of home.



Our journey offers several key lessons that begin with us. First, never underestimate the power of your story. Your uniqueness and background can be powerful tools in building your own path forward and connecting with your audience, no matter who or where they are. Second, adaptability is golden, especially in the new beginning. Starting a business is challenging, and there will be obstacles along the way. However, with perseverance and determination, success can be achieved. Lastly, your team is your most valuable asset. A culture of respect and communication will drive your growth.

I live by the famous quote of Nelson Mandela, "Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again." I believe in rebirth and the importance of giving back to the community. Our experiences have truly filled us with

empathy and a desire to contribute positively to this world because life is all about how much footprint we leave here before we die. As Peace by Chocolate continues to grow, we actively seek to support local and global peace-building initiatives that aid refugees and promote cultural understanding. This commitment has strengthened our brand and resonated with our supporters from across Canada and the world.

Our belief is always that even in the face of adversity, there is always hope for a brighter future. Our journey from Damascus to Antigonish is a story of hope, second chances and the incredible support we received from our new community. Through our little pieces of joy, we aim to spread peace and inspire others to believe in the power of being hopeful and staying focused. [CP](#)

---

**Tareq Hadhad**

Founder and CEO of Peace by Chocolate

Public Speaker, Philanthropist

Speaker, Tedx Talks

Apple Podcast Guest, *Everyone Comes From Somewhere*

# The Changing Profile of the Canadian Student

By Lisa Jane de Gara

## Setting the Stage: The 2039-40 School Year

In education, some things are eternal: busy hallways, rowdy students, a mid-December lost and found bin full of single mittens. Others are prone to endless change: teaching methods, technologies and “best practices.”

Pause and imagine your school in 15 years’ time: the 2039-40 school year. Who will your students be?

## Canada’s Demographic Change

Powered by reams of data, I can tell you who those students will be ... immigrants. And more than ever before.

Canada’s immigrant population has grown substantially in the last 30 years and continues to grow. From 1951 to 1991, about one in seven people in Canada were immigrants.<sup>1</sup> By 2016, two in five Canadians were immigrants and their children.<sup>2</sup> Language diversity increased too. In 1991, one in 12 Canadians spoke a language other than English or French at home; by 2021, one in seven Canadians spoke a non-official language at home.<sup>3</sup>

Consistent with these trends, Statistics Canada estimates that by 2040 more than half of Canada’s K-12 students will be immigrants.<sup>4</sup> Students are increasingly having their first meaningful exposure to English when they walk through the doors of a Canadian school: aged five, but also aged eight, fourteen and sixteen.

## Teaching the Students We Have

Some principals balk at the discussion of demographics, presuming the data to be a tool for discrimination. One principal told me, “I don’t care about what makes us different; we’re all the same.” Another said, “It doesn’t matter to me where a student comes from. We’ll teach them all and treat them with respect.”

The spirit is good hearted. These are capable, experienced educators hoping to welcome all students with open arms. However, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

Consider two Grade 10 students<sup>5</sup>:

- Arthur was born in Oshawa to English-speaking parents and began attending school in Ontario in Kindergarten at the age of five.
- Bimali born in Sri Lanka to Sinhala-speaking parents and her first day of education in English was two months ago.

It would be reasonable to ask Arthur to write a 500-word essay about Louie Riel. Arthur might need some assistance in math as he learns about functions; despite his best efforts, it’s never been his forté.

It would be unreasonable to ask Bimali to explain Canada’s colonial history and Métis culture in the 18th and 19th centuries when she’s been here less than a fiscal quarter. She might be quite capable in math, but grapple with the idea of using a graphing calculator since they were forbidden at her old school. Her parents might also be quite agitated that what they believe is a “cheating” tool is not only mandatory, but costs \$150! Alternatively, she might be placed exclusively in remedial, option-based courses.

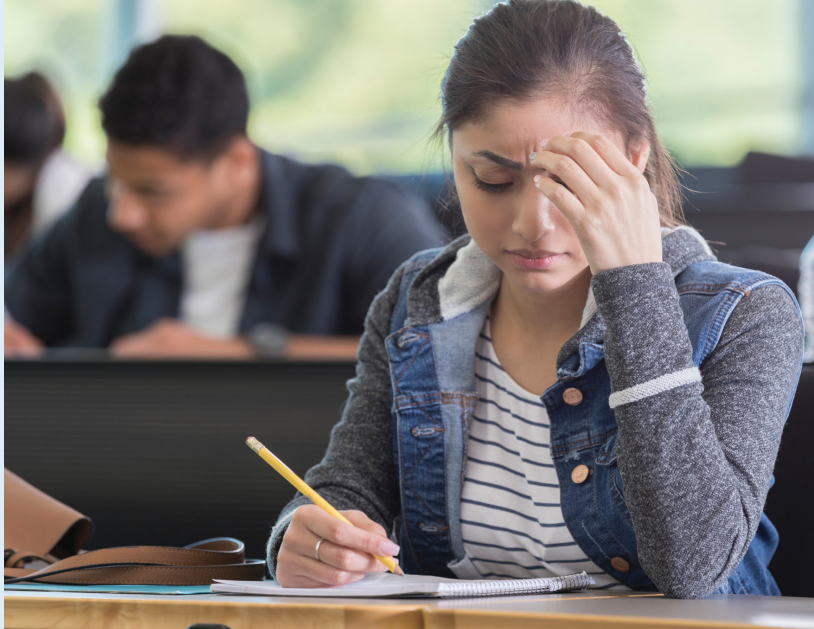
A grim sentence our team and I have heard far too often: “She’s not really going to learn the curriculum. We’re just going to get her socialized.”

In two years, Arthur graduates and heads off to college or university. In two years, Bimali graduates and is ineligible for higher education.

Looking at student outcomes during and after K-12, “welcoming” becomes a much more complex idea. Am I welcome if my country of birth and my mother language determine if I am educated or “just socialized?” Am I welcome if the year my parents received their visa is the greatest determinant of my success in Canada?

## Seek First to Understand

Beyond academics, discipline is a battleground for cultural confusion. Over the years, education administrators have lamented newcomer students’ “disrespect” to me. Their concerns:



- Student was unwilling to look adults in the eyes. “Disengaged”
- Student called female teachers Mister. “Rude and inappropriate”
- Student kept playing on his phone. “Distracted”

Yet, these were students who were trying their best to be respectful. In many cultures, for a child to look an adult directly in the eye would be outrageously insubordinate. Some languages don’t have pronouns or honorifics; the child thought every respected adult, man or woman, was Mister. The student on his phone was accessing a translating app.

Assuming disrespect, rather than asking questions about how cultural difference influences conduct, means that newcomer students are often disciplined rather than supported. As newcomer numbers grow, ensuring that staff understand how culture impacts conduct is increasingly vital.

To paraphrase Dr. Covey: “Seek to understand before you seek to be understood.”

### Can’t We Just Host a Culture Night?

Often, schools approach our team looking for ideas about how to be more welcoming. A common proposal is a “Cultural Night:” showing off national flags, traditional clothing and cultural foods. They are good fun!

However, these events are not a substitute for targeted language acquisition, or for teachers’ development of intercultural competency. Culture celebration events are best compared to Pajama Day or School Spirit Week: enjoyable for students and staff and a chance to build community, but neither a strategy nor a solution.

If a school is more than half newcomers, do we believe it is adequate to acknowledge that only one day of the year? A welcoming school acknowledges cultures in a meaningful way – not as window dressing.

### Conclusion

Families bringing their children to Canada often express that Canada’s high quality of education is a primary motivator for their migration.

Why wouldn’t it be? Canada’s schools are well-known for their excellence. While some things change, we have every reason to believe this will persist. Our schools have attracted arrivals from around the world and this will only grow in the next 15 years. We have an accountability to practise welcoming, rather than assuming a flag on the wall will do the heavy lifting for us.

In 2039-40, the class is 50 per cent immigrant students. In 2039-40, maybe Bimali is teaching a Grade 10 class of her own. [CP](#)

---

**Lisa Jane de Gara** is a Manager at Action for Healthy Communities. She and her team operate a Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program, serving immigrants and refugees in rural Alberta.

---

<sup>1</sup><https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/971104/dq971104-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup><https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220908/dq220908a-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup><https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220817/dq220817a-eng.htm>

<sup>4</sup><https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220908/dq220908a-eng.htm>

<sup>5</sup>These students are hypothetical composites, but the stories are real.



# Hope: An Essential Resource for Principals

By Rebecca Hudson Breen and Denise Larsen

## BENEFITS OF HOPE

There is no question that school leaders and the communities they serve face many threats to hope daily. Yet, research on hope is clear. Hope is an important resource in educational settings, for both educators and students. In fact, higher hope has been found to be beneficial in virtually all aspects of life (Cheavens et al., 2005).

For adults working with young people, sustaining hope is vital in experiencing a sense of purpose in their work and holding an attitude of hope for those they work with (Murdoch & Larsen, 2018). Hope is also a valuable resource in coping with challenging and stressful workplace conditions (Flesaker & Larsen, 2010; Snyder, 2005). And hope is especially necessary in overcoming difficulties and challenges in educational contexts (Nolan & Stitzlein 2011). Hopeful people have the resources to foster hope and success in those with whom they work (Coppock et al., 2010; Flesaker & Larsen, 2010; Murdoch & Larsen, 2018).

## DEFINING HOPE

Hope is a word used in everyday language. And this helps to make it accessible. Individuals often have their own personal understanding of hope, which may be informed by cultural or spiritual meanings of hope. Many academic definitions of hope also exist. Hope is often defined in educational settings as a “positive motivational state” comprised of interactions between agency (goal-directed

energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals) or the “will and the ways” (Snyder et al, 1991).

This definition emphasizes cognitive aspects of hope. Other researchers, including those from helping fields such as nursing and counselling psychology, offer more multidimensional understandings of hope (eg, Larsen et al., 2020; Scioli et al., 2011; Stephenson 1991). Combining key attributes of hope identified in various definitions, hope can be understood as a “future-oriented belief, desire and mental imagining surrounding a valued outcome that is uncertain but possible” (Larsen et al., 2022). Or, put more simply, hope is the ability to envision a future we wish to be a part of (Jevne, 2005).

A multidimensional understanding of hope is at the centre of the applied research conducted at Hope Studies Central at the University of Alberta over the past three decades.

## HOPE STUDIES CENTRAL

Beginning at the start of the 2020-2021 school year, researchers at Hope Studies Central partnered with local teachers in a participatory action research project investigating the role of hope in supporting well-being in schools. This project, the Strengths, Hope and Resourcefulness Program for School Mental Health (SHARP-SMH) involved adapting empirically supported psychoeducational hope interventions to be integrated into lessons across curriculum subjects.

The research revealed important insights about the ways in which students and teachers experienced and nurtured hope during that first full school year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In November 2021, the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) conducted their regular random stratified surveys of licensed Alberta teachers (Pulse Survey), finding high hopelessness among Alberta teachers and school leaders (ATA, 2022). Forty-five per cent of respondents disagreed (13 per cent strongly disagreed; 32 per cent disagreed) with the statement, “I feel hopeful.” In response to this finding, Hope Studies researchers developed a survey and conducted focus groups to better understand teacher and school leader hope – both places where hope is threatened, as well as sources of hope (Larsen et al., 2022).

Through this research, we learn more about the nature and importance of hope for educators, and in particular, the vital role that supportive school leadership plays in bolstering teacher hope.

School leaders draw hope from trusting relationships with their staff and the successes they see in students. In turn, principals have the potential to be hopeful role models for the teachers, students and communities they serve. Principals’ direct expressions of support, understanding, appreciation, trust and positive acknowledgement of teachers serves as a powerful source of hope for others. Yet, these findings also highlight how vital it is to support principals’ own hope, given the role they can play as sources of hope within their school communities.

Three decades of Hope Studies research demonstrate that hope is a skill that can be taught and learned. The SHARP-SMH research highlighted how, in schools, hope can be integrated in a variety of ways, to support student and staff well-being. In the face of ongoing complexity in educational contexts, hope is an important resource for principals, both to support their own well-being, and as a resource in leading with hope in their school communities. The following section highlights some of the ways principals can nurture their own hope, and support hope in those with whom they work.

## HOPE-FOCUSED PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

### *Noticing Hope*

A first step in nurturing one’s own hope is to take time to look around and be open to noticing signs of hope. Begin

where you are right now as you read this article. Look around you for things that make you hopeful. Perhaps it’s an object or a photo on your desk or bookshelf, or the view from your window. There are likely many things around you that you might associate with hope, if you intentionally look for it. As Ronna Jevne and James Miller write in *Finding Hope* (2020), “a wonderful thing about hope is that it’s all over the place. You don’t have to manufacture it; it’s already present (p. 25).”

Try making a list of these signs or symbols of hope. As you go about your day, you might even take a quick photo of signs of hope you encounter, to come back to and possibly share with others in your school community. Photos that capture feelings of hope can provide an opportunity to discuss symbols and meanings of hope. You can take this further, beyond your immediate surroundings, in the form of a “hope walk.” In the SHARP-SMH project, teachers took students on hope walks around their schools and in their neighbourhoods. Signs of hope are also plentiful in nature – even in winter!

### *Relating With Hope*

Our research with teachers and school leaders also highlights how relationships and interactions with students are a strong source of hope (Larsen et al., 2022). Explicitly taking time to notice signs of hope in your connections with others, no matter how small, can help to highlight these positive moments. Asking questions that invite others to consider moments or sources of hope can carry the theme of hope into your conversations with staff. You might look out for hopeful interactions that you witness and share your observations with others. You might even invite staff to share about interactions with students that give them hope during staff meetings, or in other ways. [CP](#)

---

**Rebecca Hudson Breen**, PhD is a Registered Psychologist and Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. She has worked with teachers on the integration of hope concepts in schools through the SHARP-SMH participatory action research project, and has recently joined Dr. Larsen as Co-Director of Hope Studies central.

**Denise Larsen**, PhD, is a Registered Psychologist and Professor of Counselling Psychology in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. She is Co-Director of Hope Studies Central, a lab dedicated to the study of hope in psychology, education and health for over 30 years.

# Blackness and Belonging

By Dr. Andrew B. Campbell and Saffiyah Waithe

Belonging can be defined as “a subjective feeling that one is an integral part of their surrounding system, including family, friends, school, work environments, communities, cultural groups and physical places” (Pogosyan, 2021).

For racialized and marginalized youth belonging can also be seen as a sense of hope, which admits social and systemic barriers. As educational leaders, we must ask ourselves – how are we inviting hope into our schools? How are we ensuring that when our students walk through our doors their fears of not belonging and the challenges tied to their identities are alleviated and addressed so they can walk into spaces they can thrive in?

Our Black students cannot thrive in our schooling system if they feel isolated or have a fear of belonging based on their identity. Feelings of fear will lead to disengagement and dim the light of hope that education can provide them. Dr. George Dei poses the question: “Dropped out or pushed out?” (Dei, 1995). As educational leaders, we need to critically reflect on the systematic and institutional challenges that our Black students face and how we can better create an infrastructure to support them.

As the lead coordinator of the Black Futures Educational Pathway (BFEP) and the director of the Centre of Black Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies

in Education (OISE), my work is deeply rooted in supporting Black students and supporting and creating affinity spaces where they can find their voice and truly belong within our educational systems. This aim has been deliberate and requires a deep commitment to anti-racist and inclusive practices. I believe there is a pathway that allows our Black students not only to survive but to thrive in our school boards. This work requires collective action from the top down to address the systemic barriers Black students face both within and outside the education system.

## Thriving Through Brave Spaces

Research has shown that Black students often feel underrepresented in their educational environments. A key factor contributing to this sense of isolation is the lack of Black educators who can mentor and support them. Diverse representation matters: according to the Federation of Black Canadians, students are 13 per cent more likely to graduate from high school if they have a teacher of the same race. Increasing the number of Black teachers, principals and administrators can significantly enhance support for Black students (Global News, 2023).

One of the most significant considerations in creating a sense of belonging and community is to be able to nurture the community once it has been established. I

recall a conversation I had earlier this year with a high school principal who was deeply concerned about how to support her Black students. As a white principal with no Black teachers on staff, she felt the weight of needing to respond to her Black students' requests for an affinity space. My advice to her was simple yet profound: intentionality is key. Creating a brave space, one built on a foundation of love and care, is the first step towards a safe space where all students, particularly Black students, can thrive.



For example, this past September we celebrated the inaugural launch of the first official Black Futures Education Pathway (BFEP) cohort. This launch welcomed over 30 Black-identifying students into the Master of Teaching program at OISE. This milestone is historic not just because it's the first time a full Black cohort has been welcomed into the program, but because these educators represent the future of Black education. Their journey, and the spaces we continue to create for them, fill me with hope for a future where every Black student can thrive. I am hopeful these brave affinity spaces can also exist in our schooling system.

## Building Brave Communities - Sharing Breath

As educational leaders, intentional community building is key to creating what I call brave spaces that support students' voices and holistic needs.

For K-12 students, brave spaces are crucial throughout their entire educational journey. At every stage of their development, these spaces must adapt to their psycho-social needs, fostering environments where they feel valued and empowered. To build this community we must share breath, which means we must all collectively engage in embodied learning and support students' holistic needs (Wong & Batacharya, 2018).

Educational leaders must be proactive in addressing the needs of Black and racialized students, ensuring they are supported at every step. My advice for creating these brave spaces is as follows:

- 1. Set High Expectations:** Maintain high expectations for Black students and actively support them in meeting those expectations. Disrupt and distance yourself from deficit thinking about Black students.
- 2. Support High Expectations:** This is where the action is required and separates the performative from the authentic. Far too many of us are wrapped up and burdened by policies and lacking results. What can you do in your school to ensure support is tangible?
- 3. Recognize the Diversity Within Blackness:** Black students are not a monolith. We must expand our understanding of what Blackness looks like, acknowledging that it is vast, deep and broad. Avoid limiting stereotypes.



- 4. Create and Empower Affinity Spaces:** Develop affinity spaces that are designed for and by Black students. These spaces should empower them to have a voice and take ownership of their experiences.
- 5. Encourage Storytelling:** Help Black students learn how to tell their stories. Their narratives are powerful and should be encouraged as a means of self-expression and connection.
- 6. Affirm Their Identity:** Continuously affirm the identities, stories and journeys of Black students. Celebrate who they are and the unique experiences they bring to the school community.

These recommendations are an integral step for cultivating sustained belonging for Black students and for them to foster a sense of holistic wellness that supports their educational as well as social needs. Black students, as well as all other marginalized and racialized children, deserve to feel like their hearts and minds are supported in our educational institutions. We must encourage the light of hope in them and allow them to see our educational institutions as brave spaces they feel they can exhale and know the next breath they take will be supported. [CP](#)

---

**Andrew B. Campbell** (DR.ABC), Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Leadership for Racial Justice in Teacher Education, Director Centre for Black Studies in Education (CBSE), Coordinator - Black Future Educators' Pathway (BFEP), Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning (CTL) Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto

**Saffiyah Waithe**, PhD Student, Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE)

# The Journey of The Forcibly Displaced Student

By Sandra Donaghue and Rosina Cosentino



Belonging is a fundamental human need which significantly impacts a student's emotional well-being and overall happiness. This need to belong and feel a valued member of the community is heightened in students who are displaced because of war.

At St. Sofia Byzantine Catholic Elementary School, Mississauga, Ontario, a school community which saw a population increase of nearly 40 per cent, all of whom were of Ukrainian descent and fleeing the war in their home country, common hardship prevailed.

Why refer to this group of people as displaced because of the war, as opposed to refugees? For many, the word refugee is tied to the notion that they are running, seeking refuge. Many forcibly displaced Ukrainian families desire to go back home, but fear what they are returning to. Even the status granted to many is not classified as Refugee Status, but rather Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET).

Regardless of why or under what title, they are here. They are our students, under our care; and they not only desire, but need, to belong, to feel they are important and valued.

## Building a Culture of Belonging

While not a surprise, the language barrier was the first hurdle these students faced in Canada. Fortunately, trying to communicate basic daily needs and requests, was somewhat alleviated by the fact that our school community is an English-speaking school with

Ukrainian language instruction. A significant number of our educators are Ukrainian speaking and of the Byzantine Rite.

Culturally adjusting to both the Canadian way of life and the Ontario school system involved learning new social norms, behaviours and expectations, sometimes vastly different from the ones our new students loved and cherished at home. While the story of each displaced student may differ, many have witnessed or experienced severe violence, loss and other traumatic events. Their new life can be overshadowed by a sense of guilt and mental health challenges, such as PTSD, survivor's guilt, grief and loss. They are often consumed with worry about loved ones left behind and the loss of lifestyle and traditions.

The economic hardships of any displaced family are multi-faceted, however Ukrainian displaced families often experience a heightened economic stress, due to fathers, uncles and brothers who were not able to leave the Ukraine. This reality created one-income families trying to provide for their children in a new country and in a difficult housing market.

For our young, displaced students, social isolation often infiltrates every aspect of their life, from the classroom to the playground, and even in the larger community as they try to find ways to fit in, to be accepted, to be a part of the group, when all they know has changed due to differences in cultural practices, social play, food selection and even fashion sense.



specialized programs is key to ensuring displaced families receive all the assistance available to them. Providing school communications with translations, coupled with consistent and frequent communication, can help ensure understanding, enable participation and promote not only student involvement, but also inclusion of families.

For any student, but importantly for displaced students, extracurricular activities and clubs are incredibly impactful. Engaging in extracurricular sports and events helps build social networks and friendships, which aid in combating isolation and loneliness. Clubs and activities provide opportunities for students to develop new skills and interests, boosting their confidence and sense of accomplishment. Whether it's fostering artistic talents or athletic skills, these activities contribute to personal growth and satisfaction. Participating in local clubs and sports allow students to understand their new

environment and engage in local traditions, culture and societal norms. Extracurricular activities also offer a constructive outlet for stress and emotional challenges. Engaging in familiar hobbies and interests can offer a healthy distraction and improve mental health, while providing relaxation and joy.

School-wide initiatives along with a variety of extracurricular activities that centre student voice and interest not only promote belonging, but also offer a constructive outlet for stress and emotional challenges. As an example, the healing art project run by St. Sofia staff provided an opportunity where students were able to express emotions through their artwork as they adjusted to their new surroundings.

As school communities attempt to create thriving, inclusive school environments, we must continue to reflect on ideas and strategies that encourage relationships and develop meaning with connections in our hallways every day. The value of being part of something is a desire that grows deep within us all. [CP](#)

---

**Sandra Donaghue**, Principal, St. Sofia Byzantine Catholic School, Dufferin Peel CDSB

**Rosina Cosentino**, Vice-Principal, St. Sofia Byzantine Catholic School, Dufferin Peel CDSB



# Black Heritage & Excellence Series

## 2024

CPCO's Black Heritage and Excellence Series focuses on the journeys and perspectives of Black Catholic education leaders. In our *Finding Hope* edition, we look at the issue of poverty in our schools. Joel Chiutsi and Jacqueline Watson share their experience and insights. How can we, as school leaders, a community and a society, help alleviate the impact of poverty?

### In Conversation with Joel Chiutsi

Joel Chiutsi, Superintendent of York Catholic District School Board (Secondary) shares his thoughts with Cheryl Sywyk, a member of CPCO's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Standing Committee and Executive Council.

***Tell us about the journey that led you to become a leader and mentor of the Catholic faith and education.***

My journey began 23 years ago when I left my home country of Zimbabwe to come to Canada. I was already a trained teacher, and moving to Canada opened new opportunities. I came from a family that highly valued education, so becoming a teacher felt like a natural choice. Entering Canadian classrooms, I quickly noticed the challenges many students, particularly those who looked like me, faced in the schools where I worked. As a teacher, I took various initiatives to bring about change and improve the lives of these students. However, I realized my ability to make significant changes was limited in my capacity as a teacher. This motivated me to pursue leadership roles such as vice-principal, principal and now as superintendent.

***From your perspective and experience, what are the types of poverty affecting the lives of students?***

I have observed various types of poverty that affect students. The most obvious type is socioeconomic poverty, where students struggle with basic needs such as food and housing. It was shocking to realize that in a developed country like Canada, some students do not have access to proper meals or a safe place to live. This is a reality that continues to impact many of our schools, especially affecting Black and Indigenous students. Another type of poverty is educational poverty, where students lack access to quality educational resources and technology. This was highlighted during the pandemic when many marginalized students struggled with remote learning due to a lack of resources. There is emotional and social poverty, particularly prevalent in racialized communities, where students lack sufficient support systems. This leads to a cycle of underachievement and inequity. I have also observed spiritual poverty, where students lack understanding and support regarding their faith.

***Has the impact of poverty on students and education changed?***

Awareness of the impact of poverty on the education system has increased due to engagement in the digital world. We are exposed to different learning methods and starting to understand the impact of poverty on communities. COVID-19 has been a big eye-opener, especially in supporting students who may not have the space or resources to participate in remote learning. There is also a growing recognition of how COVID-19

impacts mental health. This has led to initiatives that focus on emotional and economic well-being. We are concentrating more on these specific aspects in our schools. COVID-19 has changed our understanding and exposed us to many previously unknown issues. We are beginning to see a lot happening within our communities.

### ***How does poverty impact learning, health and mental health?***

Students are likely to experience lower academic performance due to lack of sleep and stress. This affects their achievement, which has long-term consequences for their future. Inadequate nutrition and unstable housing conditions can contribute to chronic absenteeism. Not surprisingly, data shows racialized and Indigenous communities are more affected by absenteeism, which is connected to poverty and the psychological burden it brings. School board data reveals a high ratio of racialized and Indigenous communities facing mental health challenges, which aligns with the issues.

### ***Can social justice and DEI initiatives help?***

Implementing initiatives to provide equal access to educational resources can help create a level playing field for impoverished students. Instead of treating all schools equally, we should focus on schools that are most affected by poverty and implement targeted initiatives to address the specific needs of each community. By doing so, we have observed improvements in the well-being of students. When formulating budgets, we now prioritize specific communities that require additional support based on the data indicating underachievement in those areas. We realize that without implementing specific initiatives, nothing will change. By addressing systemic barriers and creating an inclusive environment, schools can help alleviate the effects of poverty. For example, implementing school meal programs, offering scholarships and providing mentorship programs can help build capacity in these schools and foster a sense of belonging among underprivileged students, ultimately leading to improved performance.

### ***Refugees and immigrants are seen as double-disadvantaged and disengaged. Would implementing initiatives centred around a sense of belonging help?***

I am well-versed in the experience of being a refugee, having entered this country as one myself. I understand

firsthand the challenges and opportunities of starting a new life as a refugee. Programs that encourage a sense of belonging and community engagement can significantly enhance the lives of refugees and immigrant students. By establishing such programs, we are fostering resilience and a sense of belonging within our communities. Providing language support, facilitating cultural integration and establishing social support networks offer families a solid foundation in their new country. Upon arriving in a new country, one often feels disoriented and language can pose a barrier to progress. By developing networks and programs that address these needs, we can provide newcomers with a strong starting point. It is unreasonable to expect newcomers to independently navigate and comprehend everything without support. When I arrived, emphasis was placed on having a “Canadian experience.” Despite being a teacher, I encountered difficulties without this specific experience. Programs that offer newcomers this experience opens doors for them.

### ***In Conversation with Jacqueline Watson***

Jacqueline Watson, Principal, Niagara Catholic District School Board, shares her thoughts with Victoria Wegelin, a member of CPCO’s Ambassador Committee.

### ***Tell us about the journey that led you to become a leader and mentor of the Catholic faith and education.***

I was raised Roman Catholic and attended Catholic schools. Even though teaching was never on my radar, I enrolled at Brock University and obtained a B.A in Psychology. After that, I started a daycare, worked as a counsellor at a women’s shelter and volunteered in the community, which made me realize my passion for teaching and empowering people. I went to Teachers College and obtained my Masters in Science of Education from Niagara University. I was hired by the Niagara Catholic District School Board before I completed my program, started as a Long-Term Occasional Teacher and became a permanent teacher, specializing in teaching intermediates. I obtained additional qualifications in religion and guidance, and gained experience in equity, diversity and community relations. I served as an acting principal and vice-principal before accepting a permanent vice-principal position. After three years, I became Principal, St. James Catholic and now at St. Nicholas Catholic.

***From your perspective and experience, what are the types of poverty affecting the lives of students?***

Different types of poverty intersect with each other. We have many forms of poverty such as generational, situational and relative. Some families face poverty through no fault of their own, such as losing a job, dealing with illness or going through a separation or divorce. Some families are new immigrants who are trying their hardest to learn English and adapt to their new culture, ergo their financial opportunities are diminished. Some families have never been taught how to budget, save and spend. Many live paycheque to paycheque, constantly worrying about meeting their daily needs. Struggling to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads, they're often unable to think beyond their immediate survival.

***Has the impact of poverty on students and education changed?***

There have always been disparities between schools, with some being more affluent and others facing poverty. The situation seems to have worsened due to the pandemic, increasing housing and food costs, and rising levels of food insecurity. Families are experiencing more profound levels of poverty, making it increasingly difficult for them to improve their circumstances and break out of the cycle. Schools often struggle to provide necessary supports for their students. There are long waiting lists for services such as speech and occupational therapy and children often wait years to receive help. This contrasts to more affluent neighbourhoods, where families can seek private support for their children. Schools are left to act as a temporary solution. This constant juggling and prioritizing of limited resources is exhausting and takes a toll on everyone. Ultimately, this situation does not allow children to reach their full potential.

***How does poverty impact learning, health and mental health?***

Growing up in poverty has a significant impact on our children. Children living in poverty are keenly aware of what they don't have in comparison to other children. Other children have things they can't even request because their parents lack the means and they don't want to add more stress to their families. This takes a toll on children's mental well-being, at times making them feel unworthy and undeserving.

Needed health resources are often found in areas away from priority schools. Parents may have to travel a distance to reach medical buildings, specialists or professional supports required for healthy living. Some may not have transportation or jobs that offer benefits or personal days off. A language barrier or lack of understanding adds to the difficulties of navigating through policies, procedures and legalities of accessing support.

Despite the challenges, children living in poverty have immense potential. Due to financial constraints, they may not have the opportunity for extended activities, but their resilience and determination can help them overcome barriers. With support and resources, with a loving and caring environment that continually raises the bar of expectations and achievement, our children can excel in their education, they can expand their social connections and they can see a future that can help lead them out of the cycle of poverty.

***Is there a connection between poverty and minority/racialized and refugee groups?***

We are faced with systemic inequalities that affect marginalized racialized minority groups. They are living in poverty because these inequalities are deeply rooted in our society, making it difficult for them to access resources. They have limited income and struggle to access social services. For refugee families, their primary focus is on learning the language and meeting basic needs such as shelter and food, often taking low-income jobs to do so. Finding the best social services and organizations often takes a backseat. The process of transitioning to Canada as a refugee is lengthy, keeping individuals in poverty and perpetuating the cycle.

***Can social justice and DEI initiatives help?***

Social justice and equity are closely connected. Social justice focuses on the fair distribution of resources, while diversity, equity and inclusion examine fairness for all individuals. It's important to understand that poverty stems from systemic injustices, and we need to address this issue. We must ensure that our resources are distributed equitably rather than equally to promote success for all. To achieve this, we need to identify the most pressing needs and work towards addressing them. [!\[\]\(8c57b89803f96ec6a85c7bf6d7f021a5\_img.jpg\)](#)

---

**Julene Anderson**, Communications and Marketing Manager, CPCO  
**Cheryl Sywyk**, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Standing Committee, CPCO  
**Victoria Wegelin**, CPCO Ambassador Committee



# Improve EQAO Scores



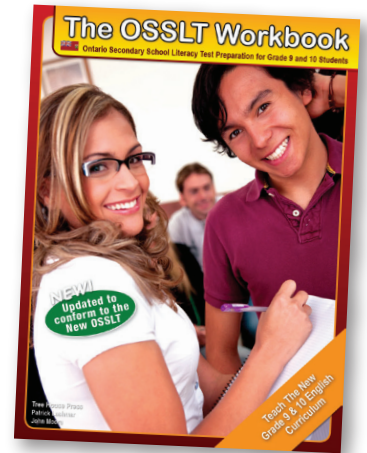
***This is your chance to provide your students with the proven tools and knowledge they need to succeed. Our EQAO books have consistently improved EQAO scores.***

## FEATURES

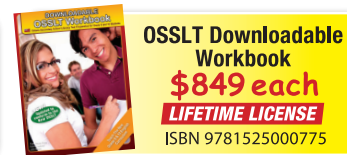
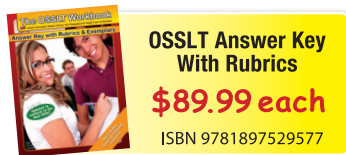
- Essential OSSLT Preparation Units for Grade 9 and 10 Students
- Also serves as a core text to teach the new Grades 9 and 10 Ontario English Curriculum
- Available in student workbook and downloadable formats with Lifetime Licenses
- Presents a comprehensive series of reading and writing lessons that mirror ALL the components of the OSSLT.

## CONTENT

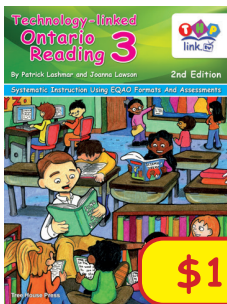
- Reading Information Paragraphs
- Reading Real-life Narrative
- Reading News Reports
- Reading Dialogue
- Short Writing Tasks
- Opinion Essay
- Answering Multiple Choice Practice Question



**OVER 140,000 COPIES SOLD SINCE 2000**

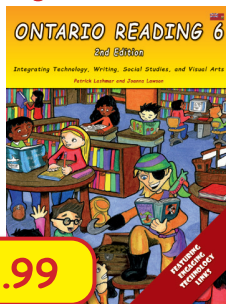


## Ontario Reading 3 and 6



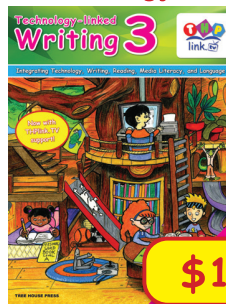
**\$12.99**

ISBN 9781525000331



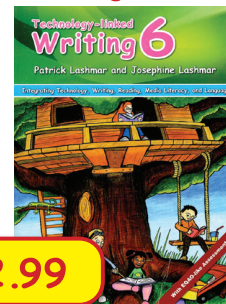
ISBN 9781525000539

## Technology-linked Writing 3 and 6



**\$12.99**

ISBN 9781525000584



ISBN 9781897529607

## Ontario Reading & Writing Teaching and Assessment Guides

- Grade 3 Reading 9781525000362
- Grade 6 Reading 9781525000577
- Grade 3 Writing 9781525000591
- Grade 6 Writing 9781897529621

**\$69.99**

***Direct, explicit, systematic integrated Reading and Composition instruction using EQAO formats and assessments.***

## FEATURES

- Teaches the entire New Ontario Reading and Composition Curriculum
- Includes EQAO Reading and Writing assessments that exactly mirror the EQAO assessments
- ALL Canadian literature including ample aboriginal and multicultural content
- Includes links to THPlink TV videos that enhance the literature
- Writing 3 and 6 include Language Links that integrate composition with language conventions

# TREE HOUSE PRESS

**Order Online:**  
**TREEHOUSEPRESS.COM**  
**CALL US: 905-574-3399**