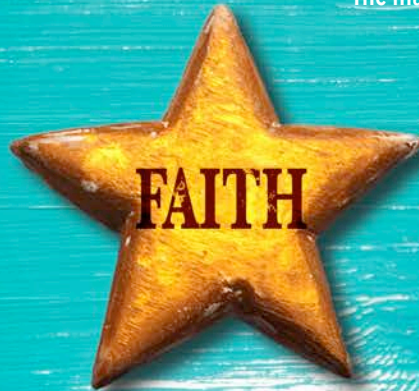




# PrincipalConnections

Winter 2025 • Volume 30 • Issue 2

The magazine of Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario



## Celebrating Our Success

**STEVEN KATZ**

*Nothing For You, Without You*

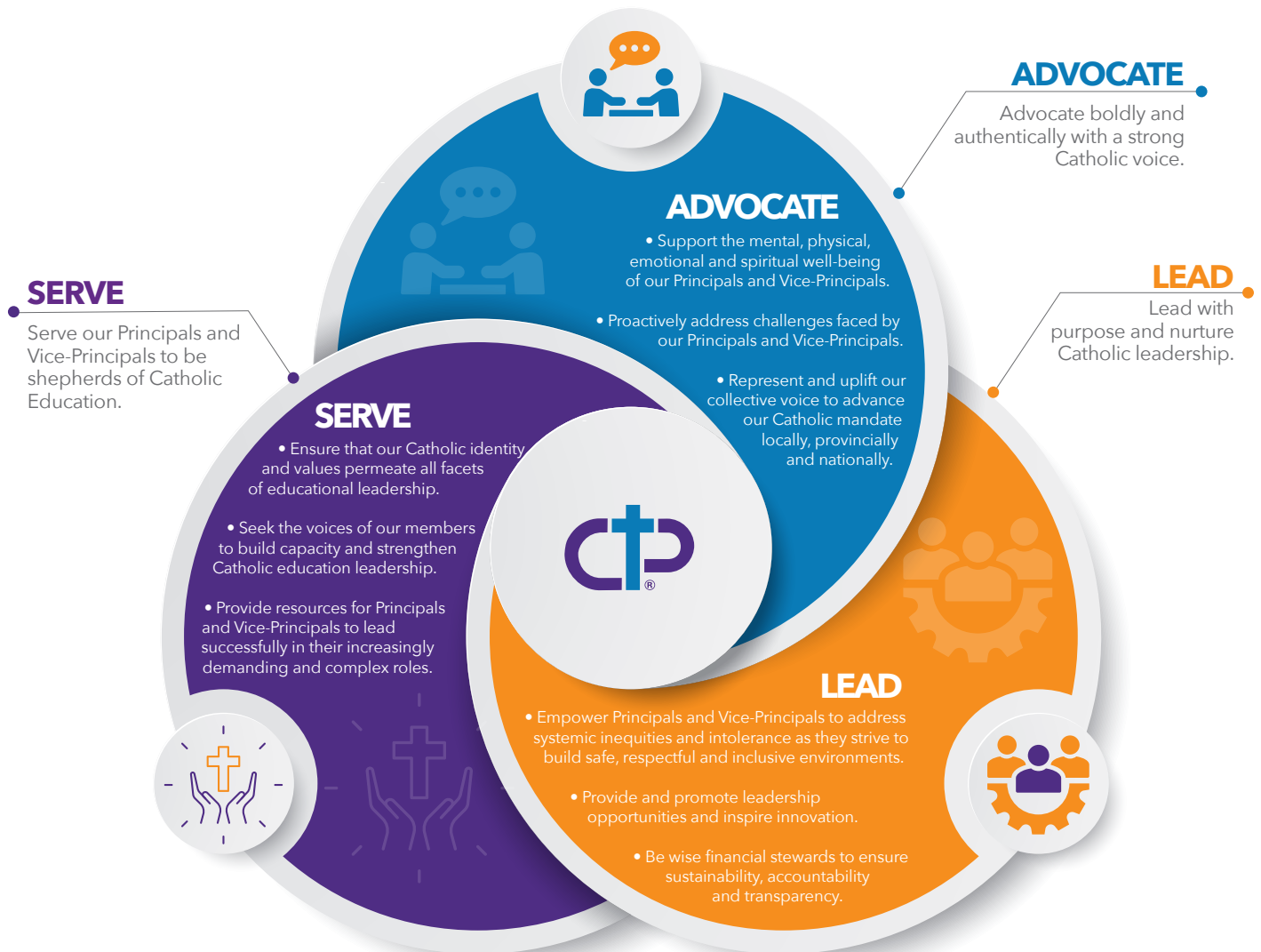
**ANN E. LOPEZ**

*Disrupting Deficit Narratives*

**JOSH FULLAN**

*Students at the Centre*

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2027



What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?  
**Micah 6:8**

# IN THIS ISSUE



Understanding Your Optimism **18**



Our Shared Horizon **32**



Big Ideas for the Care of Tiny Humans **15**



A Decade of Transformation and Coherence **46**

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

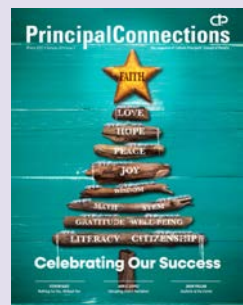
- Nothing for You, Without You | 8
- Disrupting Deficit Narratives | 10
- Students at the Centre | 12
- Big Ideas for the Care of Tiny Humans | 15
- Understanding Your Optimism | 18
- Educational Leadership and the Role of Macro and Micro Forces | 24
- Connection, Community and Calm | 30
- Our Shared Horizon – The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations | 32
- The Good News About Literacy | 38
- Celebrating Math Learning Together | 42
- Welcoming Families From Around the World | 50
- The Voice of Catholic Parents | 56

## KEEPING YOU INFORMED

- A Reflection for Catholic School Leaders | 7
- Equity-Seeking Leadership | 21
- Cultivating Inclusive and Responsive Learning Environments | 26
- After Taking The First Step ... Let Us Now Walk Together | 28
- The Gift of Catholic Education | 35
- The Rise of Outdoor Education | 44
- A Decade of Transformation and Coherence | 46
- Schools and Universities: Partnerships in Action | 52
- With the Support of a Mentor-Coach | 54
- St. Margaret Gourmet Globetrotters | 60

## IN EVERY ISSUE

- From the President and the Executive Director: Celebrating Our Successes | 4
- From the Editor: Tell Me Something Good | 6
- Connecting Voices | 59



Cover design by Luigi Palumbo

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 CPKO. Similarly, the acceptance of advertising does not imply CPKO endorsement.

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40035635

CPKO 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 CPKO.

Copyright ©2025 Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario. All rights reserved.

## EDITORIAL, ADVERTISING & SALES

- Deirdre Kinsella Biss**, Editor  
dkinsellabiss@cpco.on.ca
- Carol Anne Jeanson**, Copy Editor
- Luigi Palumbo**, Graphic & Web Designer  
lpalumbo@cpco.on.ca | ext. 25
- Katayoon Salehi**, Communications & Sponsorship Officer  
ksalehi@cpco.on.ca | ext. 30
- Juleen Anderson**, Manager of Marketing & Communications  
janderson@cpco.on.ca | ext. 38
- Gaby Aloï**, Manager of Corporate Operations  
galoi@cpco.on.ca | ext. 26

## CORPORATE, PROGRAMS & SERVICES

- Ralph Sharples**, President  
president@cpco.on.ca
- Tilia Cruz**, Executive Director  
tcruz@cpco.on.ca | ext. 44
- Nancy McDowell**, Accountant  
nmcowell@cpco.on.ca | ext. 29
- Elizabeth Creelman**, General Counsel  
djoseph@cpco.on.ca
- Antonella Rubino**, Manager of Support Services  
arubino@cpco.on.ca | ext. 40
- Rukshi Athulathmudali**, Support Services Advisor  
rathulathmudali@cpco.on.ca | ext. 27
- Michael Young**, Support Services Advisor  
myoung@cpco.on.ca | ext. 41
- Nancy Podobnik**, Support Services Advisor  
npodobnik@cpco.on.ca | ext. 35
- Damien Joseph**, Paralegal  
djoseph@cpco.on.ca | ext. 42
- Jennifer Vieira**, Manager of Catholic Leadership Development Services  
jvieira@cpco.on.ca | ext. 37
- Jan Murphy**, Professional Learning Facilitator  
Catholic Leadership Development Services  
jmurphy@cpco.on.ca | ext. 24
- Vanessa Kellow**, Office Administrator  
Catholic Leadership Development Services  
vkellow@cpco.on.ca | ext. 31
- Maria Cortez**, Administrative Assistant, Operations  
mcortez@cpco.on.ca | ext. 32

Principal Connections is the proud recipient of the following awards:



We would like to acknowledge that the CPKO 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@cpco.on.ca • blog.cpco.on.ca • www.cpco.on.ca



CPKOofficial





**FROM THE PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Ralph Sharples, Tilia Cruz

## Celebrating Our Successes

Christmas is a time to rejoice as we await the birth of Christ, reminding us of God's love and giving us hope in salvation.

As administrators, we excel at celebrating the successes and good work of those we lead; however, we are not nearly as adept in accepting praise for our own work. Instead, we tend to steer away from congratulating ourselves on a job well done and shift the focus to anyone but ourselves.

We also often overlook the impact of our successes, as they may take years to bear fruition. It could be the patience we have shown with a family – a patience that has turned an adversarial relationship into one of mutual trust. Or it could be the student that was constantly in our offices, who returns well after graduating to tell us of their own successes and to thank us for being the one adult who truly cared for them and listened. Throughout our system, too, there is the constant reminder of our successes as we look at the staff in our schools and around the board and see many of them were once our students and have been so inspired by our work that they join us in our profession.

We are, by nature, fixers who are always looking for ways to improve upon what we do and are rarely satisfied with the outcomes, no matter how impressive they are. In light of this reticence and in the spirit of rejoicing, it is important we take the time to celebrate our successes – no matter how uncomfortable that may make us feel.

In reaching out to CPCO Associates across the province for their successes we hear of the awe-inspiring efforts that go above and beyond our roles as school administrators. These successes are both individually and collectively directed but always with the focus of supporting students holistically and in line with our Gospel values.

From the **North**, this passion is evident in the actions of one of our Associates from Nipissing-Parry Sound, who is adding to the school experiences of elementary students as the board's elementary sports chair, tasked with organizing extra-curricular athletic events promoting

holistic learning by teaching the values of teamwork and sportsmanship while supporting mental health through activity and togetherness.

In the **East**, CPCO Associates from Renfrew Catholic have collectively prioritized providing consistent financial support to the Renfrew County Child Poverty Action Network (CPAN) over the past decade. A portion of their local dues is donated yearly to help CPAN provide access to school supplies, food and winter clothing for children across the county. This partnership benefits local students and families and allows the administrators to work collectively for the good of others.

The examples from the **South** are varied and equally impressive. One Associate who was celebrating a milestone birthday put others ahead of herself by requesting donations in lieu of gifts to support students in need. Another found a way to provide hockey equipment and transportation for 42 young women this year through the Hockey 4 Youth Program. Finding time for instructional leadership saw a principal pilot a HUB Learning program for students with needs. Further successes were led by an Associate committed to creating safe and inclusive spaces with strong student voices through many initiatives such as the Equity and Equality Club, Staircase Project and AMP Project. Windsor Essex's administrators are true examples of servant leadership finding inventive ways to ensure the focus remains on students and their wellness.

Looking **West**, Huron-Superior CPCO's Helping Hands charitable initiative provides meaningful financial assistance to children and families in need within their school communities. Established in October 2012 by dedicated principals and vice-principals, it draws on contributions from all employee groups. Since its inception, the program has distributed a total of \$92,216.71 to families across the board offering critical support to students, so they can focus on learning and well-being. From January to September of this year, \$5,807.62 was provided to schools through CPCO Helping Hands, reflecting the continued commitment of administrators in caring for and supporting school communities.

***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.”***  
(Philippians 4: 4-5)

And at the CPCO offices, we are also proud of our successes.

The **Marketing and Communications Department** is celebrating the success of *Principal Connections Magazine*. The *Literacy* edition was awarded as one of the Top 25 Best Single Issues of 2024 by the Tabbie Awards. This recognition is a testament to the hard work, creativity and dedication of everyone involved, and couldn't have been achieved without our Magazine Editors, Designer, Manager and contributors who bring their best to every issue.

Within the **Support Services Department**, an unprecedented number of bargaining locals reached a deal with their respective Boards by the October 1st deadline, despite the struggles of the new terms and conditions. This success is attributed to the ongoing and increased collaboration with local AMRs and lead negotiators this past year. In turn, this renewed engagement allowed these most recent negotiations to foster productive dialogue that has led to advancements as well as a commitment from the department to continue to strengthen its partnerships with our locals.

Our **Catholic Leadership Development** team is celebrating that PQP candidates consistently express high satisfaction with CPCO's AQ courses, highlighting their value in both professional growth and faith development. An example of this is reflected in the following participant comment: *“I am truly grateful for the opportunity to share my faith through the CPCO PQP experience. I feel as though any Catholic educator would benefit from taking PQP 1&2 through CPCO.”*

And in **Operations**, the glue of the organization, the team seamlessly transitioned to the new work year by proactively engaging with our 29 Catholic school boards throughout the summer and ensuring that Welcome & Enrolment information was shared with newly appointed administrators to help the smooth facilitation of new registrations in July and August. In the fall, this dedication shifted to planning and facilitating the

October 2025 Assembly of Member Representatives along with welcoming both new and returning Association Presidents where opportunities for networking and sharing of information ensured the success of the meeting.

We, at CPCO, are extremely proud of these accomplishments as well as the innumerable, unsung successes you, as Catholic administrators, achieve on a regular basis. Over the Christmas season, please take the time to reflect and congratulate yourselves on all your successes no matter how small. And when the opportunity arises, celebrate your colleagues for the successes they are having.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas filled with joy, laughter and rest.

**Ralph  
Tilia**



## FROM THE EDITOR

Deirdre Kinsella Biss

# Tell Me Something Good

Over the past decade, Ontario has remained steadfast in its commitment to educational innovation, equity and achievement. From 2015 to 2025, we have navigated global disruptions, embraced technological transformation and responded to evolving societal needs, all while nurturing curious minds and resilient communities.

In this edition of *Principal Connections*, we shine a light on the remarkable progress made across Ontario's Catholic schools in the last 10 years. We honour the educators who have reimagined teaching, the students who have inspired change and the institutions that have championed inclusive, forward-thinking learning environments. Whether through the expansion of STEM programs, the rise of Indigenous-led curriculum initiatives or the integration of mental health supports, Ontario continues to redefine what success in education truly means.

We celebrate the milestones that have shaped this generation of learners.

**Faith is at the Heart of Learning.** In our Catholic schools, faith continues to be the driving force behind every aspect of student learning and formation. Anne Jamieson powerfully underscores the significance of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations, reminding us of the spiritual and academic vision that guides our students. Norm Roberts reflects on how the warmth and traditions of Catholic education foster a strong sense of belonging, helping students feel connected, supported and part of a vibrant, faith-filled community. Ab Falconi highlights the vital role of Catholic school curriculum leaders, whose commitment and guidance cultivate thriving communities and inspire growth in every student they serve.

**Striving for Excellence with Equity and Wellness in Mind.** Equity is the cornerstone of Ontario's education system. Dismantling systemic barriers and building inclusive classrooms is work that belongs to all of us. Ann Lopez highlights the ongoing need to challenge deficit narratives by bringing attention to systemic issues, affirming student diversity and embracing inclusive teaching practices. Troy Hill reflects on how Indigenous

education initiatives honour truth and move reconciliation forward by elevating Indigenous voices, histories and knowledge. Isabelle Chartrand-Dubois shares how Ontario schools are embracing identity, well-being and mental health as essential components of student success.

**Advancing Literacy and Numeracy Through Evidence-Based Practice.** Ontario's revised language and math curricula are driving measurable improvements in student achievement. Brian Weishar highlights how a deep understanding of literacy has equipped educators to meet the evolving challenges of new curriculum and technology. Jenn Vieira and Chris Suurtamm stress how the revised Ontario math curriculum emphasizes professional learning and collaboration. Jean Clinton reflects on the lasting impact of early learning initiatives in shaping students' educational journeys.

**Promoting Student-Centred Learning and Amplifying Student Voice.** Schools are re-thinking what student success looks like; not just by tallying grades, but by empowering student voice and agency. Josh Fullan reminds us that the best learning happens with students, not to them. He advocates that in today's world, the true "mark" of education is how well we awaken each student's sense of identity, belonging, inquiry and purpose.

**Encouraging Leadership That Lasts and Learning That Matters.** Catholic school leaders remain dedicated to purposeful learning. Steven Katz emphasizes the vital role that principals and vice-principals play in driving high-quality curriculum implementation. He attributes school success to their use of appreciative inquiry and their deep understanding of what works best within their school contexts. Building on this perspective, Michael Fullan stresses the importance of "specificity" in the implementation process to maximum impact and achievement.

This edition of *Principal Connections* is more than a retrospective, it's a tribute to the people and practices that have made Ontario's Catholic education system a model of resilience, innovation and hope.

**Bravo Ontario!**

# A Reflection for Catholic School Leaders

By Ab Falconi

The Christmas season is a time when our hearts are lighter, and lights shine a little brighter. We are reminded of the deep joy and faith that unites us all as a community of faith. This is always a special time of year, yet feels especially wonderful this year as the Jubilee Year, *Pilgrims of Hope* draws to a close in January. The Jubilee Year invites us to pause and reflect on the blessings we share, and thank God for those people and moments that illuminate our journey.

Success within the framework of Catholic education is the achievement of each of our vocational calls; it is a vocation that allows us to bring Jesus into our classrooms, hallways, offices and into every interaction we have with one another. As Pope Francis reminded us, “Education is an act of love; it is like giving life.” This shines through each educator’s encouragement, every leader’s decisions rooted in compassion and every family’s trust in our shared mission. We are truly blessed.

It takes a community of caring, committed people who lift one another up for the good of our students. Think for a moment about your mentors, those who have supported you on your journey, colleagues who have encouraged you and students who have inspired you. Their influence reminds us that collaboration, perseverance and faith go hand in hand. When we work together rooted in our faith, all things are possible.

In this edition of *Principal Connections*, you will read stories of leadership, innovation and faith-filled learning that celebrate the intentional impact we are making together. As you turn each page, look for the common threads that run through them all. You will read of hope, joy and a commitment to community amongst others. These reflections demonstrate examples of the successes that you lead and experience daily.

The principals and vice-principals in our Catholic schools play a special role in these successes. As curriculum

**As curriculum leaders, you guide and inspire your school communities every day.**

leaders, you guide and inspire your school communities every day. Your leadership, grounded in faith and compassion, brings learning to life and ensures each child is

dignified, respected, supported and loved.

As we reflect, let’s take time to rejoice and to see the light of Christ in one another, and to recognize the beauty of what we accomplish together. We are blessed to enjoy our vocational call, to journey together and to do so with joy and gratitude.

May the following examples of our successes fill your heart with peace and your spirit with renewed hope. May the light continue to illuminate our path as we serve, lead and grow together in faith. [CP](#)

---

**Ab Falconi**  
Executive Director  
Catholic Curriculum Corporation

# Disrupting Deficit Narratives

By Ann E. Lopez

Public education systems should be spaces where all students can thrive. However, we know from research this is not always the case. As we navigate changing discourses and educational landscapes, educators, whose work is grounded in notions of equity, have continued to draw attention to the importance of disrupting deficit narratives in education and schooling so that all learners can feel like they belong.

Deficit narratives are often constructed to describe students who experience marginalization characterized by stories of inferiority and inability. These narratives do not address the underlying problems that cause the lack of academic success by the marginalized students – but instead blame communities and families.

Educators who operate through deficit lens place responsibilities for inequitable outcomes on students and communities, instead of underlying systemic inequities (Hinnant-Crawford et al., 2025). Russell et al., (2022) argue that deficit narratives attribute disparate outcomes to racialized groups themselves rather than policies

and actions that create conditions that produce these disparities. Deficit narratives can also be employed by members of one racialized group against another racialized group to elevate their status and power (Russell et al., 2022).

When deficit narratives are perpetuated through educational materials and other mediums such as media and movies, the narratives are socialized and become social knowledge and part of the social fabric of society (Stanfield, 2011).

Educators must name deficit narratives and discourses that harm children, stifle their creativity and curtail their curiosity (Love, 2019).

Within the Ontario and Canadian contexts, demographic shifts have made it an imperative for all educators to understand the impact of deficit narratives on students' sense of belonging and outcomes, how they might be complicit given their own positionality and socialization, and ways to unlearn and learn new approaches.



# Students at the Centre

By Josh Fullan

Up against all the reasons to feel pessimistic about the future of humanity and, more acutely, education, there is an area where we are making undeniable progress: the centring of students in our schools.

Once seen as subjects in need of teaching, students in the 21st century are accelerating as the centre of gravity in education. Principals, teachers and systems are placing students at the heart of the matter, where they belong, and many are reaping a stronger locus of learning and firmer sense of identity. School at its best is no longer something that happens to children, but *for* and *with* them.

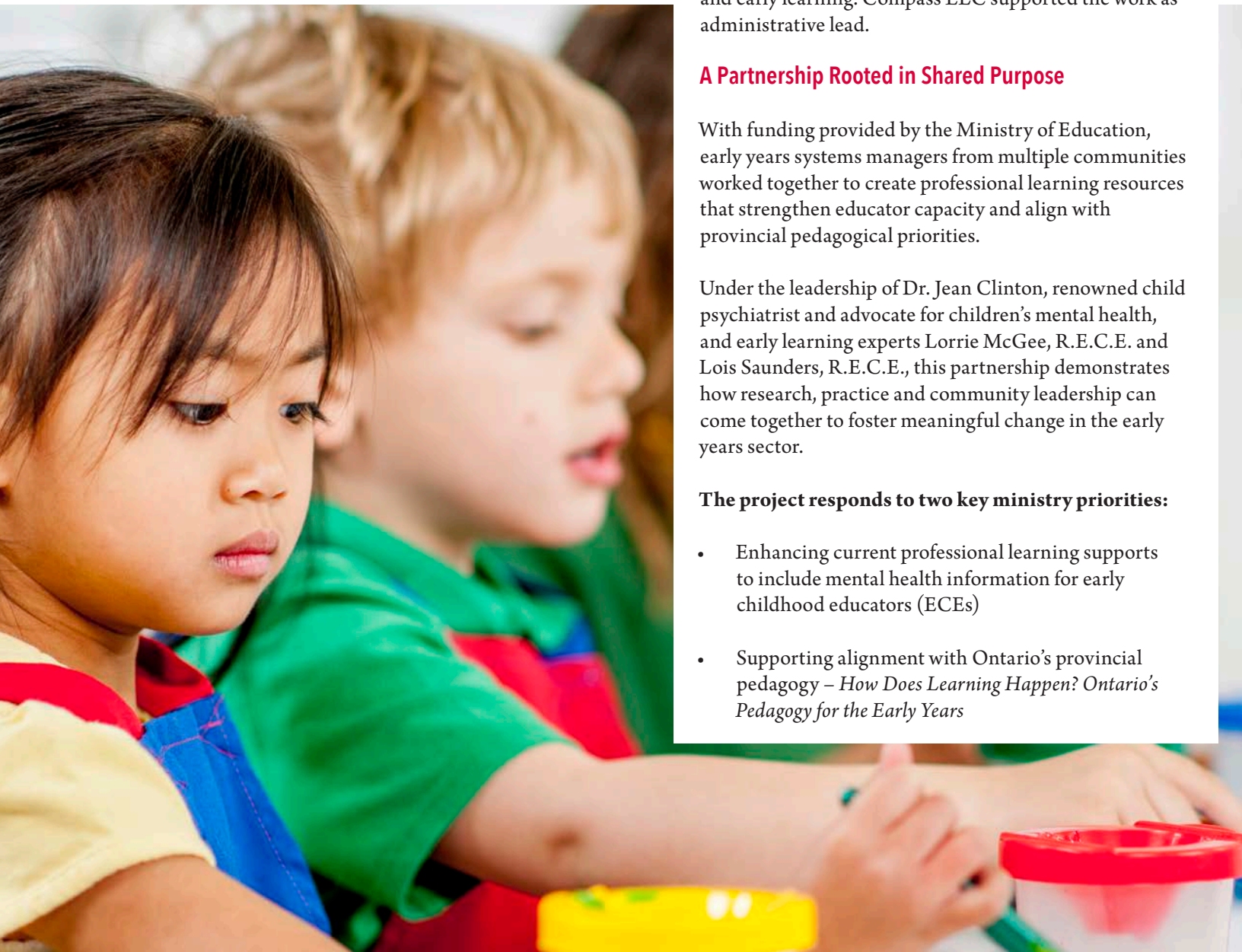
We see evidence of this progress at the legislative level in Ontario in the titles of acts such as *Supporting Children and Students*, at the policy level in multi-year plans that name students as co-creators and co-determiners of learning, and at the individual school and classroom level where instructional strategies include shared inquiry, real-world connections, and student voice and choice.

I have read several good books on the topic, all published in the last decade or so, including this year's *Pedagogies of Voice* where the authors aim for "a new 'mark' for education: the awakening of student agency through the interconnected domains of identity, belonging, inquiry and efficacy."



# Big Ideas for the Care of Tiny Humans

By Jean Clinton and Lorrie McGee



In Ontario, the Ministry of Education's vision for early learning and child care emphasizes not only quality programming but also the nurturing of wellness, belonging and relationships that sustain lifelong learning. A shining example of this vision in action is *Big Ideas for the Care of Tiny Humans*, a collaborative project that illustrates how community partners can come together to support the mental health and well-being of our youngest learners, their families and educators

While the project received funding support from the Ontario Ministry of Education, its design, leadership and implementation emerged from collaboration among early years systems managers across the province who share a deep commitment to children's mental health and early learning. Compass ELC supported the work as administrative lead.

## A Partnership Rooted in Shared Purpose

With funding provided by the Ministry of Education, early years systems managers from multiple communities worked together to create professional learning resources that strengthen educator capacity and align with provincial pedagogical priorities.

Under the leadership of Dr. Jean Clinton, renowned child psychiatrist and advocate for children's mental health, and early learning experts Lorrie McGee, R.E.C.E. and Lois Saunders, R.E.C.E., this partnership demonstrates how research, practice and community leadership can come together to foster meaningful change in the early years sector.

## The project responds to two key ministry priorities:

- Enhancing current professional learning supports to include mental health information for early childhood educators (ECEs)
- Supporting alignment with Ontario's provincial pedagogy – *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*



## Early childhood development is not about accelerating readiness for later milestones, but about fostering adaptability, connection and curiosity now.

This alignment ensures that the resource not only enriches professional learning but also advances understanding of mental health as a state of wellness, rather than merely the absence of illness, a crucial distinction for educators working with infants and very young children.

### Learning Together: Building Capacity and Connection

The five-module video series at the heart of *Big Ideas for the Care of Tiny Humans* invites educators to explore infant and early years mental health through accessible, evidence-informed content. Featuring Dr. Clinton and Lorrie McGee, the series bridges the science of social-emotional development with the lived experiences of educators, families and community leaders. Guest contributors, including Dr. Adam Davies, Faith Hale and Nicole Cummings-Morgan, offer diverse perspectives.

Accompanying the video series is a reflective guide designed for use in communities of practice. Within it are thinking protocols and discussion frameworks that support educators in deconstructing “big ideas” and translating them into intentional pedagogical practice. This emphasis on reflection and relational learning strengthens both knowledge and leadership capacity across the early years workforce.

### The outcomes have been remarkable:

- 17 Deep Dive events hosted across Ontario
- 4,600 participants engaged
- 660 facilitators trained as local champions in the reflective model
- 977 educators registered on the learning management system (LMS) [www.iemhp.ca](http://www.iemhp.ca)

Each of these numbers reflects the growing network of professionals committed to nurturing the social and emotional well-being of children, families and colleagues.

### Science, Relationships and the Human Story

Developmental science tells us that the skills we nurture in children today matter not only for future use, but for their developmental affordances, how they shape who children are becoming. As researcher Dr. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang reminds us, learning and emotion are deeply intertwined; the experiences that engage children emotionally also shape the architecture of their brains and their capacity to connect, reflect and adapt.





# Understanding Your Optimism

## A Self-Reflection Companion to Strategic Optimism

By Jenni Donohoo

*This article serves as a companion to ‘From Belief to Impact: How Strategic Optimism Sustains Collective Efficacy,’ providing an opportunity for self-reflection for school leaders.*

Over the past few years, Ontario has achieved something worth celebrating: a culture that genuinely values self-awareness and reflection in educational leadership. This success recognizes the power of leaders who understand their own beliefs, biases and cognitive patterns.

Self-aware leaders are better positioned to navigate complexity, respond thoughtfully to challenges, and create conditions for collective efficacy to flourish. Examining one’s relationship with strategic optimism becomes a natural extension of this reflective practice – an opportunity to turn the lens inward and understand how optimism shapes the capacity to lead school improvement.

In this article, school leaders are invited to explore their personal orientation with strategic optimism. How does it shape their daily decisions, responses to setbacks, and vision for what’s possible in schools?

Strategic optimism is “a cognitive orientation encompassing beliefs about capabilities and confidence in

future possibilities” (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006, p. 432). It’s not about maintaining a cheerful demeanour or avoiding difficult conversations. Rather, it’s a mindset that fundamentally shapes how people interpret challenges, envision what’s possible, and mobilize energy for improvement.

Research demonstrates that optimism serves as a strong force for achievement in schools. Hoy, Tarter and Woolfolk-Hoy (2006) found that optimistic educators not only perform better individually but also contribute to positive school climates that support collective success. This matters because, as the companion article explored, collective efficacy – built on the individual efficacy beliefs of team members – is the most impactful influence on student achievement.

What makes strategic optimism particularly powerful is that it’s a slightly elevated belief in capability that enhances persistence and effort. As Bandura (1998) explained, “human accomplishments and positive well-being require an optimistic sense of personal efficacy to override the numerous impediments to success” (p. 56). This isn’t wishful thinking or denial of challenges; it’s the confidence that allows people to act despite uncertainty and to persist even when faced with setbacks.

# EQUITY-SEEKING LEADERSHIP

## A Quiet Revolution Worth Celebrating

By Joel Chiutsi and Siobhan Wright



As the sacred season of Christmas begins, hearts turn to gratitude and reflection on the year that has passed. In our schools and communities, this reflection often brings a mix of emotions, memories of challenges faced and lessons learned. In a world that frequently highlights what is broken, there is equal value in focusing on what is being built. Within the broader education landscape, one of the most meaningful developments has been the growing presence of equity-seeking leadership.

At the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB), a series of Equity-Seeking Leadership Sessions emerged not out of policy, but out of purpose. They were born from a genuine commitment to foster dialogue, reflection and change. Experience navigating the educational landscape has made it clear that transforming education to meet the needs of all students requires purposeful leadership. These sessions became intentional acts of restoration, creating space for educators whose identities and voices have been underrepresented.

Although educators and leaders enter the process from diverse experiences, a shared understanding quickly emerges. It becomes clear that while classrooms across the school board reflect rich cultural and racial diversity, leadership tables do not always mirror that reality. This gap continues to shape opportunities and influence decisions in education.

Representation is more than symbolic, it defines what students believe is possible for themselves. If leadership is to be responsive, it must be representative. If leadership is to be just, it must include those who understand and live the realities that schools aim to transform.

At the YCDSB, Equity-Seeking Leadership Sessions unfold each year through three purposeful gatherings designed to nurture growth and reflection. The first two sessions explore identity, leadership development and systemic barriers, guiding participants to examine how personal experience shapes professional practice. The third culminates in mock interviews, pairing aspiring leaders with current leaders in the board. This final session has become a highlight, offering concrete strategies, valuable feedback and a rare opportunity to demystify the leadership interview process. Participants consistently speak to the authenticity, depth and practical impact of the experience.

These sessions have grown into courageous spaces of truth-telling, healing and affirmation. Equity-seeking educators are invited to step fully into leadership, not as a performance, but as a vocation. For some, it marks the first time they are told, “You belong at this table.” For others, it is the first time they believe it.

**Equity-seeking educators are invited to step fully into leadership, not as a performance, but as a vocation. For some, it marks the first time they are told, “You belong at this table.” For others, it is the first time they believe it.**

The impact has been both real and measurable. Some participants have advanced into formal leadership roles, mentoring colleagues and initiating equity-focused projects in schools. Most importantly, for many, leadership is no longer deferred to a future moment or permission granted by others. Today, some of those who once sat as participants now sit on the other side of the

table in leadership roles mentoring and shaping decisions for the future.

Yet, despite this progress, the journey remains unfinished. Across schools, the need for leadership that reflects student diversity is undeniable. The system requires leaders with the courage to disrupt the status quo. The work continues, calling for leaders who act with purpose and who will ensure that equity becomes a lasting part of how we lead.

Leadership today is being called upon to reimagine what a deeper understanding of equity, identity and belonging can be. The shift needed in our schools is not about a single initiative, but about transforming the very nature of how leadership is defined and lived. It challenges long-held assumptions about who is seen, who is heard and who is given the opportunity to lead. This understanding calls for courage, humility and a steadfast commitment to justice. It expands the definition of who can lead and



# After Taking the First Step... Let Us Now Walk Together

By Troy Hill



The timing of Indigenous Knowledge is fluid, alive, always in motion.



# Connection, Community and Calm

By Isabelle Chartrand-Dubois

Across Ontario, principals and vice-principals are demonstrating extraordinary leadership in creating the conditions for identity-affirming student mental health and well-being. Good mental health is foundational to learning. Students who feel mentally well are better able to learn, experience a stronger sense of belonging and thrive academically. More importantly, identity-affirming mental health practices protect human dignity by recognizing the whole person and creating conditions where each student can reach their full potential.

## Building Momentum Together

Since the launch of the *Leading Mentally Healthy Schools* (LMHS) ([smho-smso.ca/online-resources/leading-mentally-healthy-schools-ebook](https://smho-smso.ca/online-resources/leading-mentally-healthy-schools-ebook)) suite of resources in 2024, we have seen growing momentum in the way school leaders are exploring, adapting and embedding these tools into their daily practice. Principals and vice-principals are integrating them into staff meetings and using them to spark reflection and dialogue. Leadership teams are weaving them into planning and communication with families.

This steady uptake shows that LMHS is becoming a pivotal resource for Catholic school leadership across the province. Catholic education is rooted in the belief that every child is created in the image of God and deserves to flourish. By placing student mental health at the centre of our leadership, we affirm this belief in tangible, everyday ways.

## Partnership that Supports Catholic Leaders

This year at School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON), we are focusing on Connection, Community and Calm ([smho-smso.ca/online-resources/starting-the-school-year-with-connection-community-and-calm](https://smho-smso.ca/online-resources/starting-the-school-year-with-connection-community-and-calm)) as a reminder that mentally healthy schools are built when meaningful relationships are prioritized, when we engage with communities to work together and when students and staff feel supported to thrive.

Catholic social teachings remind us each person is social and requires community. As communities, we work together, we grow together and we celebrate together. In that spirit, we celebrate all that Catholic school leaders have accomplished together in recent years. Your efforts have helped move student mental health to the centre of daily school life. SMH-ON is proud to partner with Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) to support principals and vice-principals in this important work. Together, we ensure Catholic school leaders have access to practical, identity-affirming, culturally responsive and evidence-informed resources that help nurture the mental health and well-being of Catholic school communities.

Through CPCO's Supporting Student Mental Health webpage, members can quickly access the full suite of LMHS tools – the resources you need, when you need them. Whether you are looking for a concise tip sheet, a ready-to-share message for families, Catholic connections or a professional learning module for your staff, the resources are at your fingertips. Having these evidence-informed resources ready and organized is also meant to bring a sense of calm to your already

# Our Shared Horizon

## The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations

By Anne Jamieson



One of my favourite Christmas cards shows a scene of three regal figures atop their camels, their silhouettes pointing towards a distant star with determination to journey onwards towards the radiant light. The card reads, “The Wise Still Seek Him!”

I appreciate the wisdom in that image for those who serve in many different roles in Catholic education. There is the insight that we are on a journey, that we do not travel alone, that we are drawn by the light of Christ and that light illumines all we do. The image and the sentiment both beckon and encourage us.

But the pointing to that spot on the horizon, that shared sense of journey towards a common goal, speaks most clearly to our work as educators in Catholic education. Whether administrators or teachers, chaplaincy leaders, parents or trustees, we do have a common horizon – a path illumined by faith.

For nearly 30 years, we have described that beautiful horizon of our hopes for students in the inspiring language of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGE). We seek to support our students in becoming discerning believers, effective communicators, reflective and creative thinkers, collaborative contributors, caring family members, responsible citizens, and self-directed, responsible, lifelong learners. These seven expectations are the educational horizon to which we all fix our gaze and through which we experience the distinctive nature of Catholic education. There is a wisdom in our shared journey that leads us, especially at this time of year, to once again contemplate that shared horizon.





# The Gift of Catholic Education

By Norm Roberts

Catholic education is acclaimed for its commitment to well-being, equity, shared leadership, teacher collaboration, a focus on thinking skills, critical thinking, early childhood education, extra-curricular and much more. And rightly so. But these outward manifestations stem from the very profundity of our pursuit to be faithful to the Christian message.

When reflecting on the successes of Catholic education and what we have done well, we need look no further than our commitment and passion to share in the mission of the Church. Christ is made manifest in our efforts, and our roots are deep that spawn these works of God entrusted to us. We must be acutely aware of the foundations of what we do to allow them to thrive and grow and to be celebrated.

In an age increasingly shaped by individualism, power and a utilitarian view of the human person, Catholic education offers a profound and countercultural gift: the anthropological view of each person as created in the likeness and image of God.

The Church's commitment to community has been lived out across centuries, often in response to the needs of the time. This legacy is not merely historical. It is alive in Catholic schools today. Every classroom, chapel and playground is a continuation of this mission to build the Kingdom of God through serving the marginalized and witnessing to the love of Christ, to exploring the depth of personal identity and the edification of humanity.

Today, Catholic education faces the challenge of responding to a culture that often reduces the human person to function, productivity or status defining the human person as a commodity in the dehumanized purpose of economic growth, greed and ultimate exploitation. In such a context, the creation of community that promotes the dignity of all as God's creation is not optional – it is essential. Catholic schools must continue to promote a vision of humanity rooted in relationship, dignity and grace.



This means reimagining success not as personal achievement alone, but as communal flourishing as the Body of Christ. It means designing curricula, policies and practices that reflect the belief that every person is a gift. It means forming students to be not just consumers or competitors, but contributors to the common good.

Educators in Catholic schools are not merely transmitters of knowledge; they are builders of community and witnesses to the incarnational identity of each student. Their vocation is to accompany students, to model relational living and to foster environments where love,



justice and mercy are tangible. They build the Kingdom of God in our classrooms and schools. School leaders play a crucial role in shaping the culture of the school, ensuring that every initiative, from academic programming to pastoral care, is grounded in a relational understanding of humanity.

Professional development, staff collaboration and parent engagement are all opportunities to deepen the communal life of the school and to encounter Christ. When educators themselves experience authentic community, they are better equipped to create it for their students.

In a fragmented world, Catholic education offers a prophetic witness, a necessary witness: that we are created for relationship, that every person has a God-given inherent dignity and that true learning happens together. This is not a nostalgic ideal or unattainable pipedream, it is a living reality in Catholic schools across the globe each day.

By rooting ourselves in Scripture and the tradition of the Church, Catholic schools can continue to be places where community is not just taught but lived and **Believed**. In doing so, they offer students not only knowledge but **Belonging**; not only skills, but purpose to **Achieve**; not only education, but **Formation** and the opportunity to **Become** all that God desires for us.

The gift of Catholic education is essential for the re-humanizing of society, a re-awakening of each human as God's gift to creation. Humanity is the revelation of God and in a world becoming deaf and blind to its own incarnational privilege, Catholic education reveals to us the very face of Christ, and through it, we grow to become the very Body of Christ. [CP](#)

---

**Norm Roberts**  
Principal, Thomas Merton Centre  
Halton CDSB



# The Good News About Literacy

By Brian Weishar

It's been over 20 years since *Literacy for Learning: The report of the expert panel on literacy* (2004) was released. At the time, it is unlikely that the members of the expert panel would have foreseen the monumental changes that have reshaped the education landscape in Ontario.

Since the report's release, there has been exponential growth and availability of technology and technological tools, many of which can support literacy; a proliferation of social media, the amount of screentime that consumes many learners' time, and the impact on learning and social interactions (both good and bad); the rise of misinformation and disinformation, and the threats it poses to people's well-being and to democracy as a whole; and the swift emergence of AI, with its promises and concerns in a horizon of unknowns.

Also, during this time, we saw the release of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Right to Read* inquiry report (2019) that has informed the teaching of reading, particularly in the early years, so that students are developing the foundations of language as part of building their literacy skills.

In addition, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Call to Action #3* (2015), directly relating to education, has informed how schools and classrooms are working to educate their students about the history and injustice of residential schools, as well as the broader work of including First Nations, Métis and Inuit knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum.

Over this period, Ontario has continued to rank among the top scores in reading among other Canadian provinces and international jurisdictions, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA).



But the good news related to literacy is not about the high rankings on standardized tests, which tend to capture a narrow scope in terms of literacy skills. The real cause for celebration related to literacy is the degree to which Ontario educators have navigated the various seismic developments and challenges which have emerged over the last 20 years. Despite these shifts, Ontario educators have been able to assess and adapt so that literacy remains critical work in supporting learners.

The reason: Ontario educators have held three critical principles, which were indicated in that 20-year-old report, and which are equally, if not more so, relevant today. These three principles have helped educators navigate the changes. These same principles serve to help students face the opportunities and challenges.

### **Principle #1: Literacy is about thinking**

A key principle that has helped educators navigate the changing terrain is: **literacy is about thinking**. Not limited to a set of discrete skills, educators have long seen the goal of literacy instruction is to help students make meaning and think critically about ideas. Although this requires work to support students' understanding of the language (e.g., using phonemic and morphological knowledge), using reading comprehension strategies (e.g., predicting, summarizing) and being able to use language to express information in a variety of modes including writing, these are not treated as end goals. Rather, these skills are seen as contributing to building students' capacity to think critically, metacognitively and to relate their understanding to the world around them.

### **Principle #2: Every teacher is a teacher of literacy**

A phrase that has been repeated again and again since the creation of the expert panel report is, "**every teacher is a teacher of literacy.**" This belief has invited teachers across content areas to see that the skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening and representing are both a means to support the acquisition of knowledge and skills of a curriculum, and that the various curricula are opportunities to bring literacy alive in relevant and authentic ways. This has invited Ontario educators to see literacy as shared work and shared responsibility, and that all teachers and other staff contribute to students' success in literacy.

### **Principle #3: Literacy connects individuals and communities**

Ontario educators have embraced the notion that **literacy connects individuals and communities**. Literacy teaching and learning is as much about opportunities for personal growth, and for learners to be metacognitive about that growth, as it is with fostering the critical skills and discourses that support communities and support a democratic society. As such, literacy learning becomes opportunities for exploring diverse voices; examining perspectives, biases and agendas; and supporting the work of equity and social justice.



# THE ORIGINAL SCHOOL COOKIE

BAKING A DIFFERENCE IN SCHOOLS SINCE 1984



click to learn more about our school cookie program

## SCHOOL COOKIE PROGRAM:

- MADE FROM SCRATCH IN GEORGETOWN, ON
- 100% CANADIAN OWNED AND OPERATED
- HIGHLY PROFITABLE SCHOOL COOKIE PROGRAM
- FOOD SAFETY - SQF CERTIFIED PLANT
- INDIVIDUALLY WRAPPED COOKIES AND ICE DAWGS

## FUNDRAISING FOR SCHOOLS AND ORGANIZATIONS:

- FUNDRAISING MADE EASY - 40% PROFIT
- MANY DELICIOUS FLAVOURS
- VEGAN AND GLUTEN-FREE OPTIONS AVAILABLE
- INDIVIDUALLY FROZEN DOUGH DROPS
- EASY ONLINE ORDERING AND LOW MINIMUM ORDERS



click to learn more about our fundraising for schools and organizations



## \*\* EXCLUSIVE PROMO CODE FOR SCHOOLS! \*\*

WE'RE SWEETENING THE DEAL FOR NEW SCHOOL SNACK PARTNERS!

As seen in the CPCO Magazine, \*\*enjoy **\$5.00 OFF** your next school order with Terra Cotta Cookies.

Use promo code: **CPCO Magazine 01-02 2026**

Email [orders@terraccottacookies.com](mailto:orders@terraccottacookies.com) with the **promo code in the subject line** to apply the discount to your order.

\*\*For schools only. One-time use per school. Valid from January 1, 2026 until February 28, 2026. Valid on school menu orders only (not valid for fundraising menu).



[orders@terraccottacookies.com](mailto:orders@terraccottacookies.com) • 905.877.4216 • Georgetown, ON

[www.terraccottacookies.com](http://www.terraccottacookies.com)

† Trademark of the Canadian Celiac Association. Used under license.

# Celebrating Math Learning Together

By Jennifer Vieira and Christine Suurtamm

The revised Ontario mathematics curricula (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020,2021) for Grades 1 to 9 prompted students, teachers and administrators to re-engage in deep mathematics learning.

These curricula, grounded in research, maintained important elements of the previous curricula, while delivering meaningful improvements. Classroom and professional learning anchored in these curricula facilitate direct connections between educational research, classroom practice and student learning.

The revised curricula continue to focus on the development of both conceptual understanding and skills, with an emphasis on critical and higher order thinking, and the use of conceptual tools such as manipulatives and visualization to understand ideas. Learning is further advanced through the integration of technology, using coding as a tool for thinking, and mathematical modelling and financial literacy as explicit ways to see the use of math in the world.

Another addition to the curriculum is the inclusion of Social-Emotional Learning Skills. These assert the importance of mathematical processes and recognize the role of student affect in math learning.

## The Value of Professional Learning

A thoughtful and robust curriculum has minimal impact if educators do not have opportunities to learn about it, reflect on their practice, connect it to their students, and develop the skills and knowledge needed for implementation. The curriculum not only requires new content knowledge but also calls for new pedagogies. Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) calls upon us to consider the different ways students interact with math.

How do we come to learn about the identity and profile of our students? How do we develop an inclusive learning environment where all students feel a sense of belonging and can take risks in mathematics? How do we use CRRP to differentiate learning? How do we develop a student-centred and asset-oriented approach in our teaching?

Professional learning (PL) is essential to support the exploration of these and other questions and to build

educator capacity in mathematics. The role of principals and vice-principals as co-learners is critical to this development.

We have learned much about effective PL in mathematics and can identify several essential elements. Effective PL is collaborative. Leading with a co-learning stance, we co-construct understanding, as we want our students to do. In an environment supporting risk-taking, we learn alongside colleagues to unpack and deconstruct curriculum, strengthening curriculum fidelity and implementation. We focus on pedagogical content knowledge, learning the mathematics we need for teaching and strengthening our content knowledge. This involves “doing the math.” We engage with rich math tasks, exploring a variety of strategies while anticipating student thinking. We elevate well-being by focusing on social-emotional learning skills, asking important questions such as, *what does important learning look, sound and feel like?*

Effective PL in mathematics includes multiple sessions, with time to apply the learning in classrooms, ensuring our connections to the needs/development of our students. As reflective practitioners, we return with student samples/artifacts, new tasks and queries to guide our discussions and next steps.

## Examples of Engaging Communities in Mathematics Learning

There are a variety of ways to incorporate essential elements of PL. Here are some examples.

### Engaging teachers in collaborative problem solving connected to the curriculum

In a PL situation a facilitator engaged teachers in problem solving using the supports in the curriculum. For instance, the following task (Figure 1) from the Grade 5 teacher supports in the curriculum was given to teachers to work on in groups.

Although this problem is in Grade 5 teacher supports, teachers of all grades could engage in this activity at a staff meeting or professional learning opportunity.

# LEARNING WITH/IN

# NATURE

By Gillian Judson

In recent years, I've noticed a rising tide of outdoor learning. Educators are moving their teaching outside school walls. Children and youth are learning with/in nature in schoolyards and local green spaces. They are learning in “outdoor classrooms,” school gardens, and in local natural and cultural contexts.

## Something to Celebrate

With panoramic views of the mountains and a heart full from a day of outdoor professional learning in Banff, I shared the speaker stage in May 2025 with outdoor learning inspirations. On night one, the crowd was hopping and the energy contagious. I offered one of the TedX talks, focusing on my passion; the central role of imagination in (outdoor) learning. Earlier that day, under the shade of Engelmann spruce and lodgepole pine, my colleague, Beverly Bunker and I shared our research into affective, immersive and relational outdoor learning practices that support changed educational practices – that is, the deep kind of learning that affects participants and hits beliefs and values.

I was attending the 2025 Outdoor Learning Conference, organized by Take Me Outside and the Outdoor Learning School and Store. (More information below.) Sessions addressed a wide range of practical dimensions of outdoor learning, feeding educators' interest in implementing outdoor learning with their students.

This was the third Outdoor Learning Conference and hosted over 450 attendees from across North America, Europe and Australasia. I am a proud two-time attendee, grateful to be there when, each year, it sells out quickly.

The increase in outdoor learning in Canada is something to celebrate! I use the term “outdoor learning” to refer to a range of practices that are responsive to and focus on the natural world. These include practices such as, place-based education, place-responsive education, nature-based education, ecological education and imaginative ecological education.

Outdoor learning, at its core, is more than “doing the same thing outside that is done inside.” It challenges



# A Decade of Transformation and Coherence

By Joanne Quinn, Tom D'Amico and Shelley Montgomery

Tackling system-wide transformation in Ontario has faced a daunting array of challenges – rapid change, budget constraints, increased expectations for well-being, safety and equity, and an urgent need to prepare students to thrive in a complex, AI-enabled world.

Over the past 10 years, the Ottawa Catholic School Board has advanced system-wide educational transformation. OCSB's work with the Deep Learning framework provides valuable insights for change management at scale. OCSB has shown how a clear vision, persistent leadership and a focus on coherence can impact reform within publicly funded education.

## Why Deep Learning?

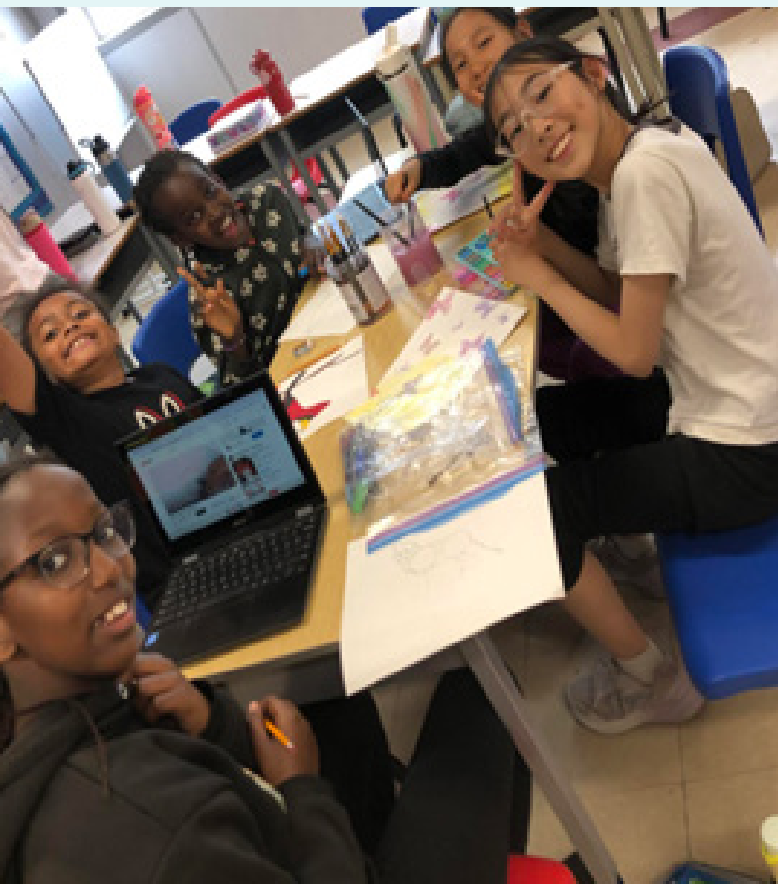
OCSB began its Deep Learning work in 2014 by joining the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL) global network. While already a high-performing board, OCSB recognized the need to engage all learners more deeply. They wanted to go beyond standardized test scores, and instead develop the global competencies of character, citizenship, communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking.

Instead of launching a siloed initiative, OCSB deliberately embedded Deep Learning throughout the system. The introduction of Deep Learning was iterative rather than a replacement of existing priorities. Deep Learning is part of the board culture. Staff in every role can articulate the framework that integrates the global competencies with a focus on leveraging technology, learning partnerships, learning environments and pedagogy.

## Building Coherence Through Leadership

A key lesson from OCSB's decade of transformation is the role of leadership at every level. Directors of Education, Superintendents and central staff provided consistent direction, but transformation at the school level depended on principals and vice-principals. Leaders created conditions for collaboration, modelled risk-taking and maintained focus during challenging times, including job action and COVID-19. The slogan "Keep the Deep Learning Language Alive" helped maintain focus and sustain momentum during the challenging pandemic, even as classrooms looked very different.

Michael Fullan's principle *leaders work through the leadership of others* guided the work. School improvement plans incorporated Deep Learning and interview questions for administrators included a Deep Learning focus. Deep Learning was no longer optional; it became central to OCSB's identity.



# SCHOOL LABELS



## VISITOR LABELS

Identify school visitors for security and add your school's name and logo.



## CUSTOM PRINTED LABELS

Promote school spirit, safety, awards and identify school equipment.



## LIBRARY LABELS & OVERLAYS

# SPECTRIM

— LABEL & EQUIPMENT INC —

WWW.SPECTRIMLABEL.COM

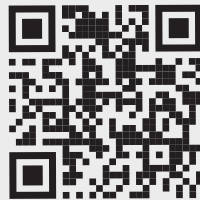
EMAIL: INFO@SPECTRIMLABEL.COM PHONE: 1-888-852-2357



Follow Us On:

# Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/cpcoofficial/>



# Welcoming Families from Around the World

By Lisa Jane de Gara

Canada is well known as a nation of immigrants. Multiculturalism is part of our social fabric and supported in our communities. Most programs are intended for adults: language training, systems navigation, employment support. Then, there are the community programs for children and youth, like soccer camp during the summer. All are essential – even more so in a political context that unfortunately has been growing increasingly and vocally anti-immigrant.

One program goes further: emphasizing how essential the education system is to sustaining a vibrant and diverse Canada. Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) is designed to help immigrant and refugee children and their families thrive in Canada's K-12 school system.

I believe it is our best program, but as a SWIS manager since 2021, my bias is well-documented. This work is something to celebrate. And at this year-end time of reflection, I want to appreciate the work educators do: in service to education and integration, for children, youth and families.

## Needs ...

As Canada welcomes families from around the world, the scale of that diversity can be reflected in classroom complexity. Supporting a child, who has endured bombing in Kharkiv or starvation in Cox's Bazaar, is different than supporting a child with dyslexia or one who has recently moved provinces.

I sometimes see people bristle at this idea – perhaps they feel it is unwelcoming, even xenophobic, to acknowledge the unique needs of newcomers. I appreciate the sentiment; it comes from a place of welcome and compassion. However, it is essential to acknowledge this unique slate of needs so we can best meet them.



All day, my phone rings with new student intakes from schools across the province. The challenges are significant and often unique to newcomers. Some are academic: a newly arrived boy from the Philippines who hasn't attended school in three years; a teenager from Ukraine who wants to attend post-secondary but will need to do an extra year of upgrading.

Others are a matter of cultural adaptation: siblings from Lebanon whose attendance is worrisome and whose mother will not let them out of the house if it's colder than five degrees. (Not viable here in Canada!)

There are children with disabilities not well-understood by their families, children whose parents are illiterate in their first language, children who have witnessed war. Increasingly, we meet children whose immigration status in Canada is tenuous, as millions of temporary visas expire.

By all accounts, these are significant needs

## ... and Assets

Of course, needs are only half the story.

In settlement, the first interaction we do with our clients is a NAARS: Needs and Assets Assessment and Referral Service. (A less-than-elegant acronym, but functional.)

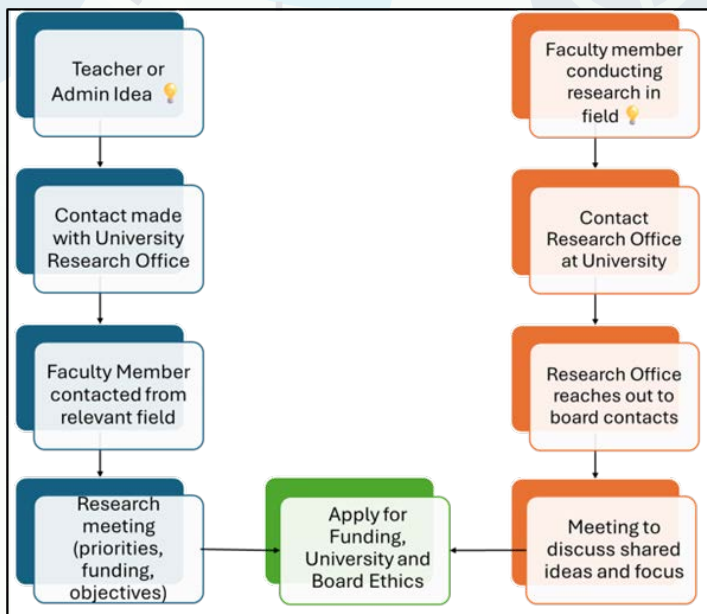
# Schools and Universities: Partnerships in Action

By Sonia Mastrangelo, Meredith Lovell-Johnston  
Max Vecchiarino and Miana Whitfield

Partnerships between school boards and faculties of education develop because of challenges faced by the school board or university. With the support of research funding, these partnerships help inform school policies and practices, support professional development, bring awareness to pressing local issues and address potential gaps in the literature.

This article highlights two meaningful and collaborative partnerships that have contributed to student outcomes, teacher knowledge and researcher understanding of the dynamic processes that enhance education for all.

The literature on school board-university partnerships reveals a myriad of benefits when organizations pool resources such as time, money and knowledge (Swick et al., 2021) to engage in practice-oriented issues impacting the school system. Ideas often begin when educators ask specific questions about their practices, curricular resources, student behaviours or performance. Connections with faculty members who are engaged in relevant areas create a synergistic excitement whereby both groups develop a shared vision for a research plan (Figure 1, left). Conversely, faculty members may be engaged in specific projects that require teachers, administrators and/or students as participants (Figure 1)



**Figure 1:** Process for Establishing a Research Partnership with a University

## The University's Role in Supporting School Priorities

We present two examples of successful partnerships that addressed local priorities using the supportive resources and expertise of academic institutions. Our work follows in the tradition of other partnerships, varying in size and scope (Jakhelln & Potholm, 2022; Mork, 2022; Swick et al., 2021), and shows the benefits and challenges partnerships hold. Faculties of education can work with local school boards to mentor and build capacity for a knowledgeable, professional workforce that meets the need for well-trained educators. Yet sometimes there is a disconnect between theoretical instruction and practical implementation during placements (Mork, 2022).

## Stories from the Field

### 1) Inquiry-Based Kindergarten and Literacy Project

In 2018/19, a number of teacher candidates failed to meet expectations on Kindergarten placements. Simultaneously, the Simcoe County District School Board experienced challenges with teacher uptake of the new curriculum and falling literacy rates in some parts of the district. During our project, two cohorts of Kindergarten educators who supervised teacher candidate placements, along with teacher candidates (when available) and faculty advisors, were provided three training workshops. We observed classrooms prior to the workshops to establish a baseline and used these to co-develop workshops with the early years team. Participants were assigned tasks between workshops and supported in group reflection activities. (Unfortunately, a job action one year and the pandemic in the next prevented final observations, so the degree of pedagogical change is difficult to assess.)

The project was successful in aligning faculty instruction with SCDSB instructional approaches and improving teacher candidates' success. Additionally, SCDSB was pleased to have resources to support educator training they would not normally access, such as guest speakers and budget for additional classroom materials. However, it is difficult to assess final results in terms of students' success or lasting legacy, since the pandemic disruptions

# With the Support of a Mentor-Coach

By Trista Hollweck and Amy Curry



*We must become able not only to transform our institutions, in response to changing situations and requirements; we must invent and develop institutions which are ‘learning systems,’ that is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation* (Schön, 1973, p.30).

When it comes to education, there is certainly no shortage of change or challenge. School systems across Canada confront issues related to teacher recruitment and retention, student achievement and well-being, financial constraints, aging infrastructure, inadequate support resources and the rapid rise of new technology such as Artificial Intelligence. It is no wonder we educational leaders are feeling so overwhelmed. It is, however, a true gift to be given the opportunity to reflect on and celebrate some of our educational successes and to think about how we can build on our strengths rather than focus solely on our problems.

One of the greatest successes of our district is its Teacher Induction Program (TIP), which was first introduced in 2008 and continues to improve and evolve each year. One of the underlying principles that guides TIP is that the well-being and success of educators is intricately linked with the well-being and success of students.

Hence, if we attend to the professional growth of the adults in our buildings through meaningful, caring and positive approaches, the benefits will be expansive. Although TIP looks very different from its first iteration, its aims remain the same:

1. To retain effective teachers new to the district
2. To provide leadership and professional growth opportunities for veteran staff
3. To improve teaching and learning across the school district

As stated by Rebecca Gilbert, a current mentor-coach, “Even though TIP has evolved greatly since its beginning, it has never strayed from valuing self-reflection, growth and life-long learning. I have had the opportunity to work with so many amazing educators in this process – teaching fellows, peer coaches and school board leaders – and their enthusiasm, innovation and passion continues to renew my own energy and reflection on my practice.”

As a learning organization, we believe expertise is found within the system and we must design structures that support, connect and empower all educators to leverage this expertise. One of these structures is the Mentoring and Coaching Fellowship which is a key component

# The Voice of Catholic Parents

By Annalisa Crudo-Perri  
and Joe Perri

Parental engagement is widely recognized as one of the most important factors in a student's success. When parents are involved in their children's learning, students perform better academically, showing improved behaviour and developing stronger social skills.

The Ontario Ministry of Education has made positive efforts to engage parents in meaningful and impactful ways. Backed by a strong policy framework, *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools*, the ministry highlighted that parent engagement goes beyond helping their children with homework; it includes participation in decision-making processes, school councils and broader educational planning. This inclusive vision paved the way for a cultural transformation across Ontario schools, where parental voices were actively welcomed and appreciated.

## The Initiative: Parent Partnership Through Shared Leadership

Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education is a champion of the parent voice of engagement. Since its inception, OAPCE has deepened its role in education through meaningful advocacy, collaboration with schools, boards and the Ministry of Education, and a strong commitment to student-centred values. This form of shared leadership – where parents, educators and system leaders work together to support student learning – is an initiative that Catholic education has embraced with intention and care.

OAPCE has helped embed parental voice not just on school councils, but in provincial discussions about policy, curriculum, well-being and the important gift of Catholic education. This collaborative model of leadership respects the unique role parents play in



shaping educational experiences of their children and in shaping the mission of Catholic education itself.

*"As representatives of the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education (OAPCE), we believe that parents are not only the first but the most enduring educators in their children's lives. Our partnership with schools in shaping the educational and spiritual growth of students is paramount, as together, we instil values that go beyond textbooks, guiding our children towards a brighter future rooted in faith and knowledge."* – Annalisa Crudo-Perri, Co-Executive Director, OAPCE

## Leadership Implications: A New Model for Partnership

When families and schools move from separate support systems to real partnerships, the impact is significant and lasting. OAPCE's work has helped build a school culture where:

- Students thrive academically and emotionally because families are informed, involved and connected.



# Connecting Voices

***Principal Connections invites our readers to share thoughts and give voice on the articles we publish. We are looking to build a professional learning community, and we are particularly interested in how you use these articles to support your practice. We invite you to send us a paragraph – maximum 75 words – that provides feedback, connects further ideas to articles, offers personal reflections or suggests next steps to share with our readers.***

“In *Called to Serve*, I was struck by the phrase, “shatter the armour.” This year, I began serving as principal in a new school. The initial staff meeting and first few interactions can be daunting. It can be tempting to assume the “armour.” A genuine commitment to service requires a vulnerability that can be uncomfortable at first. But the relationships that develop out of that initial emotional messiness are true and authentic. That genuine trust makes us more effective as a team as we serve our students.”

**Beth Allison, Principal, London CDSB**

“The issue *Pioneering Tomorrow* inspired deep reflection, especially the concept of the “unquenchable spark,” shared in Jill Gowdie’s article. As a Catholic school leader, this resonated with me as a reminder of our vocation, God’s calling to lead with purpose, even amidst challenges. That “unquenchable spark” is the inner drive that sustains, excites and guides us. It fuels not only our leadership but also inspires staff, shapes school goals and drives meaningful change in our communities. It’s a reminder that effective leadership is not perfect, but it can be both powerful and impactful.”

**Christian Zorzi, Principal, York CDSB**

“*Pioneering Tomorrow* strongly resonated with my view on the need for genuine educational sustainability, especially given our evolving world. While the term can be misconstrued, its real impact in a school setting emerges when administrators foster a clear and deep connection that both staff and students can identify with. Integrating the “New Rules,” humanitarian goals should always be at the core of what we do. For Catholic leadership to be truly sustainable, integrating creativity and flexibility into our message is paramount in ensuring sustainable leadership and longevity.”

**Elisa Mastromartino, Principal, York CDSB**

“Maude Barlow’s *The Urgent Need to Think Blue* is an informative and action-oriented article inspiring me to become more actively involved in preserving water as a sacred gift from God and integrating into our Student Achievement Plan. I have registered our school with the Blue Communities Project, and we are working with our ECO Team and school community to explore the “myth of abundance.” Guided by Catholic Social Teaching, Laudato Si and Indigenous teachings, we are transforming awareness into meaningful social justice initiatives as a Blue Community School.”

**Maria Soloman, Principal, Niagara CDSB**

“The start of a new school year often brings a mix of excitement and anxiety as we wonder what lies ahead. *Know Your Passion*, by Norm Roberts and Lorrie Naar, was perfectly timed. It reminded me of the deeper purpose behind my pastoral role as principal. The article’s message of prioritizing spiritual renewal, embracing Gospel-centred leadership and consistently returning to the “why” of our vocation set a positive tone to start the year. It helped me refocus on what matters most and inspired me to lead with joy, hope and purpose.”

**Patrick Busby, Principal, Halton CDSB**

“I was drawn to the article written by Cadmus Delorme. Until recently, many of us were educated in a time where the Canadian curriculum reflected an inaccurate and incomplete picture of Indigenous history. As Catholic educators, we have a unique role to play in addressing this with our students. In order to pioneer tomorrow, we need to repair the harm done yesterday, starting in our schools today.”

**Kevin Ng, Principal, TCDSB**

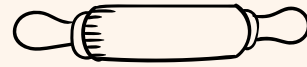
*We’d love to hear your thoughts about an article in this edition of Principal Connections. Send your comments to [dkinsellabiss@cpco.on.ca](mailto:dkinsellabiss@cpco.on.ca) by March 6th, 2026.*



# St. Margaret

# Gourmet Globetrotters

By Josephine Virgilio



Writer and director Nora Ephron was passionate about food. Her 2009 movie *Julie & Julia* features some of the most superb cooking – and eating – scenes in modern cinema. The film follows a food blogger, who cooks her way through Julia Child’s iconic cookbook *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*.

My favourite scene is when the main character attempts to make one of Child’s most famous and much-loved recipes, boeuf bourguignon: a dish significant to the delicate intricacies of French cooking.

The film *Julie & Julia* reminds us about the importance of good and nutritious food, meal preparations and spending time with the ones you love. Life skills, such as cooking, are important and should be celebrated with family, friends and our school communities all year round.

Catholic schools’ difference is reflected in the philosophy that permeates the lives of our students, staff and parents. Our Toronto Catholic District School Board philosophy challenges students to improve the world by sharing Gospel values and living Christ’s message of salvation. Students grow to understand the roots of their faith, and their responsibilities as Christians and citizens. Our schools stress the value of self-discipline, self-care of oneself and each other. As a faith-based community, we commit ourselves to serving God by helping others.

We believe developing the 3 Cs (character, communication, compassion) are just as important as developing the 3 Rs (reading, writing, arithmetic). Extracurricular activities, such as cooking programs, provide a venue to cultivate Catholic virtues, building character and civility in our students. It takes the efforts of an entire school to create a community whose members exhibit positive personal attributes and behaviours, such as respect, honesty, kindness, hard work and self-discipline. These qualities are expected, celebrated and consciously practised every day at our schools. We help students understand that each person is unique and valuable, and holds a special place in the family, the Church and society.

In this article, I share information about TCDSB’s School Nutrition Programs. And how St. Margaret Catholic School’s Gourmet Globetrotters celebrate, practise and share our values through food ... and mastering the art of cooking.

## Gourmet Globetrotters

Gourmet Globetrotters is an initiative at St. Margaret Catholic School that provides an opportunity for students to explore global cuisine and cultures, share food, practise life skills and learn more about ourselves and our diverse school community.

During the 2024/25 school year, the program began every Friday morning in the kitchen pantry. Students then gathered in the kitchen to cook delicious meals from around the world – taking into consideration student allergies. As they prepare and cook, students video the process.

Grade 8 students lead other students in researching wholesome recipes that are reflective of diverse cultures and places. Students are also designing their own cookbook of recipes from around the world, complemented by short videos that document their journeys and experience cooking different foods while researching unique people and places.



## Curriculum Linkages

Cooking is a valuable life skills and part of our curriculum. Learning is not only doing, but reflecting on the doing (Fullan, 2006).



# 2026 CPCO CONFERENCE

*Come to me, all you that are weary  
and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest*

**Matthew 11:28**

**April 23 - 24**

White Oaks Resort &  
Conference Centre  
(Niagara-on-the-Lake)



**ANCHORED IN  
HOPE** **Leading Through:**  
Wellness, Faith, & Equity

## CONFERENCE ATTENDEES

Practising Associates  
Non-Practising Associates  
Catholic Partners  
Vendors and Sponsors

**CP** CATHOLIC  
PRINCIPALS'  
COUNCIL ONTARIO

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



**Hamza Khan**  
Bestselling Author  
Award-Winning Marketer



**Jessica Janzen**  
Mindset Coach  
Philanthropist



**Dr. Andrew B. Campbell**  
Storyteller & Author  
Motivational Speaker

## EVENT SCHEDULE

### Thursday, April 23

- Opening Mass
- Keynote: Hamza Khan
- Entertainment and Hospitality
- Prizes & Surprises

### Friday, April 24

- Opening Liturgy
- Keynote: Jessica Janzen
- Wellness and Networking
- Keynote: Dr. Andrew B. Campbell

**REGISTER**

**NOW**

## Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony - Friday, April 24

Join us as we recognize our administrators, Catholic partners and other influential members of the Catholic community, who have made outstanding contributions to Catholic education, CPCO and their respective schools.

# Serve

As we reflect on the year, we as a staff are grateful for the opportunity to support our members and improve the lives of those we serve.

# Advocate

We reaffirm our commitment to advocating for our members. As we celebrate the season, we will continue to raise our voices and champion the causes that matter.

# Lead

We are reminded of the importance of guiding our community towards success and innovation as we look ahead to new opportunities for leadership and growth.

Happy  
Holiday's  
from all of us at  
CPCO!



CATHOLIC  
PRINCIPALS'  
COUNCIL | ONTARIO

May your holiday be joyful and may we continue to SERVE. ADVOCATE. LEAD with purpose in the new year!

## Christmas Hours:

The office will be closed from Dec. 22, 2025 to Jan. 2, 2026. Voice and email messages will be responded to on Jan. 5, 2026.

If this is an emergency, please contact Tilia Cruz, Executive Director, at [trucz@cpco.on.ca](mailto:trucz@cpco.on.ca).

If assistance is required for CPCO's Long Term Disability Program, contact [belairdirect](mailto:belairdirect) via email at: [GroupBenefitsON@belairdirect.com](mailto:GroupBenefitsON@belairdirect.com).



At least I'm  
not smoking.

It's just  
water  
vapour.

It helps with  
my anxiety.

My teacher has  
NO IDEA I'm doing  
it in class.

It's not like it's  
bad for you.

I just do it once in  
a while. I'm not  
going to get  
addicted.

*Students have a lot of misconceptions about vaping.*

***Teach them the truth.***

We can help.

**LUNGS ARE FOR LIFE | DES POUMONS POUR LA VIE**  
teaching resources include evidence-based handouts,  
slides, quizzes and activities.

**Visit [www.lung.ca](http://www.lung.ca).**



Canadian Lung Association  
**B R E A T H E**