



As an elementary school Principal, I would spend some time during the first week of school taking photos of new students and staff members.

I would post the photos on a bulletin board outside of the office so that current students and staff members knew who the newest members of our community were, and could make sure that they felt welcome during the first few weeks of the school year.

If I was new to a school, I would also post a photo of myself with my name underneath the photo. But, the thing is, I never actually used my own photo. I would copy a photo of Mr. Incredible, from the movie *The Incredibles* and put my name underneath it to both the delight and eyerolls of the students in the school. I could identify with an aging, out-of-shape superhero with thinning hair, so why not present myself as Mr. Incredible?



Super-Heroic Tendencies

Over the years I became a little more obsessive. On school photo day, I would often secretly slip into a superhero costume to have my school photo taken. This became so routine that Don Emerson, the Lifetouch photographer with whom I worked for many years, would adjust the school photography schedule so that I would have time to change into my costume for my own personal photo shoot. I would try to have my photo taken when others were not around so that my photo was only revealed when it went up on the hallway wall as part of the staff composite photo.

For many years, when the photos arrived at school, I would clip one out and mail it to my mother who still liked to receive school photos of my kids, my wife, and me. The superhero photo theme seemed to wear a little thin over the years for my mother, as she sometimes wondered aloud whether a school Principal should dress up in a costume. On my visits to her house, I noticed over time that while our family school photos were still displayed on her refrigerator, my own photo had migrated to less of a prominent position. It was often partially tucked behind an electrical bill, or obscured by a shopping list under

a decorative magnet. I think that my mother grew a little more reluctant to share the photo of a middle-aged son in a ridiculous costume. And, of course, this only encouraged me more.

Was there a motive behind my desire to portray myself as a superhero in the eyes of the school community? I will admit that it was likely fueled by both my ego and a respectful tip of the hat to the nerd culture that I love so much. When I had trouble connecting with kids, we could often talk about Marvel or Star Wars movies as a point of connection.

Overtime, I began to realize that there was something more behind presenting that persona to the school community. When I ran for the Board of Directors of the BCPVPA, during my three-minute speech to the Chapter Council representatives, I shared with them my habit of dressing in superhero costumes at school. What I also shared with Chapter Council – something that I never shared with my school community – was that the increasing demands on Principals and Vice-Principals was placing superheroic pressures on all of them.



The hypocrisy is not lost on me, as I externally presented myself and my role as being super-heroic while, at the same time, processing internally the super-heroic expectations and demands of the position. In my Director speech to Chapter Council, I tried to reconcile two contradictory things, and – spoiler alert – I did it poorly.

1. students should feel that their Principal or Vice-Principal is a superhero
2. the increasing demands of our roles should not require a Principal or Vice-Principal to be a superhero

To this day, I am still surprised that I received enough votes in that election, given the confusing nature of my speech. The Chapter Council representatives were likely politely pondering if my theme was that they need to be *like* a superhero, or *not* like a superhero. Ugh.

But perhaps the duality of those seemingly contradictory stances is the nature of what we do. Principals and Vice-Principals help students to do their best, provide supports to students and families, hold themselves to high ethical standards, and put the needs of those in their care first. Principals and Vice-Principals strive to serve the underserved and understand most importantly that greater power bows to lesser power. I could add the iconic line from Peter Parker's Uncle Ben in the *Spiderman* comics that, "with great power comes great responsibility".

If you stripped away the superpowers of any superhero, you would be left with those super-heroic ideals. Maybe the cape and costume are unnecessary. Maybe, it is more about striving to meet super-heroic ideals in the service of our school communities. And maybe, just maybe, my Mom was right after all.

Kevin Reimer is the Executive Director of the BCPVPA, a previous Director of the Board and served as President 2016-2018.