

The Last Word

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This past year, the BCPVPA has amplified our focus on new-to-role Principals and Vice-Principals, highlighting the challenges of those roles, offering supportive programs like the new Compass Leadership Academy pilot alongside our legacy Foundations for New School Leaders program, and sharing articles in *Principl(ed)* magazine that explore the joys and difficulties of the roles.

If we step back to the not-so-distant past, all these new-to-role Principals and Vice-Principals were excellent teachers. In some cases, their skill and suitability for leadership was recognized by existing educational leaders, and they were developed and encouraged to

pursue formal leadership roles. In many cases, it was the guidance of Principals and Vice-Principals that helped gifted teacher-leaders begin to envision themselves as Vice-Principals, and gave them the courage to consider applying for the role.

Across British Columbia, school districts are experiencing a growing and sustained challenge in recruiting Principals and Vice-Principals. Applicant pools are thinner, fewer teachers are stepping forward, and in some districts — particularly rural and remote areas — leadership vacancies are becoming increasingly difficult to fill. This is not simply a staffing issue. It is a sustainability issue in the system.

While district recruitment strategies and leadership programs are important, a powerful lever for strengthening the leadership pipeline sits squarely within the school community. Principals and Vice-Principals play a critical role in identifying leadership potential early, intentionally developing it, and unambiguously encouraging promising educators to consider leadership roles.



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SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP:

Growing the Next Generation of Educational Leaders in British Columbia

Strong leadership pipelines do not emerge by accident. They are grown through thoughtful conversations and encouragement that invite teachers to see themselves as educational leaders long before they may have considered that pathway for themselves.

In BC, many highly capable teachers never apply for Vice-Principal roles. This is not because they lack ability, but because they may lack encouragement, clarity, or confidence that the role is “for them”. Some are deterred by the perceived workload, the complexity of the role, or concerns about work-life balance. Others do not see themselves reflected in current leadership demographics or assume leadership is only for a particular “type” of educator.

In rural and remote districts, the issue is often compounded. Fewer staff, limited exposure to leadership roles, and geographic isolation can mean leadership potential goes unnoticed or undeclared.

When systems rely only on self-nomination for Vice-Principal and Principal roles, they may consistently lose capable future leaders — significant potential, unrecognized and gone without a sound.

Current Principals and Vice-Principals are uniquely positioned to disrupt this pattern. They see leadership capacity long before a posting is written, in how teachers handle complexity, respond to conflict, support vulnerable students, and influence colleagues without formal authority. Naming that potential matters.

Leadership readiness does not begin with managerial skill. It begins with values, judgment, and relationships. While leadership profiles will vary across contexts, several traits consistently signal future capacity:

- **Moral purpose:** A clear commitment to Reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusion.
- **Relational trust:** Having the natural trust of students, families, and colleagues, particularly in challenging situations.
- **Sound judgment:** An understanding of nuance, confidentiality, and the importance of context when making decisions.
- **Systems awareness:** An ability to think beyond their own classroom and consider school-wide, district, or student-centred implications.
- **Emotional regulation and resilience:** An ability to remain grounded under pressure and recover when things do not go as planned.
- **Influence without authority:** An ability to lead initiatives, mentor colleagues, or bring people together without a formal title.

Importantly, leadership potential may be most visible during moments of tension — responding to parental concerns, navigating staff conflict, or supporting students with complex needs.

Encouragement without preparation can feel risky, for both the individual and the system. Aspiring leaders benefit most when development begins well before they apply for their next role. Current Principals and Vice-Principals can support this growth in realistic, sustainable ways:

- Create authentic leadership opportunities by inviting promising educators to lead school initiatives, chair meaningful committees, or coordinate programs with real responsibility and impact.
- Demystify the work of Principals and Vice-Principals by being open to sharing how decisions are made, including constraints related to policy,



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legislation, collective agreements, and district direction.

- Mentor and coach by asking reflective questions, encouraging self-assessment, and helping individuals clarify their leadership values, in addition to sharing your own experiences and advice.
- Normalize complexity by being honest about the challenges of educational leadership, without portraying the role as unmanageable or joyless.

These experiences allow teachers to explore leadership in a grounded way while maintaining their professional identity and confidence.

One of the most significant factors influencing a teacher’s pursuit of leadership is whether someone they respect has recognised their potential. A simple, direct

statement — *“I think you would make a strong Vice-Principal or Principal”*—can be transformative.

It is sometimes difficult to know how and when to have the conversation with a teacher about their potential as a leader. It is crucial to offer effective encouragement, while being both intentional and specific:

- **Name what you observe:** “Your ability to navigate that complex parent situation showed strong judgment and empathy.”
- **Connect to impact:** “Staff already trust your leadership.”
- **Clarify pathways:** Explain district processes, timelines, and available supports.
- **Respect autonomy:** Communicate encouragement as an invitation, not as pressure.

- **Follow up:** Leadership interest often develops over time, not immediately.

Equitable encouragement matters. When educational leaders maintain the “status quo”, there can be an unintentional narrowing of the system’s leadership pipeline, resulting in limited diversity in school and district-based leadership. Look carefully for teachers who bring a variety of experiences and personal identities to the role. Representation matters, and students who see themselves reflected in their Principal or Vice-Principal receive a powerful message about belonging, opportunity, and possibility.

In BC’s public education system, leadership continuity and quality are foundational. Developing future Principals and Vice-Principals is not an add-on to the role; it is part of responsible educational leadership.

Your influence extends beyond your current school. It shapes who leads next, how prepared they are, and whether they step forward at all. So, I invite every one of our members to think about who on your staff might be an effective future Principal or Vice-Principal, and consider having a conversation with them. There are 2,700 of us: imagine if we all identified one future leader, supported their development, and encouraged them to apply for the role?

By intentionally identifying leadership potential, creating growth opportunities, and naming that potential out loud, Principals and Vice-Principals strengthen not only their own schools, but the broader system we collectively steward. If we want strong school leadership tomorrow, we must grow it today — deliberately, equitably, and with care.

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