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The Journal of the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association

Minister Singh's
Perspective

Your Stories:
Anti-Racism

Reflections on a
Leadership Journey

The Gift of Invitation

**Principal
Larry Ryan**

on finding
your path to
leadership,
and inviting
people into a
possibility



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The BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA) is a voluntary professional association representing school leaders employed as Principals and Vice-Principals in BC's public education system. The BCPVPA provides its members with the professional services and supports they need to provide exemplary leadership in public education.

We are proud to have more than 2700 members in the province's 60 school districts, and BCPVPA membership is open to any Principal, Vice-Principal, or Director of Instruction at the school or district level. All school districts in the province have a local Principal and Vice-Principal association recognized as a Chapter of the BCPVPA.

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Cover Photo - courtesy Larry Ryan

by

Brian Leonard

2022-2024 President

BCPVPA

When I am visiting local Chapters, BCPVPA members frequently ask how they can get more involved in the Association. I also received this question at the past two Foundations for New School Leaders sessions, as our members – both new and seasoned – were eager to know how they could play a larger role in the life of the BCPVPA.

The BCPVPA exists to support members in their work, and even though school leadership can be deep and challenging, it is heartening to hear so many people eager to give back in support of their colleagues. Your participation makes our Association stronger and better.

What are the opportunities to get more involved?

- Committees:
 - Budget
 - Contract
 - Indigenous Leadership
 - Professional Learning & Development
 - Workplace Intensification & Well-Being
 - Ad Hoc Anti-Racism
- Working groups and sub-committees
- Facilitator roles

Getting involved

- Coaching and Mentorship
- Chapter Council Representative
- Board Member
- President

Committee Work

Principals and Vice-Principals are busy people. And, as is often the case, the busiest people can be the ones most likely to seek out new opportunities and challenges. In other walks of life, when you mention the word 'committee', people may look at their shoes, or look for the exit: that is not true of the BCPVPA's member community!

Committee work is the ideal way to get involved without a huge commitment of time. It is also a great opportunity to network and meet members from across the province, usually those with a similar interest or passion. The BCPVPA supports several advisory and special committees that assist and advise the Board of Directors in carrying out the Board's governance role. And, from time to time, the Board may also appoint a working group to undertake a specific task or a short-term assignment.

Every spring, the Association circulates a request to members, through eNews and a special Member Update, for applications for our Standing Committees, and every year we get a significant number of applicants from across the province.

2023-2024 BCPVPA Board of Directors

Brian Leonard, SD43

President

Dr. Shannon Behan, SD47

President-Elect

Jacqueline Borosa, SD68

Darren Danyluk, SD6

Heidi Grant, SD91

Renee Hislop, SD62

Sid Jawanda, SD27

Sanj Johal, SD44

Paul Marsden, SD36

Tina Pierik, SD61

Navshina Savory, SD38

Tara Zielinski, SD45

The following criteria is used for selecting members to sit on each committee:

- An active member (either current Principal or Vice-Principal)
- Demonstrated knowledge or skills in areas within the committee mandate
- Balance of a variety of aspects of personal identity and geographic representation
- Appropriate representation from elementary, middle, and secondary schools
- Balance between new and returning committee members

Members may serve for a two-year term, with a maximum of three consecutive terms. There are just a handful of seats available on the committees each year, and it can be hard to winnow down the list of interested applicants. The President and Executive Director, in consultation with senior staff, make a recommendation to the Board of the proposed committee members for approval and ratification.

In addition to appointed members, each committee has one or more representatives from the Board, and one or more representatives from senior staff; the President is an ex-officio member of every committee. The senior staff provide support, resources, and advice to the committee, and assist the committee Chair – a Board member – in preparation of the agenda and reports. Board members on the committee are voting members, chair each meeting, and act as a liaison between the Board and the committee. Ultimately, each committee provides invaluable advice and perspective from the field to assist the Board of Directors in their decision-making. Currently, the Association has five Standing Committees, and one Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee.

Find out more about the 2023-2024 Committees

bit.ly/BCP_23-24Committees



"Committee work is
the ideal way to get
involved without a huge
commitment of time."



@bcvpapresident

Facilitation and Coaching/Mentorship

Leadership development is a key component of the BCPVPA's mission, and coaching/mentorship is a critical aspect of leadership as we work to foster and encourage success for the next generation of leaders. Facilitator opportunities are available with some of our key programs, including Foundations for New School Leaders and Explorations for Aspiring School Leaders, and the BCPVPA is in the early stages of developing a coaching network to help develop future leaders, using the guiding principles of Cognitive Coaching. These are rich opportunities for experienced Principals and Vice-Principals to share their knowledge, pass on professional learning, and inspire newly-appointed 'next-gen' school leaders. It is the ultimate way to give back to the profession.

Chapter Council

The Principals and Vice-Principals in each district are members of a local 'Chapter', or Association. All 60 school districts have a local Chapter, and *all* Chapters are members of the BCPVPA. Chapter Council, held three times each year, is a gathering of school leaders representing every part of the province, and it is an amazing networking opportunity. Chapter Representatives are determined at the Chapter level.

Formally, the most important role of Chapter Council is to "provide guidance, advice, or direction to the Board."¹ Chapter Council meetings can also provide members with the chance to communicate directly with senior officials from the Ministry of Education and Child Care, as well as other influencers in the education sector.

Board of Directors

The ultimate way to get involved – and to have a direct role in shaping the priorities and direction of the BCPVPA – is to be elected to the Board of Directors. It is not a role that can be taken on lightly, and it requires a considerable commitment of time and energy away from your school and home life. While there are no pre-requisites for nomination, other than

"These are rich opportunities for experienced Principals and Vice-Principals to share their knowledge, pass on professional learning, and inspire newly-appointed 'next-gen' school leaders."

being an active member, it is useful for prospective Directors to have a solid grounding and experience as a school leader.

Once elected by your peers, Directors of the Board will experience unique professional learning opportunities – sometimes challenging, and always interesting. Directors are continually exposed to the provincial perspective on issues within the education sector, and give valuable input to government on the development of educational policy or new initiatives.

President

The President is the chief elected officer, representative, and spokesperson of the Association. It is an honour and a privilege to serve in this role. It is also an awe-inspiring responsibility to represent the interests of more than 2,700 members living and working in our massive province. While BC is large geographically, we are small as a school-leader community, and spread over a huge area.

BC has one of the highest performing educational jurisdictions in the world due in large part to the leadership of our Principals and Vice-Principals. The work of a school leader is complex and challenging, but it is also invigorating and rewarding.

¹ BCPVPA Constitution and Bylaws 6.4.a

I ran to be President of the BCPVPA on a platform with three key elements:

- 1) Support for Member Health and Well-Being
- 2) Employment Equity
- 3) Leadership Development

These are all goals of our comprehensive Strategic Plan.

As President, my role is to work with the Board of Directors, the Executive Director, and senior staff to breathe life into the goals and objectives of our Strategic Plan, to communicate and give voice to the experiences of our members, and to ensure that our sector partners, school communities, and the public understand the vital work of Principals and Vice-Principals in keeping schools safe and operating, and ensuring a steady focus on student success and achievement.

The strength of any successful organization lies in its members. The BCPVPA has an amazing pool of skills, capacity, and impressive leadership abilities within our membership. When members can bring those talents to supporting the Association, and can further develop their own knowledge and experience through this work, it is a winning formula.

There are many ways that you can get in touch. Email Executive Director, Scott Robinson scott@bcpvpa.bc.ca or me bleonard@bcpvpa.bc.ca, or connect with your local Chapter President or Chapter Representative. Watch for information in the spring about nominations for the Board of Directors, and for the application window to join a committee. Contact our BCPVPA staff with any questions; you can find their contacts at bcpvpa.org, or through My BCPVPA.

The first step in getting involved is making the call to find out more! We look forward to hearing from you.

bcpvpa

TELL A FRIEND!

BCPVPA Members: do you have a colleague who has not yet joined our Association? Help them to be part of our community of leaders, and to get access to employment relationship support, professional learning and development, committee opportunities, and much more.

bcpvpa.org/membership/application





Get Involved With Your Association!

Elections are held for the BCPVPA Board of Directors every spring

Watch for nomination promotions to begin in March 2024, and the invitation for nominations to be issued in April 2024. Nominees need to be BCPVPA members, and can be nominated by two BCPVPA members.

Candidates have an opportunity to share their campaign messaging through both written and video statements, and with an in-person speech at the May Chapter Council meeting.

The election for Directors of the Board will be held in May 2024.

The Board of Directors has in-person and virtual meetings scheduled throughout the year.

To find out more, contact scott@bcpvpa.bc.ca



2023-2024 BCPVPA Board of Directors



Brian Leonard, President
SD43, Coquitlam



Dr. Shannon Behan, President-Elect
SD47, Powell River



Jacqueline Borosa
SD68, Nanaimo-Ladysmith



Darren Danyluk
SD6, Rocky Mountain



Heidi Grant
SD91, Nechako Lakes



Renee Hislop
SD62, Sooke



Sid Jawanda
SD57, Prince George



Sanj Johal
SD44, North Vancouver



Paul Marsden
SD36, Surrey



Tina Pierik
SD61, Victoria



Navshina Savory
SD38, Richmond



Tara Zielinski
SD45, West Vancouver

The Gift of Invitation

A 'Reluctant Leader' shares
his leadership learning

Larry Ryan always thought that he would be a psychologist. After completing his undergrad in psychology at SFU, he did not feel ready to take on his master's – and, beyond that, look ahead to a PhD – so he decided to work for a while. “I was already working with youth at risk during the summer,” Larry recalls, “doing summer camps and then working with some more challenging students, and I really loved that. I went on to do that full time, working for the YMCA and doing after school programs in partnership with the school district to identify kids that needed extra support and extra activities. Within a year, someone from the school district suggested that I come to work for them. So, I went on to be a youth worker.”

Larry was a youth worker for four years, and his direct supervisors were counselors from the different schools. “It really made me think, I want to do *that* job. A lot of my friends were teachers, and I had never felt cut out to be a teacher. I was told that if I wanted to be a counselor in a school, I had to get my teaching certificate. I decided to do that, solely as a

means to an end.” Larry went into PDP (Professional Development Program, Teacher Education) and was inspired; he had already been working in schools for four years, and had encountered many different teachers with many different styles. As he began teaching, he felt ready to pursue his purpose, working with youth at risk. He decided to work as a TTOC (Teacher Teaching on Call) first, in order to experience ‘normal’ classrooms, and gain some perspective.

Larry's journey as an educator has been supported by many people who recognized his potential, and reached out with opportunities. “I received a call after I finished PDP, asking me if I had ever considered working in a district behaviour program. I said that I *had*, but that I was trying to do something different, and that I had already worked in that area. They convinced me to take the position. I was responsible for both a youth worker and an EA (Education Assistant) and – without really knowing it – we were an integration type model. We were in a school with kids from all over the district, and our job was to get



"I feel like I'm a natural teacher at heart, whether it's coaching sports, or explaining something to my son or my daughter.

As a teacher, all I wanted to do was work with kids. I just love the opportunities to be creative in explaining a concept, to create lessons, and to react and respond to students in the middle of a lesson. You see them catch a spark, and you try to build on that and fan those flames.

I just love teaching, and it can be a tough balance between having teaching time and being an administrator. When I get to teach, I just dive in, but then you realize, as an administrator, that there's a million other things that need to be done."

them used to being in the classroom. We would work with all the different age groups and teachers on those programs. Through that leadership – having my own staff with no budget – I engaged in a lot of leadership without recognizing that I was leading; at the time, it felt like surviving.”

After four years, Larry moved to a regular grade six/seven teaching position. “I loved it, and really poured myself into it. I was all about the kids, and I didn’t get involved in things like staff committees. At the time, there was an unfortunate situation at the school with staff infighting, to the point where mediators were brought in. Myself and my teaching partner remained neutral. The mediators met with each staff member, and they asked me if I knew that myself and my teaching partner were the only two staff members that everyone had trust in at that time. Of course, I didn’t know that.” Larry was asked to chair a committee, and that was yet another step towards leadership. “The school had a reputation over the next couple of years that discouraged good staff from joining the school, and that affected the kids. That’s when I said to myself that I would never again stand on the sidelines. Our school had imploded and, in the end, it hurt the kids.”

Larry was on the brink of continuing his education with his master’s in counselling when he received a call about a special teaching position in Burnaby. “It was called Community School Coordinator, and I had forgotten that, when I was a youth worker, most of the schools I worked at were community schools where I worked alongside those coordinators. There was a maternity leave, and someone brought up my name for the role. I said that it wasn’t the right time, because I was applying for my master’s.” The invitation caused Larry to reflect on the work he had been doing since university, how people had recommended him for those situations, and that he had been able to walk into those rich and meaningful experiences. He had always wanted to work with tougher kids; should he apply? “I applied, and I got the job. I remember distinctly at the end of the first week, I said this is the *best* job. I spent the rest of the year worried that I’d have to leave it, because it was a maternity role.

“Through that leadership – having my own staff with no budget – I engaged in a lot of leadership without recognizing that I was leading; at the time, it felt like surviving.”

Luckily, I was able to stay, and I worked in that role for eight years.”

The Community School Coordinator job led Larry to leadership in many different ways. He worked with the PAC, and worked very closely both with parents, and as the go-between for parents and teachers. He did community work with mayors and city councillors, and was the chairperson for grassroots community committees and professional committees. “For me, that was the shift. I never thought I could be an administrator, because I didn’t think I was a leader of adults until I started doing that job. I was working with Principals, and with school board trustees. People seemed to like that I was a different kind of leader.”

With the idea of working towards a role at the school board as the supervisor of Community School Coordinators, Larry decided to get a master’s in educational leadership. “This master’s really changed things for me. It helped dispel the idea that you have to be the expert, and focused on how you support people, come alongside of them, and work with them to build a team. Early on in my master’s, I made it clear that I wasn’t going to be a school Principal, I was going to do a different job. In the middle of my master’s, I said out loud to my classmates that I think I might apply to be a Principal, or go into school admin. They all laughed, and said, of course you are. Once I finished, I was on that track.”

Larry was successful in applying for a head teaching job in Burnaby. “In August, my first Principal said that he knew a lot of people who have worked with

me, that he saw his job as getting me into a Vice-Principal role and, in September, he mentioned that Coquitlam was hiring for a middle school VP. I was torn, because I had literally just started at the school; again, I almost didn't apply but at the last minute I did. I thought, I'm just going to do the interview. And less than four weeks later, they asked when I could start. So, I became an administrator, and I've been in SD 43 since 2017."

After five years at the middle school, Larry was looking for a change and was moved to his first secondary school. While he loved the challenge, he still had a clock in his head that was ticking to a principalship. Similar to his previous experience, he applied in October, interviewed in November, and got the call. In his interview, Larry had spent time talking about the leadership he learned as a Community School Coordinator; the district had someone leaving a community school, and Larry started at Seaview Community School in February 2022. "I've loved stepping back into a community school again, it's full circle for me. The philosophy of community school coordinators is that we're not trying to do it *for* people.

We're not trying to run everything. Instead, we're trying to bring more people into the conversation, and into shared leadership, especially when we're talking with parents. We want them to know that we are not going to run all the programs for them; we are helping them learn how to lead, and we are supporting them."

Larry feels humbled by the support that he has received through his career. "I've presented to groups a few times, and one of the things I talk about in my leadership learning is the gift of invitation. It's the idea of inviting people into a possibility – people did that for me. I was sometimes reluctant to hear it or accept it. But the more I heard it, the more I thought that maybe I *can* do that. Maybe there *is* something to it. So that's how I conduct my own leadership, by inviting people into the possibilities."

"I think it's because they saw it in me so early in my career. I'm the type of person who has to think about something for a long time, and play out the scenarios. In some ways, I wish I had started the journey towards school administrator a little bit earlier, but I have loved the experiences that I've had, so I wouldn't change



"... one of the things I talk about in my leadership learning is the gift of invitation. It's the idea of inviting people into a possibility – people did that for me."

that. It feels good when people see something, and encourage you. It is such a positive impact. Ten years ago, I would never be an administrator. Things can change when people set the table for you, and you feel you might be able to do it. You step into it, and you see they were right all along."

Larry has been mindful about offering support to others, and helping them to find the path that is right for them. "I never saw myself as a leader, and I'm now in this formal role, but all of my other roles and opportunities on the way were leadership. For me, it was almost like trying on the uniform, the clothing, of leadership. Other people may just jump right in, but I needed to take smaller steps and believe in my skills and abilities. When I talk to potential leaders, I first tell them that they already are leaders. They're leading in their way, and don't necessarily have the formal position or title to lead. You can lead from where you are. I talk about Benjamin Zander from the book, *The Art of Possibility*. He uses the example of the flutist in the orchestra who can lead from where she is just by doing her best and impacting the people around her; with her own positive energy, she has an effect. When you do certain things that aren't in your official role, people start looking towards you because you're the person who is positive, or the person who can organize, or the person who has passion around the work. All of a sudden, you're leading people.

"I want to encourage people to at least try it on; they can start small, and have impact. For people who really are thinking about going into admin, like those attending BCPVPA's Explorations for Aspiring School Leaders, I want to show them that there are different types of leadership. Early on, I had only a single vision of what a school leader was, but there is more than one type. I want people to see my

journey, because maybe they can see something of themselves, and know that it's okay to be different. We need diversity in all aspects of education – and in leadership in particular, because that's the way of the world. Supporting our students to achieve success requires all different types of leaders. One of the leadership groups that I now work with is the recently formed B.C. Black Educational Leaders Association (BCBELA). One of our goals is to be mentors and models for other educators of colour. We want them to consider taking leadership positions in education. I am proud to be an founding member of the executive and the Association.

"Staff need different types of leaders, too. And staff can lead in so many ways where I don't have the expertise. I used to think that because I wasn't an expert in everything, I wasn't going to be a good leader. Now I know that it's all about helping people, and bringing them alongside, or walking behind them."

Much of the joy in Larry's day comes from his interaction with kids. "At lunchtime, at recess, before and after school, once I've finished meeting with teachers, I'll walk through and talk to the kids. In my short time at the secondary school, I got an email from a parent saying that they didn't know what I did at lunchtime, but that their son and his friends in grade 11 and 12 were telling them that they love it when I come to hang out and talk. While there were some problems with some of the students in that group, I turned that into an opportunity to have, hopefully, a fun conversation. I try to treat everyone, including each child, as someone who wants to do their best. With high schoolers and middle schoolers, they're smart; they already know they are doing something wrong, so instead of scolding them, I can communicate it in a different way. The kids realize that I'm not there just to nail them on things, and that I expect them to behave in a way that we can have fun. It brings us together to talk, and I can find out about them and what they like to do. One of the guidance counsellors I worked with described it as my 'positive smiley attitude', and that's how I am with everyone. Sometimes, as leaders, we think we have to act a certain way to be respected and to get credibility. I understand that, but I think

"I think my purpose in life is to support people to be the best versions of themselves. That's the meaning of everything."



"Early on, I had only a single vision of what a school leader was, but there is more than one type. I want people to see my journey, because maybe they can see something of themselves, and know that it's okay to be different."

being yourself is important. I'm not saying that what I do is the only way to lead, but it works for me."

Like many educators, Larry cites his relationships with colleagues as a driving force in his growth and happiness as a leader. "During the pandemic, I had been a Vice-Principal for about three years, and I still felt new to the district. When things shut down, I didn't have any connection with colleagues and other administrators and that felt really, really lonely. When things opened up over that first summer, I purposely called all the people I thought I could connect with to see if we could get together. That has led to some good ongoing relationships." Larry also took the opportunity to expand his experience as a BCPVPA program facilitator for Explorations for Aspiring School Leaders. "When I was asked the first time, three years ago, to be a facilitator in the breakout groups, that was such great learning for me. It was hearing the guest speakers, but then hearing from the participants with their deep thoughts and questions. I enjoy participating in things where I can be challenged, where I can learn more and share my knowledge, and be part of a community. It's so important for any leader, especially as a Principal of an elementary school where you're the lone administrator."

Family has also been critical to Larry's joy in his work. "I have been very fortunate to have a wife and kids who have given me the opportunity to dive into leadership. The stability at home has helped me to spend the time needed to focus on schools and leadership. I also want to pay tribute to my father,

Alex, who passed away in June 2022. He was the leader of our extended family. He was the first one to come to Canada, to British Columbia, and he brought so many family members over here. Even in his work as a social worker, when he retired, they created a workplace award based on his character, his integrity in leadership and his ability to support others. I really modeled myself after that; to think that you could have a long career and they would create an award in your name – you were their boss, but they loved you so much."

"I am happy that my father got to see me become a Principal. It was in February 2022, the month he was diagnosed with cancer. He was very, very proud. So I continue to dedicate my thoughts to him, considering always, what would my dad do in this situation?"

Larry contemplates his own school experience, and how that is reflected in his leadership today. "When I was in elementary school, and in junior high school, I loved going to school because of everything that was happening. I wasn't a particularly great student, but I went every day because I loved hanging out with friends, and doing sports. So, I've tried to create those type of opportunities to build community. Something that I have introduced is monthly assemblies, and they can be a great opportunity to build leadership, and allow students to shine in different ways than they perhaps have in the past. We have students performing, making music. We have teachers coming up to give the land acknowledgement. We want it to be mostly student-led, but I believe that not everyone gets to see adults in these roles. I also take pictures and we produce a video montage – the kids love seeing themselves. I can put titles and subtitles in there that represent our growth mindset, the vision about being kind and working problems out peacefully. It allows us to hold up a mirror to see that we are doing great, and to project forward, to think ahead about what we want to be. That hour is so impactful, because everyone's together and getting the same message. Monthly assemblies are the epitome of everything that we do – they are a ton of work, but the impact is huge."

"Ten years ago, I would never be an administrator. Things can change when people set the table for you, and you feel you might be able to do it. You step into it, and you see they were right all along."

Whether in the school or in the neighbourhood, Larry finds meaning in working with others. Part of the pathway towards building a community is fostering growth. "I think my purpose in life is to support people to be the best versions of themselves. That's the meaning of everything. Part of that is helping kids learn from the mistakes they've made. When that occurs, I try to put a spin on it and say, today you made a very big mistake, and the unfortunate part is that you can't take it back. It's still there, and it's caused harm. But there are opportunities to at least repair some of it, and maybe time will take care of the rest, but let's discuss what you can do that's within your control. When you can reinforce that you intend to support them, then they may make their apology, share their feelings, and hear from the other person. That's not easy, but it's necessary."

"It's meaningful to me to pass on the power of leadership. I can give that to staff, and even give a little bit to the kids, from kindergarten students all the way up to grade 12. And if they are not able to make a choice we think is appropriate, then we'll step in, but we'll talk about that. My purpose is to help kids grow into educated citizens. When students feel they have agency, power, and control, then they're more likely to take risks in their academic learning. Emotionally, if they don't feel like they have control and a level of say in their lives, and support behind them, they are not going to take those risks."

"At the end of the day, I want kids to know they were part of something special, and that they have the ability to then – in turn – lead in their own spaces."

I believe that every kid knows what's right or wrong, but it's how they make their choices. In our daily announcements, we started doing reminders about what it means to do the right thing, and why that is important. That was contagious: once we started that messaging, we saw a big improvement in some of the behaviours we had been seeing. I want kids to walk away knowing that they have the power to be a positive influence, wherever they go. They can do it by themselves, but sometimes you're not strong enough, and then you find the right people. That comes back to community."

Larry has some advice for educators who are considering a move to school leadership. "Find out if it's truly what you want to do. There are people who definitely know this is their path, and they should pursue leadership in a way that allows them to tap into their skill set and their authentic selves, and to find their fit: that could be at a different school, or even at the district level. If you are not embodying your authentic self, or you feel like you're being asked to be someone you are not, I don't think you will find the joy in the work. I think many teachers like the control that they have within their classroom, and the idea of losing some of that control may not be a fit. But when you find the right environment, and you know who you are as a person and as a leader, you can feel like you're not being controlled by outside forces all the time."

For those who aren't really sure, who aren't ready, or don't feel they are cut out to be in the role, I would say to try on as many leadership hats as you can. Try different things that your district may have, like teacher consultant jobs or teacher leader jobs; it may be a stretch for you, but you can try it rather than going right to the administrator role. I would say don't stay in a rut, or in the same vein. If you're a reluctant leader like I was, you can try a series of smaller steps down that path. Ask for leadership opportunities, seek them out: you will recognize it once you find the joy, and realize that you actually like leading people."



@laryan70



RETURN-IT SCHOOL PROGRAM 2023/2024 IS BACK! REGISTER TODAY AT [RETURNITSCHOOL.CA](https://returnitschool.ca)

Return-It School is the free beverage container recycling program offered by Return-It. Return-It is the not-for-profit product steward that makes recycling in BC easier for everyone. The Return-It system diverts used beverage containers from the landfill and makes sure they are properly recycled. You probably know us best through your local Return-It depot.

By participating in BC's **FREE Return-It School program**, you get access to our online Teacher's Dashboard with exclusive educational resources and fundraising tips, our online activity book as well as free recycling bins for your school. Your school keeps all the deposit refunds from recycling, so you can use the program to supplement your school's fundraising efforts. We want to help students learn how to do their part to help keep the planet green by recycling their beverage containers and more.



Free Program

Offered FREE to all schools in BC by Return-It, the not-for-profit product steward for beverage container recycling in British Columbia.



Free Recycling Bins

Get up to 3 free Return-It bins to help your school's recycling program. Plus, discover the best collection & bottle drive methods for your school, from Return-It Express to pick-up services (where available).



\$5,000 Grand Prize Story Contest

Share your school's interesting, creative and impactful recycling story with us and you could win a Grand Prize of \$5,000 or the 2nd place prize of \$2500 (two Elementary School winners and two High School winners every year!)



Tools & Tips

Registered schools will have access to resources to help with recycling programs including fundraising and bottle drive tips.



Return-It School Video Presentation Kit

Teachers can request a free Presentation Kit via mail with a fun & educational video about recycling, lesson tips, and special goodies for their students.



Return-It School Online Activity Book

Our Activity Book is available online to registered schools through the teacher's dashboard, and includes recycling-themed games, comics, fun recycling facts and more.

INTERACTIVE
LEARNING



Bottle Drives with Express

Return-It Express makes it easier for schools to hold their bottle drives. No sorting and easy drop offs! For more information, visit return-it.ca/programs/bottledrives/.

Sign-up today at ReturnItSchool.ca and join hundreds of schools across BC



STORY CONTEST WINNERS FROM 2022/2023

Elementary \$5,000 Grand Prize Winner: Eastview Elementary

Eastview Elementary's beverage recycling program goal was to raise funds for a physical literacy outdoor space at their school. To promote the program, they sent students home with educational materials, newsletters and instructions about the Return-It program, shared information on their school's social media pages, and put up posters around the school. A contest was held over winter break where students were sent home with pre-labelled clear bags to fill up with as many beverage containers as they could, resulting in 195 additional bags. In total, the school raised \$1,417 by returning 14,170 containers.

High School \$5,000 Grand Prize Winner: Burnaby Youth Hub

After group discussions on the importance of taking action to combat the effects of climate change and energy use, a group of six students at Burnaby Youth Hub realized they could make a difference by recycling beverage containers. They planned a campaign called "Return-It to Earn It", which involved reaching out to their school and a neighbouring one to join forces in collecting and recycling beverage containers. The students create comic-style handouts to distribute information with their campaign's mascot, "Garbeth," inspired by Return-It Gang characters. In just a few months, students collected 3,001 containers and made \$289.75 in deposit refunds.

Read the full stories at returnitschool.ca/schoolnews/.

RETURN-IT SCHOOL ACTIVITY BOOK: RECYCLING FACTS, GAMES AND MORE



Did you know that we provide a free online activity book as part of the Return-It school program? It provides fun, interactive games and facts about beverage container recycling. For inquiries about printed activity books, email returnitschool@returnit.ca.

BOTTLE DRIVES WITH EXPRESS



Return-It Express makes it easier for schools to plan and run bottle drives by taking the work out of fundraising. It allows students, teachers, parents and the community to focus more on spreading the word about their school's bottle drive and collecting beverage containers rather than spending time sorting and counting containers individually or holding onto physical deposit refunds. Scan the QR code for tips and resources on how to get started.

HOW FUNDRAISING WITH EXPRESS WORKS:



Sign up for a free Express account for your school at Return-It.ca/Express.



Share your school's Express account number within your school (and your community if you wish). A phone number or any memorable 10-digit number is valid.



Bring your unsorted containers in transparent plastic bags* to an Express depot. To find an Express depot near you, visit Return-It.ca/Locations/Express.



Log in at the Express label stand at the depot using your school's account number. Anyone with the account number can contribute to your bottle drive.



Print off the number of labels you need, stick one on each bag, and leave them at the depot.



The depot will sort and count the containers for you and credit your Express account.

* Some depots may have per-visit bag limits. Contact your local Express depot directly for more information.



Minister Singh's Perspective:

Supporting BC School Communities

by
The Honourable Rachna Singh
Minister of Education and Child Care
Province of British Columbia

As we settle into a new school year, I want to acknowledge the work that Principals and Vice-Principals do to ensure that B.C. schools are safe, welcoming, and inclusive spaces where all students can learn and thrive. Many of you are the first to arrive at your schools each morning, and the last to leave them at night. Since becoming Minister of Education and Child Care, I have had the privilege of connecting with several of you during my visits to schools throughout the province, and I have appreciated the time you've taken to talk candidly with me about both the challenges and success stories in your school communities. I look forward to making these personal connections with more of you this school year.

B.C. is in the midst of a population boom. In part because of our internationally renowned public education system, people from around the world recognize our province as a desirable place to work, live, and raise a family. In the past two years, almost 250,000 people have chosen to make B.C. their home, which is why most of you are seeing major enrolment growth at your schools. I want you to know that our government is focused on building and expanding schools throughout B.C.'s fastest growing communities. To date, we've funded the creation of 23,000 new student spaces in B.C. and have made over 33,000 seats safer through seismic upgrading. We will continue to add more new and safer seats this year.

As leaders in your school communities, you are acutely aware of the inequities that some students and families are facing right now, as global inflation increases cost pressures at home. Many of you have turned to us, asking for the Province's support. In response, this past Spring, our government announced the new Feeding Futures program, which will support districts and schools in building and expanding local school food programs. With \$214M in funding over three years, the money will be used for purchasing food and hiring dedicated staff to co-ordinate meals and snacks for students. This is the largest investment in school food programs in B.C.'s history, and complements the work that a

number of you are already doing to address student hunger.

We continue to learn about the impacts of the toxic drug crisis in every community across Canada. This public health emergency remains top of mind for me in my work as Minister, and I will continue to work collaboratively with you as you support students and their families in understanding the risks of substance use. The Ministry's ERASE (expect respect & a safe education) website includes educational resources for students, families, and educators on the topic of substance use. I encourage all schools and families to make use of these materials to help students make decisions that will keep them—and their communities—safe. As part of our Mental Health in Schools strategy, our government is also investing nearly \$175 million to integrate mental health and substance use prevention programs into our education system.

We continue to strive to ensure our schools are places where all students, staff, and families feel like they belong. In 2016, the B.C. Human Rights Code was amended to ensure that gender identity and expression are protected. All schools must comply with the B.C. Human Rights Code and ensure that discrimination against any student, regardless of their background, identity or belief, is prohibited. All of B.C.'s 60 school districts have codes of conduct in place that align with the B.C. Human Rights Code, and all districts and many independent and First Nations schools participate in the B.C. SOGI Educator Network. While SOGI-inclusive education is not a mandatory requirement in the provincial

"We continue to strive to ensure our schools are places where all students, staff, and families feel like they belong."

"As a parent and as B.C.'s Minister of Education and Child Care ...



The Honourable Rachna Singh
Minister, Education and Child Care
Sunnyside Elementary, SD36 (Surrey)

**... there is nothing
more important to me
than the well-being of
our children."**

curriculum, it provides resources that can help create an inclusive learning environment for all students.

We are also working to create an anti-racist education system where everyone feels represented, respected, and hopeful for their future. Every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, or faith, deserves equal opportunities in our schools. In January 2023, I was honored to visit School District 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) to launch the K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan, which was developed to identify and address racism in school communities. The action plan will create change in B.C. schools by raising awareness and creating resources to improve the school experience for racialized students, staff, and families so that everyone feels a strong sense of belonging. To help this work along, the Ministry of Education and Child Care released "Anti-Racism: A Guide for Teachers" in February 2023 to give educators the opportunity to take action on anti-racism education within their school communities.

Recently, our government introduced a new Indigenous-Focused Graduation Requirement which takes effect this school year and will ensure all students complete Indigenous-focused coursework before they graduate from B.C.'s K-12 education system. Having a broader knowledge of Indigenous worldviews, histories, and cultures will help to build a culture of understanding and respect for Indigenous Peoples across the province.

As a parent and as B.C.'s Minister of Education and Child Care, there is nothing more important to me than the well-being of our children. Every child should grow up with a sense of security and well-being – this is my highest priority and the highest priority of my ministry. Thank you for continuing to place students at the centre of everything you do.

Rachna Singh
Minister of Education and Child Care



Your Success Makes All The Difference

Inspiring leaders cultivate vibrant learning spaces, building school communities where students and staff feel connected and valued.

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Stay on top of your professional health



The BCPVPA is pleased to offer its members the Early Intervention Program (EIP) by humanworks

Here to help you gain greater clarity and control of your professional health

BCPVPA EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM

The EIP offers an excellent opportunity to be proactive in managing your health and well-being. It is designed to provide you with quick and easily accessible resources and counsel on how to best navigate your health-related concerns so that you can remain at work.

Questions about the EIP?

Visit the FAQ section on the BCPVPA or humanworks websites or contact:

humanworks

EMAIL: admin@humanworks.ca

PHONE: 604-734-4130

www.humanworks.ca

bcprvp

humanworks

Demystifying Compensation for Exempt Employees

by

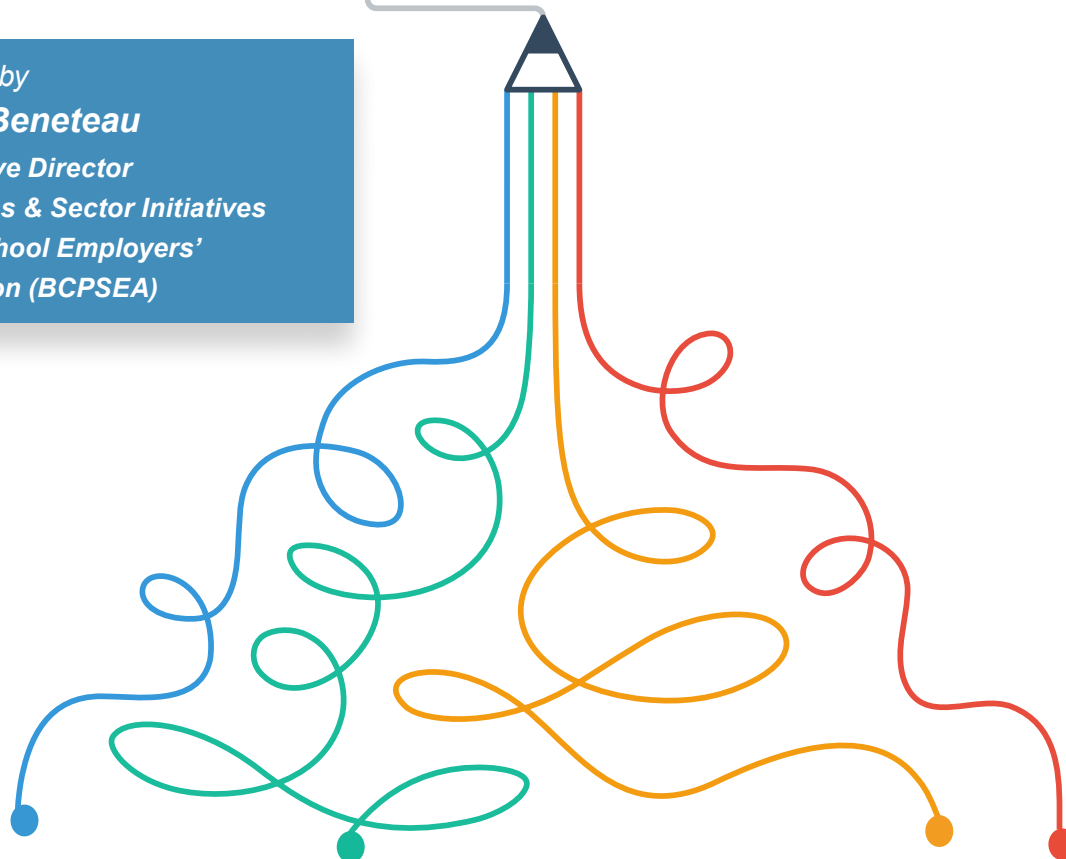
Chris Beneteau

Executive Director

Employee Relations & Sector Initiatives

BC Public School Employers'

Association (BCPSEA)



Introduction

My experience in British Columbia's public sector began in 2014 as part of the Employee Relations team at the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC). In that role, I oversaw investigations and discipline for both bargaining unit and exempt employees and, as you can imagine, I did not get invited to many birthday parties.

One thing I shared in common with my coworkers, however, was a sense of confusion about compensation. When I negotiated my starting salary, I expected to be eligible for periodic increases based on performance. Little did I know that ICBC and other public sector employers were in the midst of a salary freeze for exempt employees, which made it difficult to reward employees for good performance.

Fast-forward to the present day and, while there is no current salary freeze, compensation for exempt employees remains a challenging and confusing topic for many employees. This confusion is something I have felt keenly since taking over direction of the exempt compensation portfolio at the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) in Fall 2021.

Over the past two years, BCPSEA has undertaken a sectoral compensation review, authorized improvements to benefits for exempt staff, and completed two annual exempt staff salary increases (with funding, no less). Throughout, we have strived to improve communication with the sector about exempt compensation through written instructions, discussions with and presentations to employee associations such as the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA), BC Association of School Business Officials (BCASBO), and BCPVPA, and through reconstituting the Exempt Compensation Working Group. Our goal has been to improve understanding and alleviate confusion about exempt compensation within the sector.

And so, when the BCPVPA reached out to me about writing an article for *Princip(ed)*, I happily accepted. Through this article, my hope is that you, our education leaders, will gain an improved understanding of the exempt compensation regime for our sector. You may not like it (I still, unsurprisingly, don't get invited to many birthday parties), but I hope that after reading this article you feel a little less confused and better equipped to ask questions.

framework

The Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat (PSEC Secretariat) is responsible for oversight of compensation processes for the entire public sector. Through direction from the Minister of Finance, who is responsible for the *Public Sector Employers Act*, the PSEC Secretariat sets compensation rules, guidelines, and processes for public sector employers and employers' associations when it comes to employees not covered by unionized collective agreements (exempt employees). The Act provides the Minister with broad powers over compensation in British Columbia's public sector.

BCPSEA is the employers' association for the K-12 public education sector. Our role is to oversee and coordinate the compensation rules, guidelines, and

"BCPSEA is the employers' association for the K-12 public education sector. Our role is to oversee and coordinate the compensation rules, guidelines, and processes established by the PSEC Secretariat for the 60 school districts across British Columbia."

processes established by the PSEC Secretariat for the 60 school districts across British Columbia.

BCPSEA and PSEC Secretariat work closely together to ensure that compensation in our sector balances the need to recruit and retain employees, while staying within the policy framework and budgets set by the provincial government.

While there are a number of recurring processes, the two big ones that are generally of interest to all employees are: 1) salary grids, and 2) individual increases.

SALARY GRIDS

BCPSEA is responsible for setting exempt salary grids for school districts. Within the grids, school districts have discretion to set starting salaries for new hires and promotions.

The current methodology for setting the grids was established as part of a comprehensive sectoral compensation review conducted in 2016. Through that review – which involved consultation with sector stakeholders, an independent data market review, technical advice from compensation experts, and oversight by the PSEC Secretariat to ensure consistency across the province – two distinct streams were established:

- the Regional Salary Model for Principals and Vice-Principals, and
- district-specific salary grids for all other exempt positions.

District-specific grids are generated based on compensation data for equivalent positions from comparator organizations. The 2022 sectoral compensation review consisted of updates to both compensation data and comparator organizations for each school district.

The Regional Salary Model, by contrast, is generated using a differential above the highest potential earning teacher within a region. The regions consist of multiple school districts based on the BCPSEA Employer Regional groupings as they existed at the time of the 2016 review. For Vice-Principals, the grid ranges between 106% (Elementary, Level A) and 118% (Secondary, Level C) of the highest potential earning teacher in the region (including salary and related cash compensation amounts under the collective agreement). For Principals, the grid is set at 114% of the Vice-Principal grid.

As part of the 2022 sectoral compensation review, we also introduced a 'smoothing' increase to the regional salary grids for the Okanagan, Kootenay, Vancouver Island, and Fraser Valley regions.

In between market reviews, the PSEC Secretariat authorizes annual 'aging' (increases) for salary grids. Normally, aging is linked to bargaining unit increases. For 2023, exempt salary grids were aged by 6.75%, which is equivalent to the 5.75% base increase and 1.00% cost of living allowance increase for bargaining unit employees.

It is important to understand that when BCPSEA adjusts salary grids and distributes them to school districts, there is no automatic increase to individual salaries. The process for individual increases is related, but distinct.

INDIVIDUAL INCREASES

The key tenet of the common public sector compensation philosophy is that individual increases must be based on employee performance. As part of an employee performance model of compensation, general increases (in which all employees receive the same increase) or step increases (based on time-served in a position), are not permitted.

Nevertheless, most school districts use experience-based guidelines to apply the Regional Salary Model for Principals and Vice-Principals. This approach is permissible, but increases must still be contingent on good performance.

"The key tenet of the common public sector compensation philosophy is that individual increases must be based on employee performance."

In terms of process, each year BCPSEA develops an instruction document for school districts based on annual parameters set by the PSEC Secretariat. School districts then submit proposals for individual increases. Proposed increases must not exceed the salary range maximums established by the grids, and must also be compliant with the parameters set out in the instruction document. The decision to increase any individual's salary rests with the school district and the school district alone.

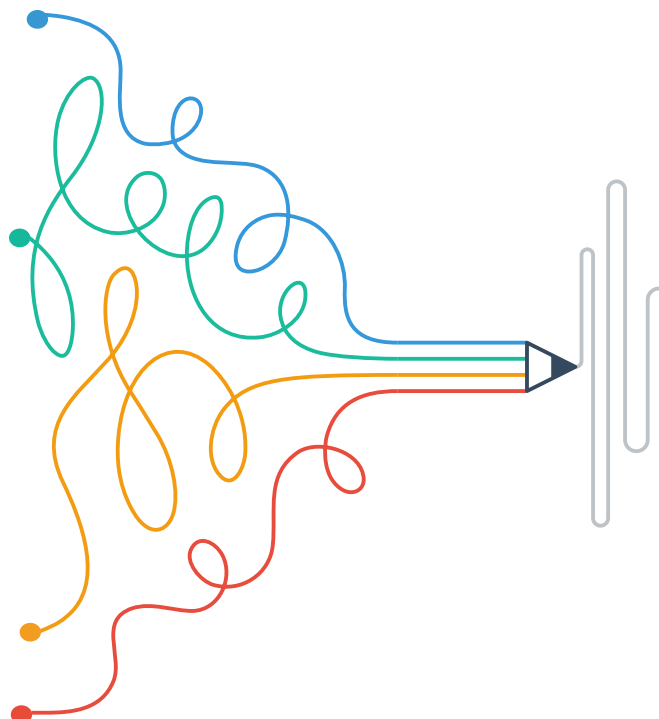
BCPSEA's role is to review school district submissions based on the parameters set by the PSEC Secretariat. BCPSEA generally does not scrutinize or interfere with proposed increases at the individual level; rather, we review the submission as a whole to ensure that it is in line with parameters and that school districts provide appropriate rationale where required.

For 2023, school districts were allowed to provide normal performance-based increases of up to 6.75% for most employees, with special increases of 6.76% or more reserved for the top 10% of performers. School districts were also directed to ensure that, absent of performance concerns, employee salaries were at least equal to the salary range minimum for their position, and BCPSEA worked with school districts to approve special increases to make this happen (such increases did not count towards a district's 10% target).

We recognize that, due to the parameters for 2023, some employees did not advance along the grid as they might have expected. BCPSEA expects to be able to authorize a larger number of special increases next year when salary grid aging is less severe.

conclusion

And that's it. That's everything there is to exempt compensation... if you don't count non-salary compensation, reporting requirements, job evaluations, employment contracts and... Okay, there's definitely a lot more to exempt compensation. But still, the above is a good place to start.



Compensation is a sensitive topic. What we earn is important to each and every one of us, and life certainly doesn't seem to be getting any less expensive (How much for a pint of raspberries that my two-year-old is going to throw on the floor?!) But just because it's sensitive, doesn't mean it should be a mystery.

When you have questions about your compensation, I strongly encourage you to talk to your manager or to your school district's human resources department. If they don't know the answer, that's where BCPSEA can help.

You can also talk to the team at BCPVPA. Our two organizations have worked hard over the past two years to foster a more open, collaborative relationship and, when questions arise, we work together to ensure that employers and employees are on the same page.

I hope that this article has helped improve your understanding about how compensation works in our sector. I also want to take this opportunity to thank you, our province's Principals and Vice-Principals, for the incredible work that you do every single day. You are helping to shape the next generation and, with a little bit of luck, a brighter tomorrow.



BCPSEA.BC.CA



**BCPVPA Member
Support Services**





The British Columbia Black Educational Leaders Association, BCBELA, was most excited to hold its inaugural “soft launch” event in February 2023 - a historic moment for the Education Community of British Columbia. During the virtual event, attendees learned about BCBELA’s vision and possible opportunities for organizations to support and collaborate.

BCBELA’s commitment is to empower and inspire educators who self-identify as Black or of Black African descent to build thriving learning communities by uplifting Black voices and dismantling anti-Black racism and all forms of oppression.

We envision a world in which all educational partners recognize Black history, joy, love, contributions, and achievements. Through our collective leadership and advocacy we commit to the transformation and improvement of education in British Columbia for all.

For more information about our association and membership, please email: [**bcbela.lead@gmail.com**](mailto:bcbela.lead@gmail.com)



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Learning





Your PLD Workout Plan

by
Peter Johnston
*Director of Professional
Learning & Development
BCPVPA*

Professional Learning and Development (PLD) is essential to any successful career, particularly in education. For Principals and Vice-Principals, PLD is not just a professional requirement, it is a personal journey of growth and improvement.

Professional learning is a commitment that requires discipline and intention, like adhering to a workout plan or dietary program. Just as a workout plan strengthens the body, and a dietary program nourishes it, PLD enhances the professional capabilities you have in your roles as Principals and Vice-Principals.

The BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association's PLD team equips you with the latest educational strategies, leadership techniques, and management skills, and reminds you to reflect upon the essential principles of leadership. We also keep you up to date about ever-evolving educational policies and technological assets.

Like any fitness or diet regimen, PLD requires consistency and dedication. It is not a one-time event, but a lifelong allegiance to learning and self-improvement. Recent research has emphasized the importance of PLD for school leaders. A study published in the International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management found that school Principals play a crucial role in supporting teachers' professional development, indirectly accelerating student achievement by enhancing teachers' effectiveness¹. This highlights the importance of PLD for Principals and Vice-Principals, as their own professional growth directly impacts the quality of education in their schools.

As Principals and Vice-Principals, you foster a culture of continuous learning in your schools. By intentionally participating in PLD, you enhance your skills and model the importance of lifelong learning to your staff. Your commitment to PLD sends a powerful

¹ Mehmet Fatih Karacabey. (2020). School Principal Support in Teacher Professional Development. International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management. 9 (1), 54-75.

message about the value you place on continuous learning, which can inspire your teachers to strive for excellence in their professional development.

Your professional learning is important to BCPVPA's PLD team, and we learn more about your needs each time we meet. Our learning opportunities range from workshops and seminars to online courses, networking events, and retreats. These programs are designed to address the unique challenges faced by school leaders across our vast province. We provide practical solutions and innovative strategies, and an opportunity to gain valuable insights from fellow school leaders, share experiences with your district and out-of-district colleagues, and discover new ways to enhance your leadership skills.

Your professional learning involves setting clear goals, regularly assessing progress, and adjusting strategies as needed. And, just as a personal trainer or nutritionist provides guidance and support in a fitness journey, BCPVPA's PLD team assists school leaders in their PLD journey.

How? In the same way that a personal trainer provides a customized workout plan, or a nutritionist offers a tailored diet plan, we can provide personalized support for each member's and Chapter's PLD journey. We understand that each school leader at every career stage has unique needs and challenges, so we offer a variety of resources and support to meet

these diverse needs, from leadership development programs and networking opportunities, to advocacy and policy advice. Whether a Principal needs help with strategic planning, a Vice-Principal wants to improve their communication skills, or a school leader is looking for ways to enhance student engagement, we have the insight, and a program that can help.

The field of education is dynamic and ever-evolving, with new pedagogical strategies, educational technologies, and policy changes emerging regularly. You are the driving force behind a school's learning success, setting the tone for the school's culture, and shaping its vision and goals. As you cultivate a mindset of continuous learning and improvement, and seek out new challenges, your leadership style and approach can significantly impact teacher morale, student engagement, and overall school performance.

The leadership of Principals and Vice-Principals is critical to the success of schools across the province. When you make the commitment to your own professional development, you will continue to grow, innovate, and lead your schools to a deep learning culture.

Discover how BCPVPA PLD can strengthen and nourish your PLD journey. Visit the Professional Learning tab at bcpvpa.org



Visit the BCPVPA website and select Professional Learning

You can choose to register for an upcoming program or event, and find out more about the available workshops and networking opportunities. Members can select My BCPVPA to explore content in our member portal. *See you there!*

eXplorations



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Do you know a teacher who loves to lead?

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Teachers can learn more about the work of a Vice-Principal,
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Deanna Holitzki

Director of Instruction - Equity, Inclusion, Diversity | Kootenay Lake

"TELP has inspired me to reflect deeply, scan broadly, research reflectively, and commit thoughtfully to learners and their families."



Jenelle Kresak

Vice Principal | Sea to Sky

"TELP has been an incredible way for me to reflect on my own practice as a leader and grow to become a better educator."



Wennie Walker

District Principal | Richmond

"TELP reminds us how critical it is to understand the perspectives and needs of those we lead in order to create a culture of trust and collaboration."



Ken Wiens

Principal | Kootenay Lake

"The program has helped me look at education systems through a wider lens and given me a better understanding on what it takes to make changes within the education system."



Scott Brown
Vice Principal
Central Okanagan



Nolan Cox
District Principal
Sea to Sky



Kandi-Lee Crooks-Smith
Vice Principal
Gold Trail



John Cunnian
Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith



Colleen DeVeyrac
Principal
Gold Trail



Ben Eaton
Director of Instruction –
Innovative Learning
Kootenay Lake



Tom Eccleston
Vice Principal
Okanagan Similkameen



Joshua Gutknecht
Vice Principal
Vernon



Kelly Hall
Principal



Mika Livingston
Principal
Richmond



Katrina Lowe
Principal
Sea to Sky



Moira Manthorne
Principal
Vernon



Jamie McEvoy
Vice Principal
Central Okanagan



Laura McEwan
Principal
Kleos Open Learning



Diane McGonigle
District Principal –
Early Learning & Care
Nanaimo-Ladysmith



Lauren Neufeld
Indigenous Student Success
Coordinator
Delta



Lisa Pedersen-Skene
District Principal –
Early Learning & Childcare
Comox Valley



Jacquie Poulin
Assistant Superintendent –
Elementary
Nanaimo-Ladysmith



Joanne Rooney
Principal
Richmond



Michael Seitzinger
Principal
Gold Trail



Dawn Snell
Principal
Kootenay Lake



Geoff Steel
Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith



Kerri Steel
Director of Instruction –
Inclusive Education
Nanaimo-Ladysmith



Sara Tyson
Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith



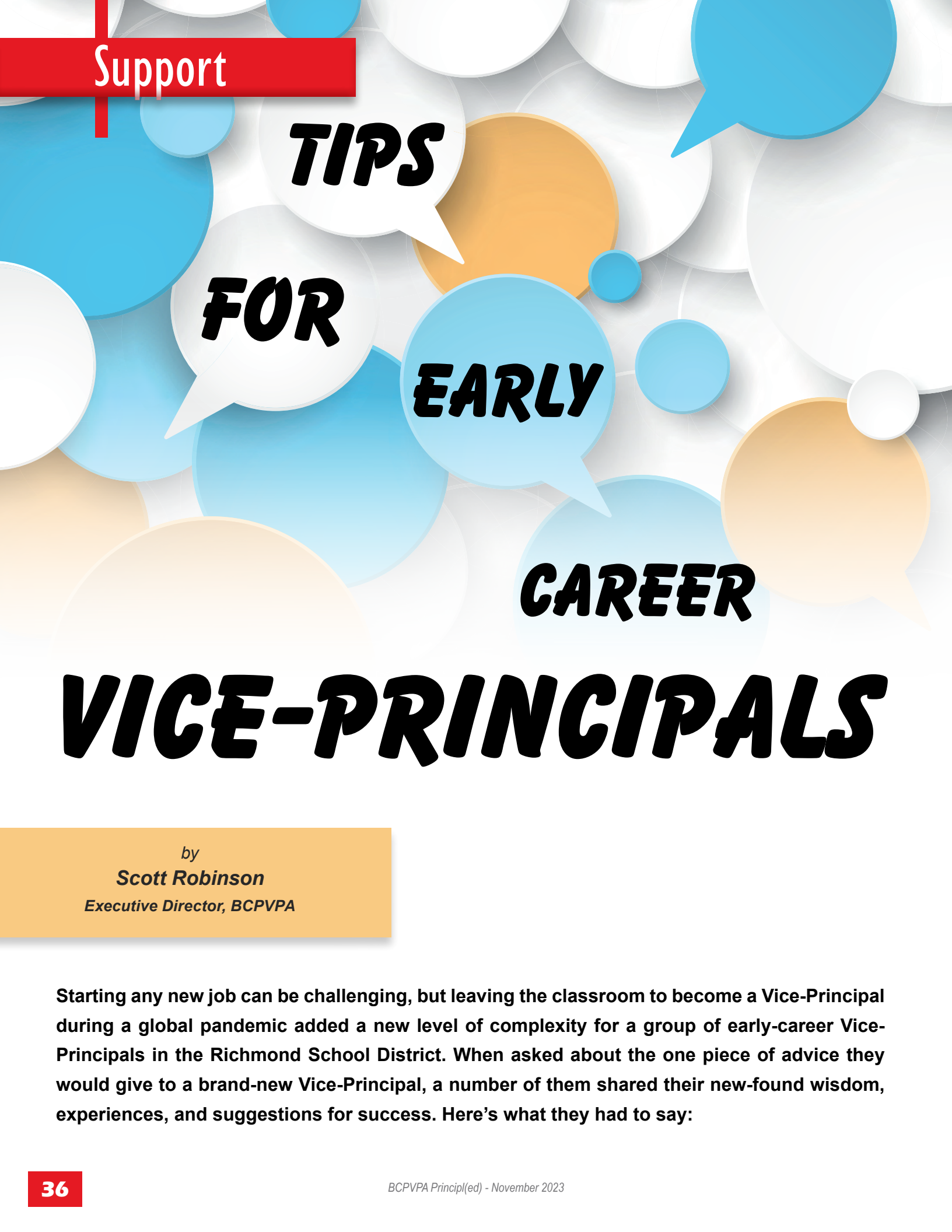
Jasmeet Virk
Vice Principal
Central Okanagan



Lindsey Watford
Vice Principal
Nanaimo-Ladysmith



Troy White
District Principal –
Learning Technology Services
Central Okanagan



Support

TIPS

FOR

EARLY

CAREER

VICE-PRINCIPALS

by

Scott Robinson

Executive Director, BCPVPA

Starting any new job can be challenging, but leaving the classroom to become a Vice-Principal during a global pandemic added a new level of complexity for a group of early-career Vice-Principals in the Richmond School District. When asked about the one piece of advice they would give to a brand-new Vice-Principal, a number of them shared their new-found wisdom, experiences, and suggestions for success. Here's what they had to say:



PART 1

1. PRIORITIZE RELATIONSHIPS

It's all about relationships: people first, tasks second! Take the time to invest in your people. Without question, the number one tip for incoming Vice-Principals is to build authentic, supportive relationships that are based in kindness. The advice was simple, yet powerful: take the time to get to know everyone in your school community, regardless of their role, and treat everyone with kindness and respect. The most worthwhile investment you can make as a beginning school leader is to invest time in your people, understand who they are as human beings, and demonstrate that you care. Is it easy? No. Does it take time away from tasks? Yes. Is it 100% worthwhile. *Absolutely.*

2. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS AND SEEK HELP

Coming in at number two is the importance of asking questions and seeking help. The new Vice-Principals were unanimous in their agreement that, *“the learning curve is steep, you can't be expected to know everything on the first day – or even during the first year – and you will inevitably find yourself responsible for something about which you knew nothing a year ago.”* There is a lot to learn, so do not be afraid to reach out to colleagues, talk to your admin partner(s), and ‘grow your bench’ of those people who are just a year or two ahead of you on their journey. They likely just lived your experience, and will be an invaluable resource.

It's okay not to know; it's *not* okay to pretend you know when you don't. Rely on others, and do not think of reaching out as ‘taking their time’; think of it as an opportunity for both people to connect, share experiences, and build a connection. Who knows – one day the other person might need your help, too!

3. DEVELOP A NETWORK OF TRUSTED COLLEAGUES

Along the theme of connecting to others for help lies the strategy of developing a network of trusted colleagues. Grow, connect, communicate with, and tap into the wonderful network of people around you. As one administrator put it, *“it’s easy to fall into a pattern of working in a silo as things get busy but, as new administrators, it’s far more powerful to keep learning as we go, to ask questions, stay curious, admit when we don’t know how to do something, have fun, laugh at our mistakes and tap into the network of people around us.”* It’s likely that your district will have administrators who are just starting out, those who are retiring, and many in between. That range of experience is vast, and most people are more than willing to be a part of your network and answer any questions you may have. In turn, you will be able to share your own knowledge and experiences as you grow in your role.

4. KEEP STUDENTS AT THE CENTRE OF EVERY DECISION

From the moment we all became teachers, we have focused our time, energy, passion, and commitment on our students, keeping them at the centre of every decision. This becomes even more important when, as a Vice-Principal, we find the level of complexity around decision-making grows exponentially. School administrators encounter daily situations in which there are multiple perspectives and competing priorities from the adults in the room. Keeping the student at the centre of every decision is your compass that offers a strong and compelling direction within otherwise complex decision-making processes.

5. BE OPEN & TRANSPARENT IN YOUR DECISION-MAKING

In the busyness of the job, it’s easy to forget to keep people in the loop, and sometimes tempting to avoid conversations that involve hard decisions. Having open and transparent communication is critical if you want to build trust and strengthen relationships with those you lead. Being open and sharing the decision-making process helps people to understand your thinking. Others may not always agree with your decision, but if you’ve kept the interests of students at the centre and have communicated your rationale, most people will accept your decision even if it would not have been their first choice. Without that transparency, people start to write their own narratives to fill in the gaps, which often leads to misunderstandings, misperceptions, and eroded trust. As a school leader, investing the time in communication and transparency will go a long way.

6. DEVELOP AN ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR YOU

New Vice-Principals often do not anticipate the magnitude and complexity of information they will need to track in their roles. A strong recommendation from early career colleagues is to create systems early on that will enable you to organize, track, and easily access the volume of electronic and paper information that will come across your desk. Some suggestions:

- Create a system for tracking notes from meetings, requests from staff members, and other notes you take in the course of your work. This might be in an electronic form, or in an old-school notebook. Do whatever works for you, but create something early on to avoid losing track of everything that will come your way.
- Set aside time each week to review and respond to district communications: expect a fairly large volume, especially at certain times of the year.
- Organize your email into folders, setting rules in your email program to direct emails into specific folders.
- Find and use a calendar system that will work for you, either electronically, on paper, or both.
- Create timelines for larger projects such as timetabling, or communicating student learning processes, and enter reminders in your calendar.
- Schedule weekly ‘organization’ time – even just for 15 minutes – where you look ahead and plan for upcoming projects and action items.
- Connect with more experienced colleagues, and ask them how they prioritize during busy days. One Vice-Principal pointed out that, *“the reality is that, on any given day, the office can feel like a bit of an emergency room triage centre on a busy day...we need to be able to reassure everyone demanding our attention that all their issues are important, and you want to make the time to have a conversation with them...”*. Having an effective system in place will help pre-empt tasks being missed, balls being dropped, and the potential for eroded trust from those who rely on you to follow through.

7. PAY ATTENTION TO SELF-CARE

Being a new Vice-Principal is a demanding job, and it’s critical that you set aside time to find ways to take care of yourself. Try your best to eat well, get some exercise, and get a reasonable amount of sleep. It’s not always easy, especially in those early days, but carving out scheduled time for yourself will pay off in the long run. As one Vice-Principal put it, *“the airplane emergency procedure always specifies to give yourself oxygen first before you help others. This philosophy also applies to you and your ability to effectively lead”*. It is easy to throw up your hands and say, ‘I don’t have the time for myself’, but, ultimately, those who can find even a few minutes here and there to look after themselves report a far higher ability to be effective in their roles. If it’s important, make it a priority and schedule it in your calendar. You’ll thank yourself later!

With many thanks to the early-career Vice-Principals of the Richmond School District for their willingness to share their experiences and new-found wisdom.

**Stay tuned for Part Two of our series
"Tips for Early Career Vice-Principals"
in the next issue of *Principl(ed)* magazine**

Recruitment:

Where Talent Meets Opportunity



by

Carmen Eberle & Magdalena Kassis

Director of Member Support Services, BCPVPA

Scott Robinson

Executive Director, BCPVPA

Kit Krieger

Former Executive Director, BCPVPA

& Past-President, BCTF

Are you thinking of moving to another district in BC? The labour market provides unprecedented opportunities to offer your leadership skills to any of the sixty districts in the province. Whether it is to gain promotion from Vice-Principal to Principal, to serve in a district leadership position, to be closer to family, or to relocate near ski slopes or golf courses in anticipation of retirement, a career change can invigorate a career and present new learning and leading opportunities. According to the 2022 BCPVPA Member Census, approximately 20% of our members have been administrators in more than one district.

There are many things to consider when contemplating a move, and one that is often overlooked is the terms and conditions of your employment in a new district. Unlike our teaching colleagues, administrators are not members of a union and do not have common contracts. Not only are there considerable differences in employment contracts between the sixty districts, there are also increasingly varied terms and conditions for school and district administrators *within* districts!

The details of an employment contract may be among the last things that a member considers in making a



move, and a failure to be attentive can have dramatic impact on their career, and beyond:

Salary: Salaries for administrators are determined by districts. Most districts place salaries within regional grids that were adopted in 2016. Government regulations state that salaries may not exceed the grid maximums. In late 2022, the grids in the zones with the lowest salaries were adjusted, and the gap between the highest salary zone and the three lowest was reduced by 50%. Districts vary both in how administrators advance from levels A to B, and B to C, and on the criteria for that advancement. If school size is a factor, you should find out whether advancement to C is possible. Remember that your highest attainable salary forms the basis for the pension that you and your partner will receive in retirement.

Benefits: Ask about the benefits package, and compare your current package with that of the new district. You may find that a benefit you currently enjoy, such as orthodontics, is not provided by your new employer. Be aware that some districts are part of the teachers' benefit plan, while some are not. Some districts also have a hybrid model where only the dental or the medical coverage has been moved to the teachers' plan. Either way, benefits are considered part of total compensation packages.

Sick Leave and Salary Indemnification: The range of benefits in this category is surprising. Whereas every teacher and support staff member in the K-12 system has short-term salary indemnification that ensures income is maintained during an illness – albeit at a reduced level – about a third of districts do not provide such a guarantee to their administrators. Some districts provide sick leave at full salary for any illness through eligibility for long-term disability (LTD), and some provide short-term disability (STD) that offers a tax-free benefit for up to 120 days until the individual is eligible for LTD. About a third of districts provide a sick bank – usually 18 days – from the beginning of employment, with an additional 18 days added to the bank annually. Unfortunately, if a member is unable to work due to illness and has insufficient sick leave for LTD eligibility, the member is without full salary until they are eligible for LTD. Some districts may provide salary continuance at the discretion of the employer, but this benefit is not assured. Additionally, always check to see if districts allow 'porting' of sick time. Most do not, but variations exist where some districts will allow administrators to carry over a specific number of sick days when transferring from one district to another.



Vacations: Vacation entitlements also vary greatly from those provided for teachers and support staff. Some contracts are vague, while others are very



Severance Provisions: No one accepts a position anticipating that employment might one day be terminated, but terminations are a reality in BC. Provincial legislation limits severance to 18 months (usually salary and benefits), but many districts cap severance for Principals and Vice-Principals at 12 months. Does eligibility for severance kick in from the outset of employment, or can one be terminated without severance beyond Employment Standards for an initial period? If no severance is provided for the first year or two, administrators run the risk of a termination without salary, or a position, in the event that the district cannot offer a teaching position under s.21 of the *BC School Act*. The right to be offered a teaching position upon termination, for reasons other than cause, is dependent upon the availability of a teaching position, and subject to the seniority the administrator has acquired in the district. In some districts, it may not be possible to post into a position because there are senior employees ahead of you, as per local collective agreements. Consider asking the employer if there are teachers on layoff-recall lists, and whether they anticipate a problem in providing a teaching position if either party thinks a return to teaching is a good idea. As well, inquire about job security and any future concerns regarding budget constraints or downsizing that may occur due to trends of decreased enrollment.

specific. Vacation can also vary depending on the position held as a school-based administrator or district-based administrator. District Principals often have different vacation allowances due in part to the specifics of their roles and responsibilities. The vacation entitlements range from five to nine weeks per year. Salaries are usually placed within regional grids despite the length of vacation period granted. In a growing number of districts, newly-hired administrators have less robust vacation entitlements than long-standing employees. Ask the employer whether vacation entitlements are the same for every administrator in the district.

Professional Development: There is a great range in professional development (PD) funding across the province, with funding levels generally static despite the increased costs of travel, accommodation, and registration. Funding levels often reflect geography, and recognize the increased costs incurred by those living in northern and remote districts. The PD funding in some districts covers the cost of PD and TTOC (Teachers Teaching On Call) replacement costs, while most do not; this has an impact on an individual's ability to access learning opportunities.





Contract Negotiations

Contract Negotiations: Teachers don't have to worry about this, but administrators should. Every teacher knows that the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) negotiates contracts on their behalf, and knows that they are legally prohibited from negotiating their own contracts. This is not the case with exempt staff, which includes Principals and Vice-Principals. In some districts, there is a contractual requirement for the employer to negotiate or discuss contracts with the local Chapter and, in other districts, consultation takes place without a contractual requirement. Many districts will not negotiate or discuss contracts with the local Chapter, maintaining that the administrator is subject to a personal services contract. These districts are often the most likely to have disparities in the contract terms and conditions of the school leaders in their employ. Contact the local contract chair to confirm the status of negotiations.

Indemnity: Indemnity provides security to a Principal or Vice-Principal in the event they are named in a legal action while carrying out their duties on behalf of the Board. This is an important clause, in that it requires the Board to bear the costs that could result from a successful action against the member. It should be understood that such actions are very rare and, in most cases, Boards avail themselves of legal support offered by the School Protection Branch of the Ministry of Education. Indemnity clauses vary throughout the province. Some contracts are silent on indemnity, while other contracts have indemnity that extends after one's employment with the district has ended, meaning the administrator would continue to have legal protection on an issue that arose during their employment, even if they leave that employment. Existing language varies in how it is defined in relation to securities against hurt, loss, or damages that may occur while working for the district. Unless prohibited by the *BC School Act*, and subject to the Principal or Vice-Principal having acted in good faith, the Board will indemnify the Principal or Vice-Principal. If the clause is not in the contract, it would be reasonable to inquire what protections are available to the district if there were ever a need to support claims made against you.

Other: A few districts have **long-service recognition** provisions and/or retirement gratuity pay. If you have one of these provisions in your current district, you may lose it by leaving the district and may not have this provision with your new employer. Districts differ in how they deal with **assignment changes** within the district, whether – and for how long – the school leader maintains a salary if the new position calls for lower compensation. Another area in which there is little consistency between districts is in **performance appraisal**.

Recommendations

1. Carefully review any offered contract. Compare the terms and conditions with those of your current employer contract, and assess whether the differences offer an incentive or disincentive to move.
2. Call the Chapter president or the contract chair in the new district and ask about the district culture and the relationship between the parties. Ask about the most and least positive aspects of working for your new employer.

3. Negotiate, where possible. Your initial placement on the grid is critical. Once you are placed, your contract, and BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) and Public Sector Employers' Council (PSEC) guidelines, will guide how you advance through the grid. There is nothing to prevent a district from recognizing your previous leadership experience in your old district and placing you at level B or C, rather than at level A. If there is not a common agreement for all administrators, you can negotiate a personalized advancement through the grid. Some things, like benefits, are not subject to individualization; but some provisions, such as your PD funds, can be improved through personal negotiation.



Most Importantly, Seek Advice

The BCPVPA staff in Member Support Services can help you understand the proposed contract language and offer professional guidance around the strengths and vulnerabilities of less-than-plain language. Do not be rushed: the employer has offered a position because the district believes that you are the person for the job! Treat your contract like the purchase of a new home: you need to check it out and make sure that it is as good as it looks, and that it is the best fit for you and your family. You do not want to suffer buyer's remorse, for either your home or your work.

BCPVPA Member Support Services

The Directors of Member Support Services (MSS) have a wealth of experience in school and district-based administration in BC, as well as training in negotiation, investigations, and school law.

They are available to support members and provide guidance in a variety of areas relating to our members' employment. Discussions between members and the Member Support Services department are always held in strict confidence.

The following services and supports are available to BCPVPA members:

- Professional guidance relating to educational leadership
- Formal representation and support for:
 - Harassment and bullying complaints and investigations
 - TRB complaints
 - Discipline or misconduct allegations and investigations
 - Terminations
 - Challenging meetings or conversations with senior management
 - Mediations
 - Liaising with senior management on the member's behalf
- Contract reviews and guidance
- Teachers' Pension Plan information

Please reach out for assistance with any employment related questions or concerns.

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Your Stories: Anti-Racism

The BCPVPA strives to be an anti-racist association, and to help build a more inclusive community of educators. Early in 2023, the BCPVPA Ad Hoc Anti-Racism Committee—comprised of BCPVPA members, Board Directors, and senior staff – held their inaugural meeting. The work of the committee includes offering recommendations to the Board about ways in which the BCPVPA can support effective school leadership for racial equity and anti-racism, and support members on how to best deal with issues of racism in their schools.

Our strength comes from our members, as voices on the committee and as leaders in their schools and districts. We asked our members about the stories of the anti-racism initiatives taking place in their school communities. We are sharing the words of leaders in SD 62 (Sooke) and SD 23 (Central Okanagan), and we will continue to share stories in upcoming issues of *Principl(ed)* magazine.





Michaela Mistal

Vice-Principal

SD 62 (Sooke)

As a new PVP team here at Journey Middle School, we spent the first few months getting to know our community, our students, and our staff. It is a unique setting, in a small town just outside of Victoria. As we were learning about our school, a series of incidents occurred that showed the need to approach anti-racism work on a school-wide level. Students at our school experienced racial slurs, microaggressions, racist vandalism, and unfair treatment from their peers. These incidents revealed that work is needed to address the fact that many in the school community do not appear to know the difference between 'non-racist' and 'anti-racist' behaviours, or the difference between 'institutional' racism and 'interpersonal' racism. We needed to devise a way to work with the whole school to help heal and reflect, and to understand racism and the actions required to be anti-racist. As a PVP team, we talked about ways to address these challenges, implicit bias, and overt racism. We have a responsibility to address these issues head-on, and to create an environment where every student feels safe, respected, and valued.



Grade 8 Class during Anti-Bias Film Festival Activities
Journey Middle School, SD 62

"We needed to devise a way to work with the whole school to help heal and reflect, and to understand racism and the actions required to be anti-racist."

In order to foster an environment where racism and discrimination have no place to thrive, we adapted the Anti-Bias film festival created by the Anti-Defamation League to create a connection with our middle school students and promote inclusivity, understanding, and empathy among our students.

Once this mini film festival had been prepared, we focused on one short film per week during school morning announcements after the winter break. Then, each day that week, we followed up through interactive discussions both in the classrooms and shared on announcements via Teams, and students engaged in writing activities, reflections, and small group projects. Each week had a different focus, and facilitated open conversations about race, privilege, and the importance of embracing diversity. We invited both students and a guest speaker from the Speakers Bureau from UVIC (University of Victoria)

to share their personal stories, helping the students to develop a deeper appreciation for different perspectives. In addition, students who were referred to the administration for racist language or vandalism underwent reconciliation activities using the young adult book *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi, and took part in one-to-one conversations, reflections, and activities.

Over time, we have witnessed a change. There is less racist vandalism, and students engage in further conversations and understandings, embracing differences rather than turning to discrimination. We hope to continue this work, creating more learning opportunities as students grow through their years in middle school, creating compassionate, empathetic young humans who understand the power of unity and actively work towards building a more equitable society.

Leader Life Stories

Every leader has a story: what's yours?

The **Leader Life Stories** series in *Principl(ed)* magazine brings together member voices from across the province on a variety of topics.

We want to hear from you!

Do you have an idea for a theme for an upcoming article?

Contact sandra@bcpvpa.bc.ca

Read the November 2022 Leader Life Stories
"Diverse Women in Leadership"



Read the June 2023 Leader Life Stories
"The Family Balance"





David Johnson

Vice-Principal

SD 23 (Central Okanagan)

Member, BCPVPA Ad Hoc Anti-Racism Committee

Watson Road Elementary sits on the traditional and unceded territory of the Okanagan (Syilx) People.

Watson Road Elementary is a K-6 elementary school with 630 students. Our journey to becoming an anti-racist community of learners began two years ago, with an incident of racism in the form of a racial slur directed at a student of colour. Following this incident, a call to action was made to our staff; I shared the story of this occurrence, and invited them to be a part of an Equity Team which would engage in learning opportunities, and strategize about how we could meet the needs of our racialized and marginalized students and families. Ten members of staff were excited to join the team and, this past year, we grew by three additional members. We are represented by classroom teachers, our ELL teacher, Indigenous Advocate, an Education Assistant, and Administration. Our work rests on the pillars of education, parent, and community involvement, and building staff and student awareness and capacity.

Our Equity Team's first meeting was to establish our vision and purpose, and to discuss what was happening in our school community, with the awareness that this was not an isolated incident. It was made clear that we wanted to engage in targeted learning so that we could effectively respond to incidents of racism and discrimination, while

Courtesy David Johnson



The Equity Team
Watson Road Elementary, SD 23

BCPVPA Principals' November 2023

also educating our broader school community about inclusion and how to become informed, anti-racist citizens. Our first learning opportunity came through the BCPVPA's webinar series, Leading for Equity. Each of the four webinars gave us an opportunity to learn from provincial leaders while discussing the learning and how to apply it to our context. We also participated in the BCPVPA webinar series, Unconscious Bias, as well as engaging in equity, diversity, inclusion training with our district's EDI Lead Teacher. Our team connects each month to check in about our community and the implementation of our action plan. We also make it a priority to engage all staff during monthly staff meetings, where we share what we have learned and facilitate staff learning activities around equity and anti-racism. This year, our Equity Team will facilitate more staff learning during a dedicated district Implementation Day, continue to devote time for learning at staff meetings, and invite staff to participate in a book study on inclusion and anti-racism.

A critical component of our work has been the involvement of our parent community, more specifically, the parents of our students who have been impacted by racism, discrimination, micro-aggressions, or other forms of exclusion. We know that unless we understand their stories, our work will never gain the traction it needs to be effective. Our responsiveness to incidents where our racialized or marginalized students are negatively impacted is crucial to building relationships of trust with our parent community. Early on, as we continued to have conversations with these parents, it was evident that they could contribute directly to our work. An invitation to participate in a parent roundtable discussion was extended to specific BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color) and LGBTQ2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Two-Spirit) parents so they could share their experiences and those of their child with our team. Parents were sent some guiding questions to prepare for the roundtable. To say that this event was powerful would be a significant understatement: it has helped shape our work. Our school's PAC president also

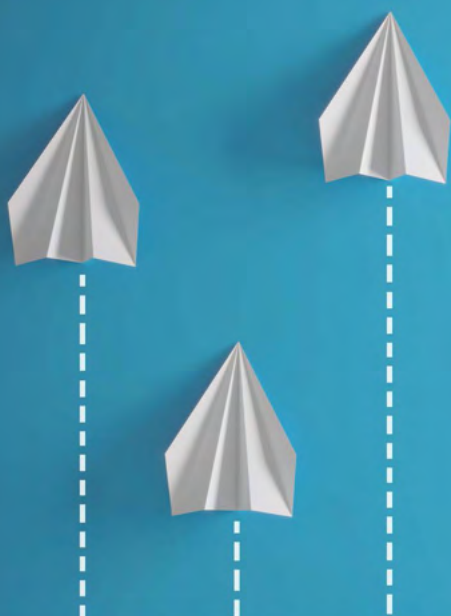
participates in our Equity Team's learning and work while representing our broader parent community.

The most important impact of our work comes from building the capacity of our students to understand what it means to be anti-racist, and how to act on this understanding. We learned through conversations with students that there was a lack of awareness as to what constitutes a micro-aggression; why this indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination is hurtful; and, that much of their behaviour is being learned through social media and peer interaction. This past year, we began presenting 45-minute lessons to our grade six classes on the history of racism, what micro-aggressions look like, and how to respond to situations where other students are being impacted by racial slurs, micro-aggressions, or hurtful behaviour based on their skin colour or how they identify. These presentations will continue in every classroom in 2023/2024 so that this targeted learning reaches each student at Watson Road Elementary.

Some other actions we are embedding in our school's culture include having students read their personalized land acknowledgments on our daily announcements; identifying a Multicultural Calendar event each day on our daily announcements; and including specific anti-racist language in our Code of Conduct. Each school newsletter communicates our work on anti-racism so that our parent community understands the importance of this work, and can continue the conversation with their children at home.

A single incident led to a series of events that has culminated in a collaborative effort by staff to ensure that students who are racialized or marginalized can be heard, and feel welcome, safe, and part of the broader community. Although we still experience incidents fueled by racism, these incidents are less and less frequent and we are making marked progress in how staff and students respond.

This important work is heavy work, and we are ready to lift to make a difference for our community of learners.



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Always bring your old, unwanted, or unusable electronics to our authorized drop-off locations to ensure that your end-of-life electronics are being recycled in a safe, responsible, and environmentally sound manner.

The Electronics Products Recycling Association (EPRA) is a not-for profit, industry-led organization designed to manage end-of-life electronic products that have exhausted their potential for re-use by donation to friends, family, or authorized re-use organizations.



For more information, and to find out what and where to recycle, visit Return-It.ca/Electronics

Even when they stop working, your old electronics can still be useful.

Craig Wisehart,
Executive Director, Western Canada



Return-It and EPRA provide British Columbians with safe and environmentally responsible ways to reuse or recycle old, obsolete, broken and unwanted electronics devices.

Today, we recycle more than 3 million electronics devices every year in BC, and over the past 15 years we've worked together with British Columbians to recycle more than 260,000 tonnes of old electronics. Keeping metals, plastics and other valuable resources out of landfills, and putting the recovered materials back into the manufacturing supply chain.

The Return-It Electronics program operates on behalf of the Electronics Products Recycling Association (EPRA), a national not-for-profit dedicated to collecting and recycling end-of-life electronics in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. For more than a decade we've been working together to make it easier and more convenient for people to drop off their old devices for recycling. The program has grown from only a few depots, in 2007, to now more than 285 authorized collection sites found in communities spread all across BC.

The number of categories of eligible devices that are accepted has grown since the program inception. A decade ago we could only accept computers and monitors, printers, fax machines and televisions, but today British Columbians can recycle 17 different categories of electronic devices including cell phones, video games, home entertainment devices, medical devices, musical instruments and more.

Once they've been collected at a Return-It Electronics depot or an authorized collection site, devices are sorted and sent to local EPRA approved recycling facilities for processing, where their component materials are then separated to recover metals, plastics, glass, and other natural resources that are then used to make new products. In addition to saving these materials from ending up in landfills, this process also keeps them from being illegally exported out of Canada.

93% of British Columbians are aware that they can safely and responsibly recycle their old electronics in British Columbia through drop off locations like their local Return-It Electronics depots, regular electronics drop-off events in communities across the province and more. Last year alone we recycled about 4kg of electronics, per person, for every person in BC.

We're also working hard to spread the word about other responsible uses for old electronics, by connecting businesses that would prefer to have their reusable electronics refurbished—rather than recycled—through organizations like the BC Technology for Learning Society. This helps give new life to old electronics by supporting the Computers for Schools program in BC, and by helping British Columbians to give away electronics items to a BC-based refurbisher qualified under the comprehensive standards of the Electronics Reuse & Refurbishing Program.

Return-It Electronics and EPRA British Columbia are not-for-profit organizations dedicated to protecting BC's environment and our shared future. The program is funded through the Environmental Handling Fees (EHF) which are applied to the sale of all new electronics products in BC. Neither a tax nor a refundable deposit, the EHF on each new device is used for the costs of the collection, transportation and responsible recycling of the device once it reaches the end of its life.

In addition to protecting the environment through the programs listed above, Return-It Electronics is also dedicated to helping protect the privacy and data of British Columbians, by providing easy, practical advice on safely and securely wiping devices and memory cards before getting rid of them. This information—and more—is available online at the Return-It.ca website.

WHAT CAN BE RECYCLED?



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Printing, Scanning and Multi-Function Devices



Desktop Printers



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Vehicle Audio/Video Systems (aftermarket)



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Cellular and Non-Cellular Devices



IT and Telecom Equipment



Medical Devices



Musical Instruments

Give new life to your old electronics. Learn more at Return-It.ca/Electronics

I Could Live in a Forest

by

Amy Newman, EdD

Principal, SD 36 (Surrey)



Photo courtesy Creative Commons_Amy Newman

Principaling is not for the faint of heart.

A number of years ago, I entered a doctoral program in Educational Practice with a master's degree in music education, and a keen interest in studying what I like to call 'humane assessment practices'. Shortly after beginning the program, a colleague suggested I read "Awakening from Descartes' Nightmare: On the Love of Ambiguity in Phenomenological Approaches to Education,"¹ an article by Dr. David Jardine. With that, everything changed. I fell in love with educational philosophy. My work as a Principal and every aspect of my daily life began to shift, opening up in the most troublesome, surprising, and joyous ways.

My research was foraged, gathered, seeded, and re-seeded across school hallways, playgrounds, and classrooms on the unceded, traditional, and ancestral lands of the Katzie, Kwantlen, and Semiahmoo peoples, a place we now call Surrey. My intent with this article is to share some stories and ideas to offer and invite different ways of listening, living, and leading. I hope you find sites of resonance.

I will start with a story.

I Could Live in a Forest

A 10-year-old boy with a rumpled shirt and messy hair arrives at my office.

What's up? I ask.

It's so hard to be in school, he tells me. He collapses into one of the office chairs, pulls his knees to his chin, securing them with his arms. If I had everything I need, I could live in the forest. I HAVE everything I need. If there's no clean water, you can put water in your hoodie and suck it out of the bottom. I have pocketknives and a brand-new slingshot. His voice is suddenly animated. In the forest you can walk, and if you can walk down, there's a stream and a fishing hole and a little cave. We're putting wood all around it and putting some planks down. My mum says everything should be peaceful. I want everything to be peaceful too. *It's just really hard to live in school.*

¹ Jardine, D. W. (1990). Awakening from Descartes' nightmare: On the love of ambiguity in phenomenological approaches to education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. 10(3), 211–232. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00367745>

To live. Etymologically, “to be, to be alive, to have life.”² The meaning shifted over time to include an understanding of life lived in which one could “supply oneself with food, procure a means of subsistence; pass life in a specified fashion.”³ This boy on this particular day did not feel alive in school. The surroundings were unfamiliar, sterile, discrete. Hard surfaces, void of natural elements. The world of written words and letters, translated into patterns of sound, eluded him. Yet he could find his way in the forest. He reads the forest differently than reading a book. He knows the trails, the smells of the camp – the berries that are safe to eat, the ones to avoid. He has learned how to be alive in the forest, to *supply himself with food, to pass life in a specified fashion*.

I offer him the flimsy hope of a knowing look. We sit in silence. The sky darkens on the other side of the office window. He slips into shadow. I want to weep. We have lost the trails of our ancestors, forgotten that school – our school, this place – is a vital part of the living ecologies of the world. Surrounded by ancient chestnut trees, pines, and willows, our fields speckled with shiny red-brown chestnuts. Yet somehow in our rush from bell to bell, from class to class, from subject to subject, our ancient connections to this place, to this land, to the forest – *where there is a stream and a fishing hole and a little cave* – have become weakened and thin.

I push away the urge to fix this somehow, to take the boy’s pain from him. Instead, the space between us fills with shared understandings of *trying to be, to have life, to be alive in school*. The sun slips toward the horizon.

How is it that I find myself here — in *this* school, *this* office, speaking to *this* boy about how difficult it is to be in school? His words create a timbral shift in the still atmosphere of my office. I find it difficult, painful, yet tender and profoundly human to be here together.

Earthly Connections

Was it schooling that severed the connection to the Earth for this child, a boy who dreams of the familiar sanctity of the forest, where he understands connections, relations, and that he, too, is of the forest? I watch as children gather the chestnuts in the school fields, create piles and shapes, cities, and kingdoms. They gingerly collect the spiky green coats the nuts have shed. How might we reimagine the boundaries we have drawn, delineating the inside of school as safe and controlled, the outside of school as wild, unpredictable, abundant?

Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “For all of us, becoming indigenous to a place means living as if your children’s future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it.”⁴ As we press on amidst lingering industrial norms of schooling, an interpretive worldview offers us possibilities for attuning and attending to the natural world, heeding the urgent call to care for the land, as we understand her breath to be our own.

Principaling

The title of my dissertation, *A Stone Sings in the Stream: Sounding Timbral Lines in Principaling*, highlights *principaling* as an intentional, dynamic, and embodied practice. Indigenous Hawaiian scholar Manulani Meyer reminds us that,

2 Live. (n.d.). In Online etymology dictionary. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/live>

3 Live. (n.d.), para 2. In Online etymology dictionary. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/live>

4 Kimmerer, R. W. (Citizen Potawatomi Nation). (2013). Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants. Milkweed Editions.

"Tides come in and they go out again. Nouns," she says, "have always been verbs."

Principaling draws attention to the idea that being a Principal happens over and again, and each time, it happens anew.

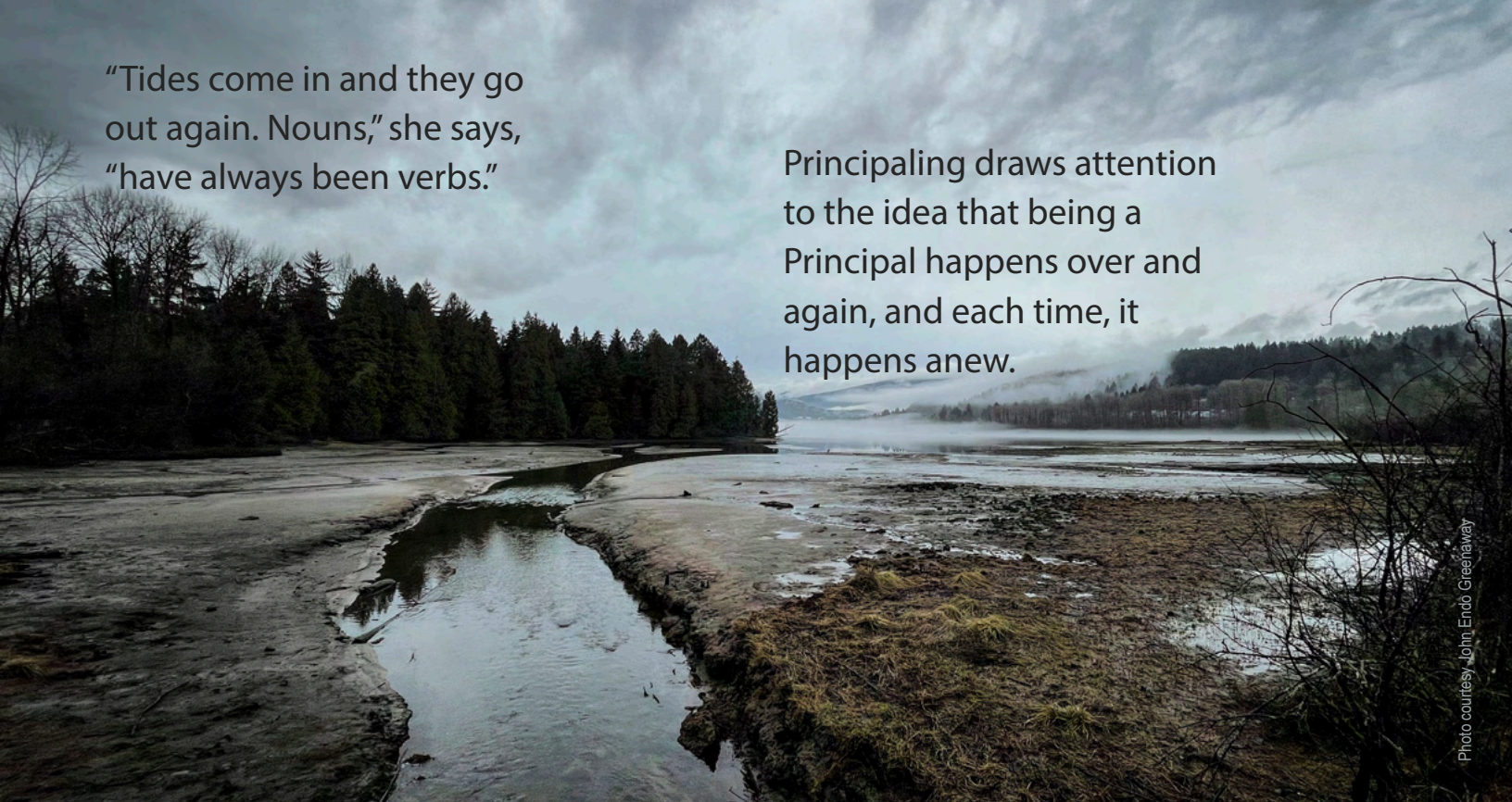


Photo courtesy John Endo Greenaway

"Tides come in and they go out again. Nouns," she says, "have always been verbs."⁵ *Principaling* draws attention to the idea that being a Principal happens over and again, and each time, it happens anew. There is surely not a script, checklist or pre-set agenda to follow. *Principaling* asks that we pay deep attention to the people and things of schooling, to lives unfolding. *Listen*. Cultivate the ability to stay open and notice the many, small pedagogical moments that make up our day. This focused attunement fosters reciprocity and can change the ways we listen and lead.

A Tug on the Sleeve

How is it possible to lead and listen differently? Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer writes that "Understanding begins when something addresses us."⁶ *Begins*. Our task becomes staying awake to the callings, to being addressed. Scholar and drama educator Dr. Lynn Fels likens these moments of being addressed to "a tug on the sleeve."⁷ Whether a child literally tugs on your sleeve or startles you with an outside-the-box idea, an unexpected act of compassion, a big worry, or an unanswerable question – "Why did God make the middle finger if it's a swear?" – *understanding begins* in these moments if we learn to stay open to them. Can you think of a time when you were stopped in your tracks in the midst of the urgencies of a school day? What pulled you into presence?

Inside the ecology of a school, the lively acts of teaching and learning can become divided into discrete chunks, stages, and levels, detached from the nascent melodies of children and things. What does learning to attune to this pedagogical ecology, to the "tug on the sleeve," ask of us as leaders? Our task becomes cultivating an ability to interpret our living circumstances, and asking what these arrivals offer, conceal, and require of us. Over time, you may recognize that every thing, and every child, "has something to say to us."⁸

5 Meyer, M. A. (2013). Holographic Epistemology: Native Common Sense. China Media Research, 9(2), 2013. <http://www.chinamediaresearch.net>

6 Gadamer, H.-G. (2013, p.310). Truth and method. Bloomsbury Academic.

7 Fels, L. (2012, p.51). Collecting data through performative inquiry: A tug on the sleeve. Youth Theatre Journal, 26(1), 50–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08929092.2012.678209>

8 Gadamer, H.-G. (2001, p.55). Gadamer in conversation: Reflections and commentary (Ed. and Trans. R.E. Palmer). Yale University Press.

“Be Like Grass”

As a Principal, I grapple with the tensionalities arising from Principal tropes, prescribed roles, and mythical stories. The selfless leader, the fixer, the solver, the all-knowing leader . . . the Principal who saves the day! It can be difficult to let go of these mythical stories and prescribed roles, to re-narrate our life stories. Despite my best efforts, I still find myself falling into these tropes. In response, I have learned to heed Ojibway author and storyteller, Richard Wagamese’s call to “be like grass” from his book *Embers, One Ojibway’s Meditation*.⁹ This vignette, in which he is in conversation with an old woman, resonates with my sense of who I hope I am becoming as a leader.

OLD WOMAN: Always be a gentleman, my boy.

ME: You mean polite, gracious, humble?

OLD WOMAN: No, I mean always be a gentle man. Act softly and kindly to others and yourself.

ME: In everything?

OLD WOMAN: Yes. In Everything. You don’t need to be hard, like others may say. Hard things break. Soft things never do. Be like grass. It gets stepped on and flattened but regains its shape again once the pressure passes. It is humble, accepting, soft. That’s what makes it strong.

Of course, we cannot fully prepare or ready ourselves for what may arrive. I have found in the heat and flesh of a meeting with an upset parent or worried child that I try to relax and soften my body, remain curious and open, release judgment and listen deeply. To acknowledge my own failures, assumptions, and fears, and listen for those in others. To pay keen attention to the way our shared love for a child presses and pulls, brings sudden tears or stillness. Wagamese’s “be like grass” offers many teachings for educational leaders. How do you ready yourself for such encounters? What do you hear in the spaces between the words of the Old Woman and the voice of the boy, between teacher and student?

Wagamese asks that we practice resilience. Yield. If we trace the etymology of “yield” we find a verb from the 1300s meaning to “give oneself up, submit, surrender (to a foe).”¹⁰ Most Principals and teachers, I would venture, are not keen to be seen as “surrender[ing] to a foe.” In common usage, yielding implies conceding defeat, relinquishing control, giving in, letting go of intention or purpose. Yet giving way, giving something of ourselves in conversation, in relationship, seeking the truth of others, particularly amidst challenging circumstances, becomes something manifestly different. Giving way allows for new understandings – for truths – to break through.

Yielding in principaling, as giving way, as giving something of ourselves, becomes a compassionate act of reciprocity. Moving towards mutuality requires this offering of self.

9 Wagamese, R. (Ojibway). (2016, p.53). *Embers: One Ojibway’s meditations*. Douglas & McIntyre.

10 Yield (n.d.). In Online etymology dictionary. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/yield>

How do you ready yourself
for such encounters?

What do you hear
in the spaces between
the words of the Old Woman
and the voice of the boy,

between teacher
and student?

Photo courtesy John Endo Greenaway

Letting Go

Gadamer tells a lovely story about growing up as a child learning to ride a bike. He had to teach himself, so he pushed the bicycle up a small hill and rode down several times, gripping the handlebars with all his might. With each attempt he wobbled and tipped over. He realized when he loosened his grip on the handlebars—ever so slightly—that he did not fall, noting, “it happened as if by itself.”¹¹ Loosening his grip meant he was able to hold the bicycle in balance, listen and respond to the landscape, release control. Reflecting on this, he added, “but if you exert just a little too much pressure, then suddenly nothing goes right.”¹²

Think about your daily work. Have you ever exerted just a little too much pressure? And nothing went right? I know I have. This story illustrates a common theme in principaling, in teaching, in all manner of experiences. Releasing the grip “even just a wee bit”¹³ as Gadamer says, opens possibilities for finding balance, connection, for new relational sensibilities.

How might the idea of letting go offer teachings about our lives, in and out of schooling? How can we as educators create generative spaces at school that invite acts of mutuality, of flourishing? Kimmerer tells us how natural elements “weave a web of reciprocity, of giving and taking. In this way, the trees all act as one because the fungi have connected them. Through unity, survival. All flourishing is mutual.”¹⁴ Schools have much to learn from these nourishing ecological places and practices.

11 Gadamer, H.-G. (2007, p.116). *The Gadamer reader: A bouquet of later writings*. Northwestern University Press.

12 Gadamer, H.-G. (2007, p.117). *The Gadamer reader: A bouquet of later writings*. Northwestern University Press.

13 Gadamer, H.-G. (2007, p.117). *The Gadamer reader: A bouquet of later writings*. Northwestern University Press.

14 Kimmerer, R. W. (Citizen Potawatomi Nation). (2013, p.20). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.

How might the idea of letting go offer teachings
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school that invite acts of mutuality, of flourishing?

If principaling is not for the faint of heart, principaling can open up ways to lead with heart. These philosophical approaches are not simply theoretical, but impactful and empowering practices. I've had countless conversations and encounters with parents, staff members, or students, and found authentic connections, real breakthroughs through softening, through being like grass, through yielding and giving something of myself. Tough conversations that ended with shared understandings and opened into a bloom of trust and love. Over time, these small, intentional conversations seeded the landscapes of my schools, inside and out, creating a growing field of care, reciprocity, and community

I invite educational leaders to deepen their understandings of how the whole educational project can continue ethically, with compassion, mutuality, and love. Stay curious and present to the offerings of children, teachers, and families, to the things and spaces of schooling. Attend, attune, and practice deeply ethical, ecological, and reciprocal relationality.¹⁵

Listen.

Be like grass.

Open to the gifts of a child.

Remember that your school is a vital part of the living ecologies of the world. Just as the boy learned to read the forest, to be alive in the forest, so too, can we all learn to be alive in school.

¹⁵ Donald, D. (Papashash Cree). (2012, p.535). Indigenous métissage: A decolonizing research sensibility. *International Journal for Qualitative Studies in Education*, 25(5), 335-355. Dwayne Donald is a member of the amiskwaciyiniwak (Beaver Hills People) and the Papashash Cree. He conceptualizes "ethical relationality" as "an ecological understanding of human relationality" ... one that "seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other." He refers to ecology in the spirit of a web of relations, human and more than human, whose survival and sustenance intimately depends on one another.



Amy Newman has served as a music teacher, classroom teacher, Faculty Associate at SFU, and a District-based Helping Teacher in both the Arts Education and Research and Assessment departments. She is a long-time musician and taiko drummer and loves the emergent nature of being an elementary school Principal.



As I was writing my thesis, a series of five musical soundings emerged. Sound and imagery allowed me to more fully articulate my understandings.

Please visit www.soundings.ca to see the images and listen to the aural interpretations of the work.



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From Surviving To Thriving

A Reflection on Pandemic Principalship, Building School Teams, and Teacher Agency

"I am thankful for the stories I have from my parents, and I share them with my school community and my own children. I hope the stories will help direct them, so that they know where they came from, and see where they want to go."

- Jacqueline Taylor

I survived COVID-19 as the Principal of Silver Star Elementary.

In the early days of 2019, my goal as the school's new Principal was to refresh the narrative for the Silver Star community. I spent dedicated time with the staff rep to get up to speed on the school, as I was aware that this staff had experienced a rotation of new administration each year. As the voices of staff offered insights into the school context, I also

by

Jacqueline Taylor

Principal, SD 22 (Vernon)

recognized that leadership was needed to support many new assessment practices and initiatives. Change requires the laying of groundwork to build trust and open communication, and Silver Star was not unlike many schools where serving the changing and diverse needs of learners and families can be challenging. I saw an opportunity to rebuild a narrative that would help staff to feel valued and heard. I wanted to make this a success story.

As I was in my first year at the school and still building relationships, I made myself available for everyone. I started by being open and honest when telling my own stories and introducing my leadership, and was warmed to learn the stories of Silver Star and my new teammates.

The first TELP (Transformative Educational Leadership Program, UBC) article I ever read was “Storywork Pedagogy” by Jo-Ann Archibald¹. This article expanded my thoughts about leadership and led me to think more deeply about who I am and where I came from. It helped me to dissect my leadership style as, in the words of one of our guest speakers, Dr. Bly Frank, “you must listen to the stories they (students, staff and parents) are telling you and the culture you are developing.”

That year, mindful of the power of story, I launched two book clubs: *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller², and *Inquiry Mindset* by Trevor MacKenzie³. As the groups met monthly, dialogue opened among staff, strategies were shared, and arrangements made to co-plan and team teach. I felt like the new team was breaking ground.

As Christmas approached, the waters felt even calmer. Staff were coming to me with their questions, ideas,

and frustrations. There had been many changes in practices, and in expectations on different fronts, but we were beginning to navigate the changes through building relationships, communication, and – above all – trust.

Then, all of a sudden, COVID-19 was upon us.

We were instantly separated, yet – in retrospect – the most ironic thing happened. We all grew closer.

When COVID first emerged, it was a confusing time. Many educators were experiencing stress, trying to navigate a new kind of teaching with the threat of the virus all around them. I supported their strengths, offered positive support, and encouraged them to continue to explore new strategies that would best work in this very difficult time in education. With every passing story and interaction, there flowed kindness and compassion that developed into strong relationships and open communication, and this bolstered our team through 2020 and 2021.

When we returned to school in September, we were all separated in cohorts, with just one other teacher or class. While these were tough and lonely times for teachers, families, and staff, the Silver Star staff were amazing. We continued to meet on TEAMS, and we even had socials online. We all grew very close and worked as a team.

When we thought things were approaching normal, January 2022 arrived with a bang – and a *crash*, a *push*, and a *smash*! The rise of Omicron was a shock, and created a heightened fear: would there be enough teachers, Education Assistants (EAs), students? What would a ‘functional closure’ mean for our school?

January and February 2022 were the most challenging months of my career as a Principal. As we dealt with this serious wave of the virus, a great number of staff – and students – were absent, and we had to contemplate how learning could continue with so many missing. We had been working towards building a long-term vision, action plans, and goal

1 Archibald Q'um Q'um Xi'em, J.-ann (2023) “Indigenous storywork for Education and research,” *International Encyclopedia of Education* (Fourth Edition), pp. 189–197. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-818630-5.06016-4>.

2 Miller, D. and Anderson, J. (2011) *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child*. New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.

3 MACKENZIE, T.R.E.V.O.R. (2021) *Inquiry mindset; scaffolding a Partnership for Equity and agency in learning*. S.I.: ELEVATE BOOKS EDU.

"As we dealt with this serious wave of the virus, a great number of staff – and students – were absent, and we had to contemplate how learning could continue with so many missing."

setting, but needed to balance that with managing the challenges of day-to-day operations. Our team was poised to start penning the Silver Star story, but was this the appropriate time? The words of Tony McKay kept running through my head: "We shouldn't be doing things to people, but with people".

At our next collaboration meeting, I took a page from a TELP session and recognized that our next step was to share our gifts. I believe that leading from your core values makes you who you are as a leader, and focusing on the gifts we have gained from our families, colleagues and those that are important to us helped us all to dig deep for our own core values, and helped us to uncover what has shaped us and who we are as teachers. Discovering those values has brought us to the next step of writing our story, as a community, here at Silver Star.

As a team, we took the time to deepen our thoughts and collect street data on what we see for our learners, and to examine where they are and where they are going. We have started to measure the value of our system by the networks within them. Together we established shared values and a vision which led to more empowerment for the teachers, and filtered on to our students who need encouragement and support. These stories are like a book that needs to be opened and shared; these stories are never-ending as we continue to learn and grow.

We are moving forward, working on our school goals and developing our action plan. The learning

from TELP sessions and *Spirals Playbook*⁴ inspired the process we used to develop our school plan. Our staff has been presented with data from the province and district, and now we examine our own individual data. This has opened the door to curiosity, and has allowed us to pinpoint areas of growth and to highlight areas of success. I am striving to heighten everyone's responsibility for our learners; in Tony McKay's words, "We have to have a learning system that is productive." This is our shared responsibility, as we build a collaborative culture of learning for both staff and students. Our next step is to create the action plan that will support our vision and values for the next three years.

From the many great readings, riveting presentations, and discussions from this year's learning opportunities, I have been defining what supports me in building leadership with my teammates. This quote by Shane Safir has inspired me:

"The purpose of leadership is to listen, inspire, hold space for others to make meaning, model excellent pedagogy, and build a culture of transformation. It is about slowing down, really seeing and hearing people and moving with humility and integrity."

I want to do exactly this, and to hold space for others to make meaning. I have been setting the stage for next steps in planning for impact and will use the *Spirals Playbook* to help unfold what makes our school a

4 <https://c21canada.org/playbook/>

"Our network groups have enabled teachers with like passions to get together and have meaningful conversations about a topic of interest. I appreciate the time we are given to put our plans into action."

- Ali Thompson, Silver Star Elementary



Fern Imrich and Ali Thompson
Silver Star Elementary

learning organization. There will always be stumbling blocks. I know from the University of Victoria's Catherine McGregor that, "the pathway is not always linear." Her comment about Tempered Radicals – people who want to succeed in their organizations yet want to live by their values – made things clearer for me. We can all feel that we are being pulled in two directions, and engaging in networking both as a district leadership team and as a staff has proved powerful from a learning perspective.

At Silver Star, we have been working towards a consistent shared moral purpose by sharing our individual values and gifts, and this is how teachers can become more deeply engaged in the learning. We have been defining our Silver Star purpose by exploring the value of our teachers as a community of learners. Leading innovation is about collaboration with staff who have very different perspectives, and this leads us to support all student learners. Our team is now starting to better understand how relationships are key to helping students learn. Our next steps are a collective practice, as we create pathways from our

life experiences and build networks within the staff.

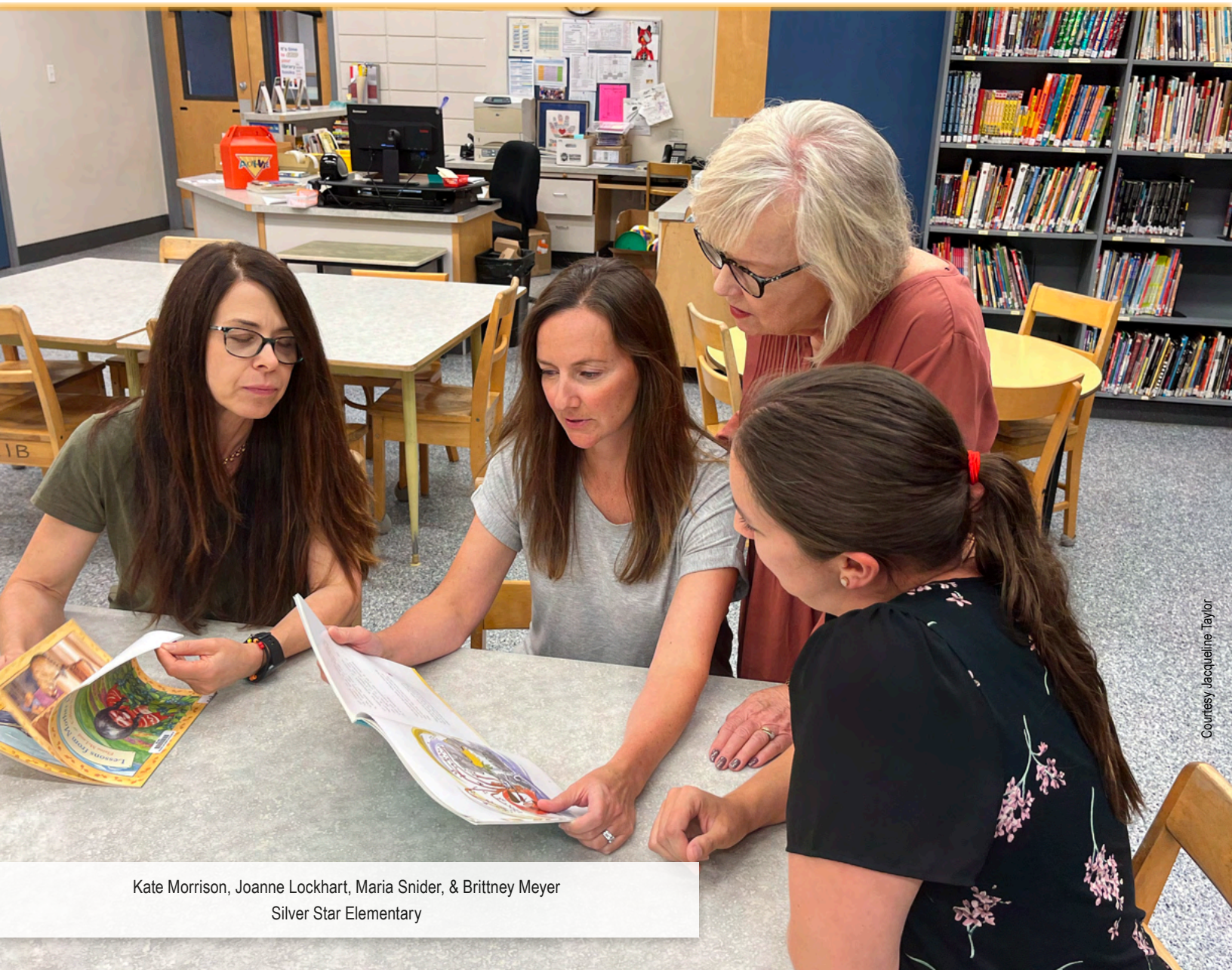
This quote from Jana Fox inspired me: "My background story helps me every day with how I lead." Listening to the stories of my staff, students, and parents has helped me to shape and create a space in our school

"We have been defining our Silver Star purpose by exploring the value of our teachers as a community of learners. Leading innovation is about collaboration with staff who have very different perspectives, and this leads us to support all student learners. "

"Trusting teachers as professionals to know where their interests and passions for growing as professionals lie is the most respectful and collaborative approach to accessing this in order to contribute to growing a school community and support student learning. Often, all the knowledge we need is in the room, and when teachers combine this knowledge through interest based collaborative groups it creates

ownership and shared leadership. No one person is directing what or how the learning is occurring, but rather time and space is provided for teachers to meet. The area of interest often becomes embedded in teaching practice and, much like an inquiry approach, evidence and data sources (whether quantitative or qualitative) are revealed through the daily workings of a classroom or a school as a whole."

Robyn Ladner, Silver Star Elementary



Kate Morrison, Joanne Lockhart, Maria Snider, & Brittney Meyer
Silver Star Elementary

community where we can share our stories and trust. Our team is starting to take risks both in telling our stories and asking for support in learning. As I model holding space for my staff, I see how they are working to build connections, and to really listen to the stories of our students.

After a year of TELP, I felt ready to lead for impact. Stepping into the 2022 new school year, I was ready to present my ideas of 'Teacher Agency: Voice and Choice'.

In consultation with Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser, and after reading their new book, *Leading Through Spirals of Inquiry For Equity and Quality*, I introduced a new format for our teacher professional learning meetings. My new Vice-Principal, fresh out of the classroom, was supportive, and ready to assist with this new challenge.

As the Principal who usually leads the meetings, I was nervous about the idea of giving up control in a new meeting format, but I knew the key was to be vulnerable. I explained to the staff that I was scared to introduce my new idea for 'Teacher Agency'. I outlined my fears: I was fearful that the idea would not work, and fearful that they would find the idea too 'airy fairy'. I was fearful that I would not get buy-in, and that my idea for a new structure would flop. By speaking to them, I faced those fears.

After reviewing our journey of the past year in developing our Silver Star story, we asked all of the teachers to write down two areas of interest where they would like to spend quality time collaborating with their colleagues.

We sorted the topics and found six themes: Numeracy, Indigenous Education, Assessment, Technology, Outdoor Learning, and Community Connections.

Following the Spirals process, we presented each group with questions from the scanning chapter in our first meeting. Teachers were engaged in deep discussion about what was going on for our students, and what we could do to support student learning.

"Teachers were engaged in deep discussion about what was going on for our students, and what we could do to support student learning."

We had scheduled only 30 minutes for the second meeting, and I received feedback that they would like more time for the next meeting. The Pro-D chair received a request from the committee to use part of our school-based Pro-D Day to meet in our interest-based collaborative groups. This felt like success.

As our groups continue to meet, TTOC (Teachers Teaching On Call) times have been offered to help support Teacher Agency. Our Primary Team has jumped on board to learn about evidence informed literacy practices. This has created a sense of teacher agency where teachers are fully engaged in improving practices, alongside our network collaborative learning groups where teachers are sharing ideas of what we can do, and how we can change our practice to support student success. Several of our team have signed up for a residency where our district support teachers work with the teacher at the school to support the learning and growth of our students. Silver Star is becoming a true learning community that supports teacher agency to ultimately support student success.

As I had hoped, we are writing the story of Silver Star Elementary as a team. Teachers have agency in their learning and are making great gains as to how they work together to support student learning. The team is aligned like never before. I am grateful for the opportunity to lead and support the staff, and I am thankful for my colleagues for the consultation and brainstorming, and for the District staff for their support, knowledge, and encouragement. I am very excited about our accomplishments, and our direction. We are thriving.

Reflections on a Leadership Journey



by

Kevin Reimer

Retired Principal

Retired Executive Director, BCPVPA

When I first took on the role of Vice-Principal in the Comox Valley School District in 1999, it was with a blend of trepidation and enthusiasm. A newcomer to the community, I was brimming with anticipation but also, I must confess, a case of imposter syndrome. In those early days, the weight of the responsibility occasionally prompted me to question my decision to uproot my young family and move to an unfamiliar community. Change, as we all know, often comes bearing the gift of discomfort. In this case, that discomfort was tangible. As time went on, my initial feelings of being an imposter gradually faded, replaced by a growing sense of purpose and belonging.

In retrospect, I can see that this early challenge was instrumental in shaping my approach to leadership. It strengthened my resolve and sharpened my focus on the power of community, collaboration, and resilience. This served to deepen my appreciation of – and commitment to – the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA). In this reflection, I'll share some of my thoughts about the remarkable journey that I was fortunate enough to experience. After all, in our profession, it is our shared experiences and our collective wisdom that truly makes us stronger.

In 2016, I stepped into a role that was, in equal parts, intimidating and exciting: President of the BCPVPA. It was a responsibility that I undertook with a sense of anticipation, a little apprehension, but – above all – a steadfast resolve to serve our members to the best of my abilities. One of the most enriching aspects of my role was the opportunity to visit and engage with members across the province. It was in these interactions that I was truly able to 'breathe their air', appreciate the depth of their commitment, and witness firsthand the difference their schools were making in students' lives.

Every visit was a unique narrative, and a testament to the passion and dedication of our members. From the coastal communities of Vancouver Island to the mountain-framed schools in the Kootenays, from bustling urban hubs to tranquil rural settings, each school had a unique flavour, and its own distinct energy. Yet, in each of them, I saw a common thread: a deep-rooted commitment to creating transformative learning environments for students.

*In 2016, I stepped into a
role that was, in equal parts,
intimidating and exciting:
President of the BCPVPA.*

Being able to engage directly with our members, to share in their daily experiences, their triumphs, and their challenges, was an enlightening journey. I had the privilege of hearing stories that moved me, stories of students overcoming adversity, of communities coming together to support their schools, of members going above and beyond to ensure their students not only learned but thrived.

The pride our members take in their work is profound. You can see it in the way their eyes light up when they speak about a student's progress, in the energy with which they discuss new projects or initiatives, and in the deep sense of fulfillment they derive from

their work. Their dedication isn't just about improving academic outcomes; it is about positively influencing the life trajectories of their students.

In 2018, I transitioned from the role of President to Executive Director, a move that brought with it a whole new set of challenges and opportunities. From the start, I focused on elevating our collective impact, hoping to ensure that the BCPVPA was not just an association, but a catalyst for change and improvement in education. A crucial aspect of my role involved strengthening our provincial advocacy efforts, reaching out to people and organizations with influence over the day-to-day work of our members, and fostering a stronger collaborative culture.

That first summer, I met with a BC Ministry of Education official, known for his data analytics prowess, who posed an intriguing question: What accounted for BC students' exceptional performance when viewed in an international context? We explored different educational elements and research findings, including John Hattie's work on student achievement influences. Throughout, I listened more than I spoke, absorbing his strong data-centric perspective. The next summer, when I met with the official again, he was still grappling with the same question. His exhaustive data analysis hadn't yet cracked the code on BC students' success.

When he first posed the question in 2018, I felt I already knew the answer. Systemic success isn't pinned to a unique curriculum or numerical analysis. It's about the commitment and capacity of the people who work in the system, and the collaborative quality of their working relationships. These seemingly unquantifiable elements significantly shape our students' learning experiences. It is a people-focused explanation – it's not just numbers, but the humans behind the numbers.

Since the beginning, I viewed one of the important aspects of my work as telling the stories of our members. I held steadfast to the principle that our association is not just for BC's Principals and Vice-Principals, but of BC's Principals and Vice-Principals.

The BCPVPA's work is to uphold and honour the ideas of our members, the stories of their leadership context, their shifting concerns, and their successes as they lead one of the highest performing systems in the world.

As I reflect on my transition to Executive Director at that time, I am filled with gratitude for the trust placed in me by our members and staff. The role challenged me, helped me to grow, and deepened my understanding of the complex, multifaceted world of educational leadership. It has been a rich and impassioned journey of learning.

As my tenure unfolded, I found myself frequently referencing a concept I fondly termed as 'BCPVPA 2.0', something that helped me to frame my personal perspective on the work ahead. Surprisingly, amidst all the ongoing conversations and developments, no one ever directly asked me what I meant by BCPVPA 2.0. The concept wasn't just a catchy phrase, or a reference to a tech upgrade. To me, it represented the vision of enhancing our collective voice and professional growth as school leaders.

At the heart of my vision of BCPVPA 2.0 was the creation of a robust online learning platform. This platform would be accessible to BC Principals and Vice-Principals and, importantly, to educational leaders across the globe. Through this platform, we could foster connections that extended beyond our geographical boundaries, facilitating shared learning and collaboration on a global scale.

"The concept wasn't just a catchy phrase, or a reference to a tech upgrade. To me, it represented the vision of enhancing our collective voice and professional growth as school leaders."

Yet, BCPVPA 2.0 was not solely focused on learning and connectivity. A critical component of this vision involved enhancement of our advocacy work. With an increasingly interconnected membership, we could better identify the common contractual items that affect our members across the province, and look towards a collective negotiation that could yield stronger outcomes and support for our members.

Moreover, BCPVPA 2.0 embodied an increased emphasis on provincial advocacy. We could amplify our influence with key stakeholders, organizations, and decision-makers who shape the day-to-day work of Principals and Vice-Principals. By strengthening our voice and extending our reach, we could better represent the interests of our members and effect positive changes in our educational landscape.

BCPVPA 2.0 represented a vision for a forward-thinking and progressive association. We have made significant strides towards achieving this vision – from implementing BCPVPA Connects *powered by BetterEducate* and the WelTel initiative, to advocating for fairness and equity in contractual items on behalf of our members. However, I am mindful that this journey continues.

Unfinished work cannot be considered incomplete; rather, it represents the winding path of our collective voyage. Education is a dynamic field; its demands and opportunities are continuously evolving, and so too must our Association. We must continue to adapt, learn, and innovate. Our unfinished work is a testament to our commitment to staying relevant, responsive, and resilient in a changing educational landscape.

As I look to the future, I am optimistic. There is more work to be done, but the journey ahead promises growth and innovation. Throughout my time with the BCPVPA, I've had the privilege of encountering and working alongside some of the most dedicated, passionate, and inspiring individuals. Every interaction, every shared story, every gesture of support has instilled in me a deep sense of gratitude. I am thankful for the trust that members placed in



Karen Reimer & Kevin Reimer
May 2023

"Unfinished work cannot be considered incomplete; rather, it represents the winding path of our collective voyage. Education is a dynamic field; its demands and opportunities are continuously evolving, and so too must our Association."

me, for their willingness to share their experiences, and for their invaluable contributions to our shared vision.

Reflecting on my time with the BCPVPA, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to serve, to learn, and to contribute to the incredible work of our members. I am thankful for the kindness and

generosity of the people I've had the privilege of working with, for the lessons I've learned, and for the friendships I've made. Along the way, I've learned countless lessons, about leadership, about education, and about the power of community. I've learned that every voice matters, that collaboration is key to success, and that the heart of education lies in the relationships we build. All of these experiences have shaped my perspective, deepened my understanding, and left an indelible mark on my heart, making my tenure not just a professional journey, but a profoundly personal one as well.

Kevin Reimer announced his retirement from the BCPVPA on March 31, 2023. We are grateful for his passion for serving the Association, our members, and BC's public education sector.

kevinreimer64@gmail.com

Nutsa'maat

Courtesy Colleen Mullin

by
Darren Danyluk
SD 06 (Rocky Mountain)
in conversation with
Colleen Mullin



Although I was paying attention, I drove right past the exit.

I could be forgiven; it comes up without much warning, and is a left-hand turn. Travelling in the right-hand lane, it was impossible to cross traffic when the road sign saying 'Brenton Page Rd.' registered in my view. The first opportunity for a U-turn was several minutes down the highway in Ladysmith. By the time I had backtracked and returned to the exit, it seemed I would be asking for forgiveness from Colleen when I arrived late for our meeting.

About nine kilometres down a two-lane road that hugs the shoreline, BCPVPA member Colleen Mullin was waiting for me at the Stz'uminus Community School. During my term as president for the Association, I had spoken with Colleen and learned she was working in a First Nations school on Vancouver Island. I had so many questions, and had waited two years to visit with her; I guess another ten minutes wouldn't be so bad.

Colleen is part of a team at Stz'uminus Education Society School. She is the Principal of Instruction and is Co-Principal to Kelly Hall, the Principal of Hul'q'umi'num, Community and Culture. Together, with eight other dedicated people, Colleen and Kelly form the Leadership Team at the schools. Colleen leads Instruction for grades JK to 12, which is comprised of three schools.

More than twenty years ago, Colleen came to BC from Ontario, where she taught at Francine J. Wesley Secondary School. FJWSS is under the Hishkoonikun Education Authority in Kashechewan, Ontario. Colleen and I nearly crossed paths in the Nechako School District, where I began my teaching career, and she started her BC experience, at Fort St. James Secondary School. And, before arriving in the Cowichan Valley in 2017, Colleen served as a Principal in Merritt, at the Kengard Learning Centre. I was to learn that the sum of Colleen's experience made her the right person for this unique situation which first piqued my interest in 2021: a BCPVPA member leading in a First Nations School.

To be eligible for membership in the BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association, an individual must be employed within BC as a Principal or Vice-Principal "of a public school," and Stz'uminus Education Society Schools are governed by the Education Department of the Stz'uminus First Nation. I wanted to explore this apparent contradiction, learn more about the vision behind its development, and understand if this arrangement was more common than I realized. This curiosity led me to the turn-off near Ladysmith, and a wonderful conversation with Colleen.

While most of the province was enjoying spring break, Colleen and I sat down together at the Stz'uminus Community School to begin my education. We reminisced about Fort St. James, a common point on our journeys, and then talked about Colleen's current path. Colleen is a Principal for the Cowichan Valley School District, and has been seconded by Stz'uminus First Nation's Education Society. She has been 'temporarily detached' from School District No. 79 (Cowichan Valley), yet technically her employment remains in the public education sector.

Stz'uminus Education Society adopted a new and unique approach, restructuring how it provides services to the community. This approach harmonizes BC curriculum with Stz'uminus language and culture. Stz'uminus Education is governed by a new Board which includes Ted Cadwallader, a system change consultant specializing in Indigenous learning, as a member. "One challenge of First Nation operated schools is consistency and retention of staff," said Cadwallader, "particularly Principals and Vice-

Stz'uminus Education adopted a new and unique approach, restructuring how it provides services to the community. This approach harmonizes BC curriculum with Stz'uminus language and culture.

Principals with experience of what it is to be a Principal or Vice-Principal.” Stz’uminus Education Board member Denise Augustine similarly noted the importance of mentoring and fostering leadership in education, commenting that, “Public schools have a greater capacity to share resources.” Augustine understands the benefits of a secondment as a mechanism to share and further develop the skills of our best educational leaders.

A secondment, however, relies upon cooperation between two parties. Members of the Stz’uminus Education Board credit Cowichan Valley District Superintendent Robyn Gray with, “making it so simple.” Part of the reason that Gray has embraced such a partnership is her own personal experience. In 2001, while working for Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools as a District Principal, she was seconded to work with a First Nations school. “This historical experience I owned allowed me to see its value,” Gray recalls. “The partnership and relationship is incredible as you share learning and resources... [it is the]

While uncommon, partnerships between First Nations schools and the public sector can be rich and reciprocal; however, much depends upon who steps forward, and how they tread.

greatest gift to immerse in learning on a Nation, a gift to have a greater understanding.”

While uncommon, partnerships between First Nations schools and the public sector can be rich and reciprocal; however, much depends upon who steps forward, and how they tread. A leader must come to this relationship with the right approach, and they must see it for the remarkable opportunity it presents. As recognized by Denise Augustine, “Colleen is genuinely open to wrestling with ideas.” Augustine added that Colleen is interested and curious, and





Kelly Hall and Colleen Mullin

a child-centred advocate, making her an excellent choice for this work.

As we spoke, Colleen characterized the heart of this work as *nutsamaat*, uniting with "one heart & mind." The journey commences with her Co-Principal — Kelly Hall, hailing from Cowichan First Nation — and intertwines with Stz'uminus roots. Kelly imparts *snuwuyulh* (sacred wisdom), cultural insights, and language teachings, serving as Colleen's anchor and complementary force. Colleen emphasizes that,

"She steadies me, reshapes my perspective — my essential counterpart. This endeavour thrives on our synergy." Together, they work to gently bring about the changes as directed by the elders and the community voices.

The change she speaks of has come through the vision of the Stz'uminus Education Department leader, Justin Magnuson. It is a vision of educational excellence and ongoing growth to meet the needs of the Stz'uminus Nation. It is a vision to build capacity,

foster learning, and forge relationships between First Nations schools and the public sector. It has called upon the staff to reflect on their practice, delve into data from the community, take risks, and trust one another to rebuild the entire system from the ground up, with students at the heart of the process.

Colleen recognizes the importance of breaking away from conventional methods and daring to challenge the status quo. "They have been courageous," she acknowledges, referring to the staff who have embraced this transformative endeavour. "I can be hard to be with — I challenge them," she adds, emphasizing the significance of confronting established norms for the greater good.

The process of decolonizing the educational system is no easy task. Colleen understands the need to dismantle the existing structures and systems that may perpetuate biases and inequalities. She has engaged with elders, seeking wisdom and guidance to ensure the journey respects and acknowledges the community's language and cultural heritage. By tapping into the passions and desires of the staff, she encourages a collective ownership of the transformation.

Crucially, Colleen actively seeks student input and works closely with families to ensure that the learning experience is inclusive and reflective of the diverse needs of the community. Empowering students to voice their ideas and concerns is at the core of this endeavour. It is an approach that fosters a sense of belonging, and strengthens the student-teacher bond,

The process of decolonizing the educational system is no easy task. Colleen understands the need to dismantle the existing structures and systems that may perpetuate biases and inequalities.

ultimately leading to a more enriching educational experience.

Colleen has a determination to "blow things up", highlighting her commitment to breaking down barriers and reimagining what education can be. Her relentless pursuit of change is driven by a deep belief in the power of education to positively shape lives and communities. As the school embraces a new path, it welcomes the autonomy to marshal resources, aligning them with the community's unique requirements.

Colleen is quick to point out that her secondment is not the only unique feature of her current role. She works closely with her Co-Principal Kelly to bring together instruction and culture. However, the vision is a flip of the narrative, with language and culture over curriculum, guided by the four principles: *snuwuyulh* (sacred teachings), *tsi-tsu watul* (helping each other), *nu stli'ch* (love), and *nutsamaat* (together as one). As we talk, Colleen shares with me the Provocative Propositions which serve as the engine that drives their mission. Central to all is connection: connection to culture, language, land, and each other. Colleen speaks of awakening language and culture gently, "together, one heart... one mind," while reconciling provincial curriculum, pedagogy, and Stz'uminusqun. This is exemplified by the new primary school that is under construction for the Nation, and Colleen talks about the considerations for its design. As an instructional leader, she will challenge the notion of traditional classes, and challenge educators to honour traditional ways of being together.

At this point in our conversation, Colleen reflects on her unique leadership journey with the Stz'uminus Education Society, and of *etuaptmumk*, two-eyed seeing. In the words of Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall, *etuaptmumk* is to see the world simultaneously through the lenses of both the colonized world and the Indigenous world, and to find success through the strengths of each. Colleen teaches each day – she is a biology and chemistry teacher – and, alongside

staff, she consistently strives to honour language and culture and create tradition while preparing learners for education beyond secondary school. With the gift of understanding this profound struggle, a seconded leader can return to their district, able to mentor and inspire. Colleen speaks of the change in her own sight; she is more sensitive to the challenges Indigenous learners face in a colonial system. “I see it everywhere, and I see it where I wouldn’t have seen it before.”

Through her work with the Stz’uminus Education Society, Colleen feels that she is beginning to understand what it means to move at “the speed of trust.” She speaks of the Elders, and their influence upon her. “Elders ground me. They are honest, true, and reflective, with no agenda.” Colleen is learning to not always default to giving advice, but to focus on empowering others by building agency and trust. When she moves on from this experience, she hopes that the Elders will see how the team has tried to create a student-centred program, built upon language and culture, and the voices of families. And, for herself? Colleen shared that the experience is “making me honest. I will be a better Principal, and a better person, because of this.”

When such a partnership can realize this deep transformation and reciprocal benefit, one might expect to find many examples throughout BC. In truth, there are a precious few. While the financial aspects of this arrangement may pose a significant challenge for

Colleen is learning to not always default to giving advice, but to focus on empowering others by building agency and trust.

consideration, the greatest barrier may be a scarcity mind-set. Even in a time of staffing challenges, sharing and exchanging expertise, resources, and knowledge must be seen as an opportunity to give, to receive, to teach, and to learn. It is a Provocative Proposition – *We heal, hope, and love one another: our snuwuyulh teach that we are one and, by sharing our gifts with each other, we learn and grow together.*

My time with Colleen ended. Although it was spring break, the school was busy with the activity of the community, and my host needed to return her attention to the work of her Leadership Team. The sun was trying to break through the clouds on this typical March day on Vancouver Island. As I wound my way back to the highway along the quiet seaside road, I thought about journeys, the impressions they leave, and the transformations they inspire. I slowed to a stop when the road met the highway and I paused to read the sign which greeted me. The sign declared it was not possible to join the flow of traffic, and to go back the way I had come; I had to turn in an unexpected direction to continue this journey. There was no going back. I smiled, signaled, and smoothly joined the forward stream of travellers.

Do you have a story to share about your own school or district?

We'd love to hear about it!

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WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

by
Read Jorgensen
SD 61 (Victoria)
Retired



Last night was the same as usual. You got ready for bed, crawled under the covers a bit too late, and finally drifted off. Several hours later, you are awake, staring at the ceiling, brain spinning, with little hope of sleep.

We can all be plagued by the problems of falling asleep, fragmented sleep, or waking too early, and there are many reasons why you may not get a full night's rest. The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Network Open recently published a study which included more than 100,000 participants and presented an interesting conclusion. The prevalence or improvement of four psychosocial supports in your workplace – quality leadership, procedural justice, a collaborative culture, and co-worker supports – are associated with the reduction of sleep disturbances. *Is it possible that organizational behaviour is keeping you up at night?*

We devote about one third of our life to sleep. We can't live without it. While we don't really understand why we *need* sleep, evidence points to maintaining our immune system, physical and psychological recovery, and promoting memory consolidation. We have all experienced restless nights, and even a modest loss of sleep can impair our daily performance, marked by fatigue, poor recall, and muddled decision-making. While these can feel like personal lapses as we try to mask them, our fatigue affects our work and the work of others. Lack of sleep is also costly for your organization, as job-related errors and absenteeism increase. For the economy, sleep issues cost billions

of dollars due to lost productivity, injury, illness, and poor decision-making. In medical terms, lack of quality sleep, or insomnia, is defined as a difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep three nights a week, and chronic insomnia as suffering from insomnia for three months or more; about 10% of the population suffers from this condition. And more than just fatigue is at play, as chronic insomnia can damage your health by contributing to weight gain, diabetes, depression, an increase in blood pressure, and a greater risk of stroke.

● **SLEEP 101**

Sleep seems simple, yet it is biologically sophisticated. The daily cycle of sleep is guided by your circadian rhythms which are controlled by the suprachiasmatic nucleus located just above the optic nerve. This 'internal clock' helps regulate many bodily functions, and the neurons of the suprachiasmatic nucleus are sensitive to light, helping trigger the production of melatonin for inducing sleep, and cortisol and other hormones for you to wake.

When sleep comes, it is divided into two broad phases, REM (Rapid Eye Movement) and non-REM; combined, both segments take around 90-120 minutes to complete. In a full night's sleep, you will repeat this non-REM and REM cycle five or six times.

Non-REM sleep is first, and moves through three stages. The first stage is the transition between wakefulness and slumber when your body starts to slow down and you enter a light sleep. After several minutes, you enter stage two where breathing and

heart rate slow even more, your body cools, and eye movements stop. You spend more time in stage two than any other stage. In the last period, stage three, brain waves, heartbeat, and breathing are at their slowest, producing the deep sleep that we find so refreshing.

REM begins after the three segments of non-REM sleep, and starts about 90 minutes after falling asleep. It is characterized by rapid movements of the eyes, dreaming, and brain activity that is so prolific that the brain seems almost awake. Although you are asleep, your eyes move rapidly in a manner that is similar to when you are awake and are asked to remember specific images. Breathing and heart rate increases, and your brain sends neurotransmitters to your muscles to prevent your body from physically acting out your dreams.

● **YOU NEED YOUR SLEEP**

Principals and Vice-Principals have demanding, stressful jobs and are required to be in top form every day. Unfortunately, this can't always be the case. Could changing some of the organizational behaviours in schools and districts help enhance employee well-being through improved sleep? The JAMA Network Open study says:

"Improvements in leadership quality and procedural justice (i.e: vertical resources) and in culture of collaboration and co-worker social support (i.e. horizontal resources) were associated with a lower risk of persistent sleep disturbances in a dose response fashion."

**"COULD CHANGING SOME OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOURS
IN SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS HELP ENHANCE EMPLOYEE
WELL-BEING THROUGH IMPROVED SLEEP? "**



"FOR THE ECONOMY, SLEEP ISSUES COST BILLIONS OF DOLLARS DUE TO LOST PRODUCTIVITY, INJURY, ILLNESS, AND POOR DECISION-MAKING."

This means that with an increase of these four psychological supports, sleep disturbances could be reduced. While each factor exhibited a positive effect on sleep, the study indicated that procedural justice and leadership quality were more consequential. While the horizontal resources of culture of collaboration and co-worker support were still significant, a difference is that the vertical resources, leadership and procedural justice, are organizational behaviours that are largely determined by how leaders perform their roles. The results of this study echo other findings, showing that a higher presence of the same four psychosocial resources in the workplace have been associated with reduced risks

of stress-related cardiometabolic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Procedural justice is based on the fairness exhibited in decision-making. For example, if you were transferred to another school with no prior notification or consultation, you would likely consider the decision as lacking procedural justice. We have all felt the sting of a decision we consider unjust, and it comes at a cost to your sleep as you ruminate over a lack of fairness and transparency in the process. Further, an employee's respect for their leaders can suffer when decisions appear to be made with no sense of procedural justice. Leaders at

all levels of the organization – from Vice-Principals, to Principals, to Superintendents — can promote a sense of procedural justice and impartiality by using transparent decision-making processes, providing voice to employees, and striving for fair and objective decisions.

Study participants were also asked to assess leadership quality, rating statements such as: does your immediate manager take time to engage in your professional development; do you have the necessary and sufficient authority to do your work; and, my boss shows that they care about how things are for me, and how I feel. The lower the prevalence of these factors, the more employee's sleep was disrupted. McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y of employee motivation can help to illustrate this finding. Theory X and Y managers see employees differently. Theory X managers believe that employees are unmotivated, need close supervision, and work just for the money. Conversely, Theory Y managers see

employees as individuals who are interested in doing well, are self-motivated and, as a result, require less direct supervision. The study seems to indicate that leaders who take an interest in *how* employees work and not just *what* they produce are likely leading a more rested workforce.

Quality sleep is critical for all employees and desperately needed to tackle the complex and demanding assignments found in public education. Whether in a corporate setting or in the education sector, careful consideration for how we lead personnel and implement transparent and fair decision-making processes can support the employees upon whom our organizations depend. This is not a suggestion that your boss consult with you, and then tuck you in every night, but rather that your organization could benefit from a careful analysis of their practices in leadership and procedural justice, so that everyone can get a good night's sleep. After all, tomorrow is going to be another busy day.

● **TROUBLE SLEEPING?**

The one key factor is to be kind to your circadian rhythms. Keep to a schedule and don't cheat yourself on sleep. There are plenty of resources online: consult with your health practitioner if you have further concerns.

RESOURCES

Good sleep practices:

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/SleepHygiene.pdf>



McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_X_and_Theory_Y



JAMA Online:

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2804654>



Who We Are

the bcpvpa member census



The BCPVPA's fourth Member Census was open from October 12 – December 5, 2022, and was conducted by Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group (Directions).

Every three years, the BCPVPA conducts a comprehensive Member Census. The data we collect helps us to target support and professional development opportunities, and gives us a closer look at what our members are experiencing in their roles. In the past three Census reports, our members delivered a high rate of response, up to 53% in 2019. The 2022 Census was a clear demonstration of one challenge that our members consistently face: time. Even so, 40% of our 2,700 members answered the call, and shared their details, stories, and aspirations.

The majority of respondents are school-based Principals (57.7%) and Vice-Principals (32.3%), with 5.5% responding as District Principals, and 2.8% responding as District Vice-Principals.

The census reinforced that leadership matters, and that BC's K-12 Principals and Vice-Principals working in public education have continued to provide excellent leadership in support of their students, staffs, and school communities.

Our members communicated clearly in the Census that they like the people they work with, and that they feel a sense of pride in doing their jobs. In 2022, 85.4% of respondents felt confident talking to colleagues about the challenges they faced in their work, and more than 90% identified networking with colleagues as being important.

For the first time, the Census asked respondents to identify their racialized/cultural group. The majority of respondents (84%) identified as White, with 4% South Asian (East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan), 3%

Our members communicated clearly in the Census that they like the people they work with, and that they feel a sense of pride in doing their jobs.

First Nations, 3% Métis, 2% Chinese, 1% Black, and 1% Japanese. We recognize that the lack of diversity in school leadership roles needs to be addressed on a systemic level, and the BCPVPA will be supporting the development and implementation of recruitment and retention strategies as part of our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

More than 80% of respondents felt they were very (14.2%) or somewhat (67.6%) prepared to address issues of inequity and racism in their district. The majority of participants suggested that more training, in the form of professional development, workshops, forums, and conferences, could support their learning.

Respondents also emphasized that there was a need to continue developing a shared understanding of racial equity and initiating more discussions and conversations, the provision of more case studies and examples, and collaborations with school and community leaders, and other districts.

Across all survey years, respondents believed that school should be a safe and inclusive place for students. Three statements that earned agreement from more than 80% of respondents in 2022 focused on activities to improve the teaching and learning process:

1. An important part of my job is to create an orderly atmosphere in the school (92.9%)
2. In this school, we work on goals and/or a school improvement plan (90.9%)
3. I believe that supervision for learning positively influences student learning and teacher performance (83.4%)

The 2022 Census also found that 75% - 100% of respondents selected three factors which they identified as a potential hindrance to the schools' capacity to support students:

1. A lack of certified teachers on call (84.5%)

2. A lack of special education assistants (84.4%)
3. Insufficient administrative time to provide effective educational leadership (78.4%)

The 2022 Census reveals that 44% of Principals, and nearly 70% of Vice-Principals, are within the first five years of their leadership roles. 61% of respondents have taken on their leadership roles with between six and 15 years of teaching experience. A clear theme in the Census relates to our members' sense of preparedness for the roles they are undertaking, and the need for long-term investment in the professional development of the educators leading in BC's public system.

67.3% of responding Principals, and 63.1% of responding Vice-Principals, had completed a Principal training program or course before and/or after entering their positions. However, 32.7% of Principals and 36.9% of Vice-Principals have never taken a Principal training program or course, compared respectively to 24.7% and 33.9% in 2013. The BCPVPA is collaborating with the Ministry of Education and Child Care, the BC School Superintendents Association and a broad consortium of our education partners to

44% of Principals, and nearly 70% of Vice-Principals, are within the first five years of their leadership roles.

launch a pilot program with learning modules to help Principals and Vice-Principals hone their skills in a number of key management areas. We are excited about this project, and how meaningful this learning will be for our members.

Respondents to the Census identified that the workload for Principals and Vice-Principals has increased and intensified in recent years. Four key statements were selected by 75% - 100% of

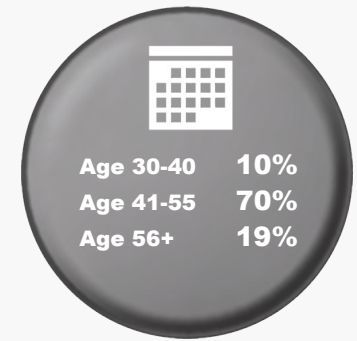


Vice-Principals

35% of Female Members
28% of Male Members

Principals

55% of Female Members
62% of Male Members



District Vice-Principals

3% of Female Members
2% of Male Members

District Principals

6% of Female Members
4% of Male Members



Experience: Vice-Principals

Up to 5 years 69%
6 - 10 years 25%
11 years+ 6%

Experience: Principals

Up to 5 years 44%
6 - 10 years 30%
11 years+ 25%

Schools	
Elementary	50%
Secondary	22%
Middle	6%
Primary	2%
K-12 schools	2%



Rural 24%
Remote 3%

Settings

Urban 39%
Suburban 33%



respondents when asked about the difficulties that Principals and Vice-Principals might face:

1. I find that I must sacrifice time devoted to educational leadership in order to deal with management tasks in my school (90.5%)
2. I find it difficult to remove tasks from my plate when new responsibilities are assigned to me (83.6%)
3. I have too much to do at work (81.2%)
4. My role as a school administrator makes it difficult to achieve work-life balance (79.4%)

Work intensification was identified by most respondents as detracting from job satisfaction (81.7%), followed by day-to-day stress (81.7%), and working hours (71.9%).

In identifying the top three factors perceived by respondents to produce stress, work intensification was reiterated as the primary factor, up significantly to 76.8% from 62% in 2019. This was followed by balancing work and personal life, up to 74% from 64% in 2019; and overtime or long work hours, up to 68.2% from 59.8% in 2019. The fourth factor, with the most substantial increase in concern, is not having enough staff/teachers to do the work, which is up to 67% from 36.4% in 2019.

The reported time spent on administrative tasks, such as reports, budgets, timetables, and human resource or personnel issues is 24.8%, up from 20.9% in 2019. The shortage of TTOCs (Teachers Teaching on Call), as part of the labour shortages that have arisen in many sectors through the pandemic, has had a tremendous impact on the work of Principals and Vice-Principals. Of those who reported covering the classes of absent teachers, approximately 55% do so up to one full day per month over the course of the school year. Principals and Vice-Principals are then frequently completing administrative responsibilities outside of working hours. The BCPVPA, along with our sector partners, has been part of working groups established by the Ministry of Education and Child

Care to seek solutions to the recruitment and retention challenges experienced by many districts

Our responding members reported much joy in their work, and the relationships they forge in the workplace. In 2022, 93.3% of respondents identified working relationships as contributing to their job satisfaction. Other frequently identified factors were perceived value of work (66.4%) and compensation (69%). Other named factors included the relationship with students, reduced teaching time, and the ability to influence students' lives.

**93.3% of respondents
identified working
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job satisfaction.**

The BCPVPA's 2022 Member Census will be a critical resource in the months ahead as we continue to examine how our Association can best support our members, and identify the supports that BC school-based and district Principals and Vice-Principals need from government and the education sector in order to be successful in their roles. We look forward to the continued collaboration with our members as they have generously given their time to tell us about their work. Their deep passion for leadership, learning, and finding pathways for the success of students and school teams is an inspiration to us in our work.

For more information about the 2022 BCPVPA Member Census, please contact:

Scott Robinson
Executive Director
BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association
scott@bcpvpa.bc.ca

TAKE 3

by
Darby Barnes
Rehabilitation Consultant
humanworks

Darby is a registered clinical counsellor who describes her work calling as "caring for people who care for people" and has worked supporting leaders and workers in complex human serving systems for over a decade.

Practice Pacing

Think Like a Turtle

The start of the school year is often approached with a 'sprint' pace, but it doesn't take long to realize that pace is not sustainable. Think about your pace for the year, and what is going to be sustainable for the full year. Think like a turtle, and keep your pace appropriately slow and steady. This helps us respond instead of reacting to things that pop up through the days and weeks. Pacing ourselves for the race we're in can promote a stabilizing effect for those around us, as well as for our own wellness goals.

Each Day is New

Be a Goldfish

Any *Ted Lasso* fans in the house? (If you aren't yet, I strongly encourage incorporation of this show on Apple TV into this year's wellness plan). As Ted's saying goes, "You know what the happiest animal in the world is? It's a goldfish. It's got a 10-second memory. Be a goldfish." There is a lot of opportunity to ruminate and carry cognitive and emotional weight from the work you do in educational leadership. Take the opportunity to be a goldfish when you can. Let go, and approach each day anew. A quick morning check-in can help:

- 1) How can I take care of my wellness today?
- 2) How can I connect with others today?
- 3) Where can I find meaning in my work today?

Root Yourself

Be the Tree (Not the Leaf)

The winds of the school year start to blow early, and can unexpectedly knock us off our path. We know that gusts will come. When this happens, consider whether you are responding like the leaf (getting blown in the wind) or the tree (swaying and bending to avoid breaking, but rooted deeply where you're planted.)

The gift of channeling the tree is that we can practice acceptance and grow where we are planted. Accepting what is happening around us, and finding the path to growth, renewal, and rootedness, can create a sense of stability and calm on blustery days.

Wishing you a super start to the year!

With great admiration and respect,

Darby



Mitigating the Impact of Vicarious Trauma

by
Rochelle Morandini
Director, Member Health & Well-Being
BCPVPA

The exposure of Principals and Vice-Principals to the trauma of others is not widely recognized.

Their central role within the education system includes the care and safety of student and staff well-being, and regularly exposes Principals and Vice-Principals to the difficult, painful, and sometimes traumatic situations experienced by students, their families, staff, and – in some cases – the larger community.

The nature and frequency of exposure to traumatic scenarios may vary significantly between communities, schools, and even grade levels. There are school leaders who live and work in communities where they are exposed to continuous trauma. There are others who have less daily contact with trauma, but who may then be exposed to one or two traumatic episodes in their school community, and can find themselves struggling both emotionally and mentally with vicarious trauma.

Vicarious trauma is the accruing effect that one may develop by being exposed to the trauma of others. It is trauma that they have not personally experienced, but are indirectly exposed to through a first-hand account, repeated discussions, and even through supporting those involved following the event.

Vicarious trauma is included in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as part of the groupings of "trauma and stressor-related disorders". Principals and Vice-Principals experiencing symptoms of vicarious trauma may face:

- lingering feelings of anger, rage, and sadness about a student's victimisation
- emotional over-involvement, or over-identification with the student and/or their

family, sometimes leading to horror and rescue fantasies

- bystander guilt, shame, and/or feelings of self-doubt
- loss of hope, pessimism, and/or cynicism
- distancing, numbing, or detachment, a state of intentional 'busyness' and an avoidance of contact with the student or others wanting to discuss traumatic experiences
- difficulty in maintaining professional boundaries with the student and/or their family, and offering help beyond the parameters of their role

Vicarious trauma is also known as secondary trauma, or second-hand trauma. While vicarious trauma is not the same as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which refers to someone experiencing or witnessing trauma directly, the symptoms of PTSD and vicarious trauma can be similar.

These may include some of the above symptoms, in addition to:

- preoccupation with thoughts of students outside of the work situation
- nightmares
- social withdrawal
- negative coping skills, both personally and professionally, including substance abuse
- hyperarousal to personal safety and the safety of loved ones
- loss of work-related motivation
- distancing from spiritual beliefs
- reduced longevity in the field, a shortened career
- stress-related medical conditions

Principals and Vice-Principals who experience vicarious trauma are not weak, nor are they unskilled at their jobs. These leaders have a sympathetic engagement with their jobs, as they are deeply motivated to help others.

Vicarious Trauma vs. Compassion Fatigue vs. Burnout

When Principals and Vice-Principals are feeling challenged, or are in situations where they need to take time off from work, they often say they feel 'burned out'. While that may be true for some, for others the stories, experiences, and symptoms they share signal factors beyond burnout. It is important to identify what may be impacting the mental health of school leaders so that they and their health teams can identify the right strategies for recovery.

In researching this article, I found an informative fact sheet that describes vicarious trauma and outlines detailed symptoms along with suggested interventions. This article defines vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout, and how these three terms are complementary, yet differ from one another.

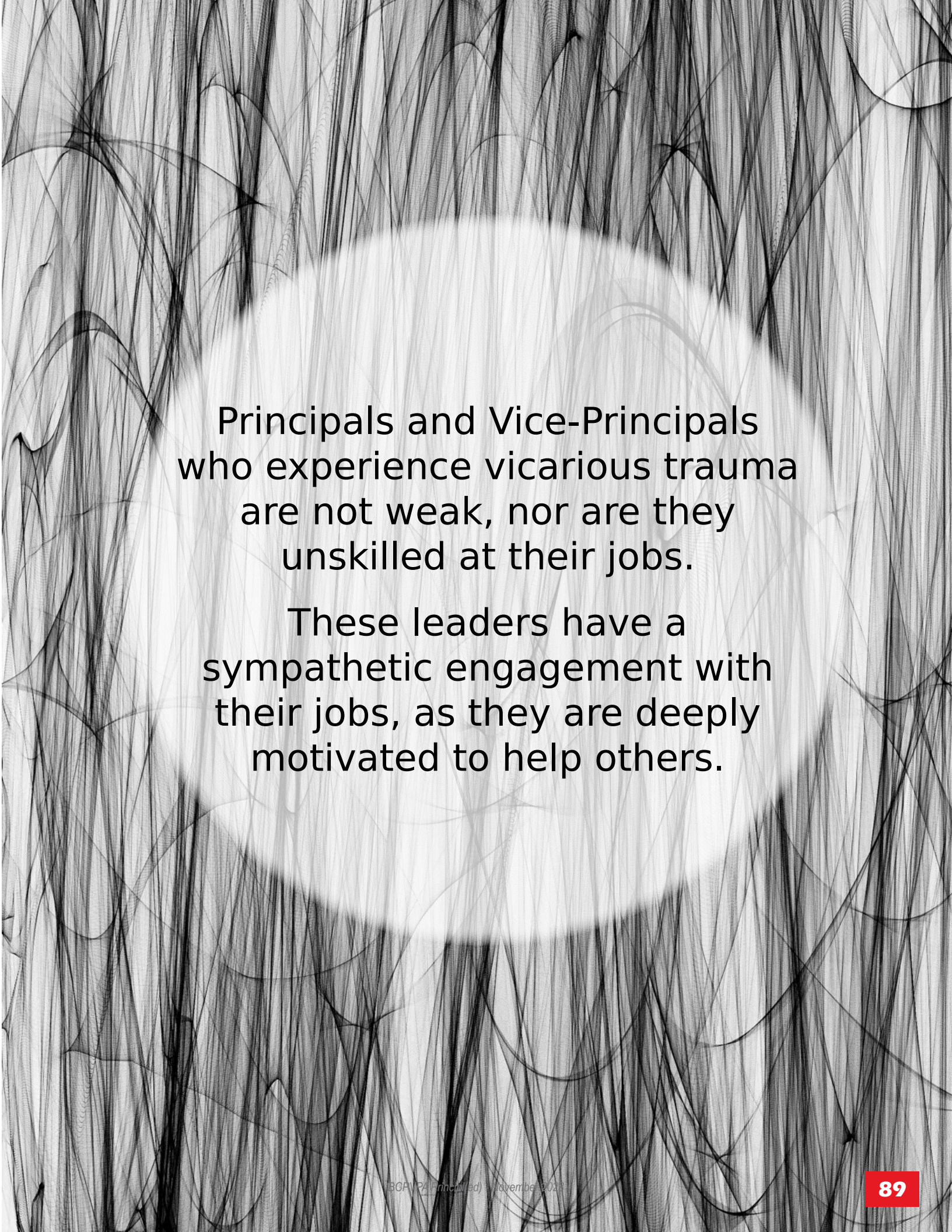
Trauma Fact Sheet

bit.ly/TraumaFactSheet



1) Vicarious trauma: The emotional residue of exposure to traumatic stories and experiences of others through work; witnessing fear, pain, loss, and terror that others have experienced.

2) Compassion fatigue: Beyond empathy, a condition characterized by a gradual lessening of compassion over time. It is often the cost of caring for others or for their emotional pain, resulting from the desire to help relieve their suffering.



Principals and Vice-Principals
who experience vicarious trauma
are not weak, nor are they
unskilled at their jobs.

These leaders have a
sympathetic engagement with
their jobs, as they are deeply
motivated to help others.

3) Burnout: A long-term stress reaction and process that is often brought about by workplace conflict, overload of responsibilities, and the perception of inequality and inadequate rewards. Burnout results in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. While burnout may lead to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted, it does not necessarily mean that our view of the world is damaged, or that we have lost the ability to feel empathy and compassion for others.

Compassion fatigue refers to the profound emotional and physical erosion that takes place when individuals are unable to refuel and regenerate, whereas vicarious trauma – a term coined by Pearlman & Saakvitne (1995) – describes a profound shift experienced by individuals when their fundamental beliefs about the world are altered and possibly damaged, by repeated exposure to traumatic information.

Compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma are much more complicated than the fatigue and overwork characterized by burnout. The two conditions often result when there is a conflict between our deepest values and the work that we are required to do, a phenomenon which is called *moral distress*.

The Canadian Medical Association states that moral distress occurs when one feels unable to take what they believe to be ethically appropriate or the right course of action, including avoiding wrongdoing or harm, because of institutionalized obstacles.

Of the three, burnout is the most easily resolved: changing jobs or taking time away from work may provide relief in a relatively short period of time to someone suffering from job-related burnout.

However, relief for vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue is elusive due to the overall impact on the nervous system and the need for appropriate

treatment. A Principal or Vice-Principal can experience both simultaneously, and conditions can be cumulative over time. The exposure of school leaders in their roles is an occupational hazard in a helping field¹, as is often cited for occupations such as first responders, health care teams, and social workers.

Are You Feeling At Risk?

If you feel you may be at risk, or are already suffering from vicarious trauma, try these coping strategies:

- Increase your self-observation, and recognise and document signs of stress and vicarious trauma. Journaling may help to explore thoughts and emotions.
- Take care of yourself emotionally, engage in relaxing and self-soothing activities, and find ways to rest and recharge.
- Look after your physical and mental well-being, and be proactive in taking care of yourself. Practice self-care: eat a healthy diet, get physical exercise, practice good hygiene, and engage in activities you enjoy outside of work.
- Be realistic about what you can do to support others, and be true to your role boundaries. Don't take on the responsibilities of your students or the well-being of their families, but supply them with tools or direct them to resources so they may support themselves.
- Take regular breaks.
- Seek social support from colleagues and family members.
- Use a buddy system; this is particularly important for new Vice-Principals. This includes using peer support and opportunities to debrief.

¹ Saakvitne & Pearlman (1996) <https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/vtt/what-is-vicarious-trauma>

The exposure of school leaders in their roles is an occupational hazard in a helping field, as is often cited for occupations such as first responders, health care teams, and social workers.

- Don't always step forward for the difficult roles: regardless of how experienced and skilled you are in navigating difficult situations, you need a break at times to refuel.
- Talk to your supervisors if you feel that a change or modification in your role may reduce your exposure, and give you an opportunity for a break.
- Take time off from work if needed, particularly if you have continuous exposure to those experiencing trauma.
- Seek emotional support from families, friends, or other trusted sources.

When you first recognize that you may be struggling, make an appointment with a physician who may consider different treatment options that could include

medication to help manage certain symptoms, and/or psychotherapy.

Accessing a counsellor using evidenced-based treatments for vicarious trauma can be helpful if you are not yet experiencing symptoms, but recognize that you have high exposure. Different counselling methodologies include, but are not limited to:

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy: Known as CBT, this form of therapy focuses on identifying unhelpful or problematic thinking patterns, finding ways of reframing them, and learning to respond to future situations.

Cognitive Processing Therapy: Known as CPT, this form of CBT focuses on challenging and reframing thought patterns related to traumatic experiences.

Eye Movement Desensitizing and

Reprocessing: Known as EMDR, this form of therapy uses specific eye movements to aid in retrieving, and reprocessing, memories of a traumatic experience.

Here is a great resource that was produced by the City of Toronto for The TYES (Toronto Youth Equity Strategy) Frontline Workers' Toolkit: Vicarious Trauma & Self-Care Toolkit

TYES

bit.ly/TYESToolkit



This resource was created for those working in communities who have exposure to youth trauma. It includes a full description of vicarious trauma, self-reflection exercises, and many tips and practices to help support you in your work and exposure to trauma, with an emphasis on applying self-care to limit the impact.

I invite you to take 10 minutes to scan the resource and see what it offers.

Share it with your staff who may also be exposed to trauma.

Finally, here is a quick article to reference, with relevant points on how as a supervisor or co-worker (or even family member), you can support a colleague who is exposed to vicarious trauma.

OVC

bit.ly/OVC_WhatIsVT



Continuing to Fulfill Your Purpose Safely

As Principals and Vice-Principals, you are driven by your passion and purpose, and love your role. You come to work to make a difference in the lives of students and those who support them. In today's society, this can mean that, at times, you will be exposed to traumatic events and losses that can take their toll. The key is to be aware of the risks, and continue to regularly assess your well-being. The resources in this article offer practical self-care tools to lessen the impact of trauma at work.

The well-being of your students matters, *but so does yours*. Find ways to stop, reflect, unpack, and replenish your energies – either on your own, or with your team – to continually reinforce your well-being.

References and Resources

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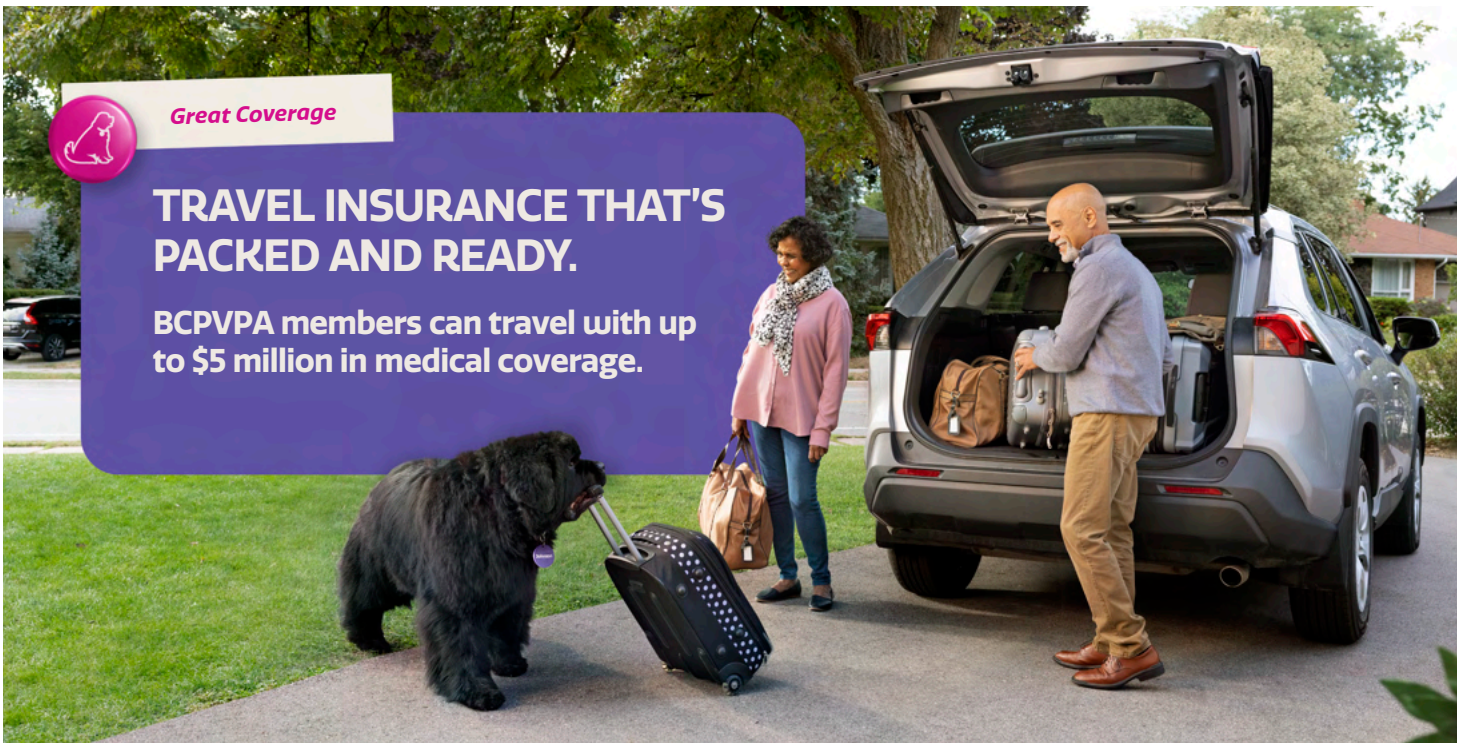
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For more health & well-being articles, please visit

www.bcpvpa.org/resources/health/articles



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Books



Split the Pie: A Radical New Way to Negotiate

by Barry Nalebuff

Harper Business, 2022

Reviewed by

Carmen Eberle

Director, Member Support Services

BCPVPA

Whether you are negotiating terms of engagement within a relationship, business deals, or terms and conditions of employment in your workplace, the process can quickly become taxing and adversarial. But, it doesn't need to be. According to author Barry Nalebuff, his approach – as explained in his recent book *Split the Pie: A Radical New Way to Negotiate* – capitalizes on a framework that is fair, equitable, and principled.

The book provides negotiation strategies that promote working collaboratively to find solutions that benefit both parties. Throughout the book, case studies showcase how the approach can be applied successfully to everyday discussions. Not only can this approach allow both parties to 'split the pie', but also to 'expand the pie', and get more from the negotiation by fully understanding and identifying what is at stake, and what can be achieved together. Some of the best ways to 'get more' than 'negotiated for' is by openly answering and asking curious questions, using creativity as a first resort, finding out what is valuable to both sides, and offering alternatives and new options. Nalebuff also emphasizes the importance of anticipating the reaction of the other party, and equipping yourself with ways to counter.

*The book provides
negotiation strategies
that promote working
collaboratively to find
solutions that benefit
both parties.*

One of the biggest lessons in the book is to be prepared. This means having your research and data collection completed ahead of time. It also means understanding what both sides want, and planning for what can go wrong. The top ten basics of negotiation preparation that I identified with include:

- Discuss the ground rules and present the negotiation framework up front.
- Help the other party see the value in working together.
- Be prepared to make principled arguments that will persuade the other side to work with you.
- Provide exemplars that support your perspective/stance.
- Stay away from ultimatums and never give one, even if one is received.
- Have strategies to diffuse challenging situations, such as using humour, or suggesting a break.
- Be aware of cultural differences, and listen to what is important to others.
- Identify questions to be asked, and information to be revealed or shared.
- Make smart trades, and try and give each other more of what one another values.
- Know your BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement): never accept less than your BATNA, and understand the other party's BATNA.

When thinking about BATNA, some negotiation strategists may counsel that you never reveal your best alternative to a negotiated agreement. However, Nalebuff suggests the opposite. By not revealing your BATNA, you may place yourself in a position

*Know your BATNA
... never accept less
than your BATNA, and
understand the other
party's BATNA.*

where the other party makes assumptions about your BATNA, leading the other party to come in with a lower-than-expected alternative. When you reveal your BATNA, you demonstrate honesty and transparency, and avoid wasting everyone's time. The strategy builds trust with the other party, and does not lead to questions about integrity within the negotiation process. According to Nalebuff's research, having low BATNA does not mean you cannot get your share of the pie; in fact, it can work in your favour.

If this preview has piqued your interest, and you would like to learn more about this field-tested approach to negotiations, visit the book's companion website SplitThePieBook.com for links and videos.

SplitThePieBook.com



Chapter contract chairs are invited to email mssinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca to request a negotiations workshop and/or professional guidance to prepare for upcoming contract reviews and local negotiations.



Courtesy ArtStarts in Schools

Finding a Voice in Art ArtStarts in Schools

by
David A. Serpa
Communications Assistant
BCPVPA

ArtStarts began in 1996 as a grassroots initiative to bring the transformative power of the arts to young people in BC. Over time, it has grown with the collaboration of artists, volunteers, families, and donors across the province, and because of critical support from partners including the BC Arts Council and the City of Vancouver.

ArtStarts is now a leading organization for young people exploring their creativity. It provides opportunities for artists to get into schools, and helps school administrators in getting students involved with the arts. Their model is about helping match schools with artists for specific projects.

Jules André-Brown, Co-Director of Programming, explains; “We have artist performances in schools, as well as artist residencies where an artist is in the school for multiple weeks, working on a specific project with students. Whether it’s a series of performances or a long-term project, the students get some meaningful interactions, and see new ways of expressing themselves.”

ArtStarts is somewhat curriculum-driven, in that artists often communicate with schools about their needs. However, their programs do not grade students in any way; instead, they provide an exploration of creativity and help young people form a new approach to the world.

By seeing the work of a professional artist, students can take a new perspective, or learn an important way of listening to a different style of music or poetry.

Artists in Schools



Courtesy ArtStarts in Schools

Luisa Henz is an artist and the founder of recently formed project **SoundMind Introspective Arts**, which is funded through grants from ArtStarts in Schools.

SoundMind is an arts based, community-building program that facilitates game-centered, applied theatre and movement workshops. Luisa collaborates with facilitators such as Braulio Vidal, a trained actor from Chile, and Warren Hooley, a facilitation expert and workshop trainer. SoundMind has facilitated multi-session workshops for students in Grades 2-12 in Metro Vancouver schools.

Their school workshops promote collaborative problem-solving, creative risk-taking, and social-emotional awareness skills. They bring social justice dialogue to life through student-directed theatre, sparking discussions on important topics such as mental health, cyberbullying and belonging. Students also learn self-regulating relaxation strategies through Luisa's meditative soundscape journeys using her Handpan instrument.

Workshops encourage students to assume leadership and steer the direction of the sessions. "We have no strict agenda on discussion topics," says Luisa. "We hear different student voices and simply facilitate discussion, aiming to include voices that can often feel left out."

When asked what students will take home from SoundMind workshops, Luisa says, "I believe (youth) are hyper-connected, yet this does not always help them genuinely connect to themselves or others. Our workshops are designed to slow down social interactions, strengthen new perspective-taking capacities, and build multiple avenues for self-reflection through the arts."

Luisa is currently an artist-in-residence at St. John's School in Vancouver, where she works with teachers and counsellors to facilitate arts-based social and emotional learning for their students, while expanding her SoundMind program to other public schools with the help of ArtStarts grants.

Experiencing ArtStarts

**Principal
Sean Della Vedova,
SD 43 (Coquitlam)**

Why does your school work with ArtStarts?

I have had a long relationship with ArtStarts because I have confidence in the quality of the artists with whom they work. The performances and projects offered by ArtStarts are created with school settings in mind.

What program(s) has your school accessed through ArtStarts?

At every school where I have been Principal, we have typically had three to four performances per year. We have also worked with individual artists to create in-house residency opportunities for students. I would say that there has been a recent move toward having students being involved more directly with workshops and hands-on experiences.

“There is something unique about being with an artist who is uncovering their process,” says Jules. Artists break down their process so that students can understand and learn. Students often walk away with a new skill, even if at a beginner level.

In his own academic work, Jules has seen how young people see themselves in arts organizations. Many of their reflections were about how, in school, they felt pressure to create art that either satisfied the requirements of the class or related to some sort of future job opportunity.

ArtStarts programs take different approaches to different subjects; students can learn about their own culture or other cultures through dance, and learn about the importance of expressing culture in that way. Students will often hear powerful stories about a culture, with learning that is far beyond what they might learn from a textbook.

Many artists have a package they have developed, and a program that they have worked on, to explore a particular theme. When a school administrator is booking a performance, they can review these materials to ensure that there is a fit.

During performances, artists explain a concept and walk students through the idea. The programs are about 45 minutes, followed by a Q&A and some participation, if appropriate. The residency model is a longer process involving various sessions. Students build trust with the artist in the classroom. It is an educational experience that is different from having a teacher.

ArtStarts focuses on anti-oppression, which has allowed many young people to have a voice in places where it may not be easy for them to speak out.

“There is something unique about being with an artist who is uncovering their process.”

“We don’t just want to define ourselves by what we stand against, but also by what we stand for,” says Jules. “That’s youth empowerment – empowerment for young people to have expression, critical thinking, and cultural resonance.

For every community we visit, we need those artists and school administrators to think about the instruments of anti-oppression and empowerment that may be most valuable there, and how we can cultivate and support that, because every context is unique.”

In speaking about how Principals can support arts, Jules says; “For Principals that are fairly new to integrating arts in their schools, it’s really helpful when they can bring the power of arts and culture into the school’s overarching pedagogy, when they champion how arts can fit into the organization and its strategy, and when they can provide a secure foundation for an artistic and cultural space.”

For Jules, Principals are well-suited to helping students find their confidence with the arts. There are communities where school leaders already have confidence and capacity, and are well poised to be leaders in the arts even beyond the school. Arts can be the catalyst to redefining a neighborhood, to “redefining a postal code” says Jules, quoting US educator Amir Whitaker. “Arts can give young people a voice to create the story of their neighborhood.”

“The school is so well positioned to define what a neighborhood is, what a community is about.

If young people can define their communities, then you see the evidence in the parks, in the stores, in the library. When the Principals are promoting the arts beyond the school, the impact is really meaningful.

“Arts can give young people a voice to create the story of their neighborhood.”

How do their programs align with your school’s action plan for learning?

Our social and emotional learning goal involves self-regulation strategies. I believe that the creative process has an inherent focus on assisting students with their ability to have agency and control over their learning. Playing a drum, painting a picture, or moulding a bowl requires focus and awareness: these are important aspects of self-regulation!

How do you see ArtStarts impacting students’ lives or learning experiences?

Students sometimes might not see themselves as having arts skills. It can be intimidating looking at the work of artists. By showing students the thought process, art becomes a less mysterious and ambiguous process for a learner.

One of my most meaningful school projects involved an ArtStarts grant. The project created a forest inside the school foyer. Working with a potter, students created leaves and bugs that lived in our forest. The result captured the life of a living forest. Students were truly the artists for this project and their thoughts and feelings guided the act of creation and the final product.

Has Art Starts inspired your school community to promote leadership and advocacy for arts in education?

I attend the ArtStarts Showcase annually on behalf of our school district.

Many districts have representation so performances can be coordinated between more isolated communities. Bringing these performances to schools is such an important part of creating school arts cultures and offering students ways to express themselves. My goal in becoming a school administrator was to promote and to ensure that students had opportunities to engage with the arts.

Why would you encourage other school leaders to get involved with ArtStarts?

Each year, I distribute internally the list of artists being presented by ArtStarts.

There is always a buzz in the school when there is a performance scheduled or workshops offered. Teachers do an amazing job offering opportunities for artistic expression, but having someone from outside of the school community come and create with students is another important aspect of the artistic process.

If young people can define their communities, then you see the evidence in the parks, in the stores, in the library. When the Principals are promoting the arts beyond the school, the impact is really meaningful. So, there's both internal and external work that Principals can do.

"Where there isn't an arts infrastructure in place, we recognize that one is needed. I've seen incredible practices come from regions with few resources". ArtStarts is committed to responding to these different contexts.

To illustrate, Jules tells the story of a community with a strong agricultural practice that integrated weaving corn husks into creating an art practice for children.

"When the Principals are promoting the arts beyond the school, the impact is really meaningful."

"So, rather than assuming you need to build the same arts infrastructure you see in Vancouver or bigger cities, you can also work with what's available in the community."

Bigger cities have plays, concerts, festivals, and many other cultural events, where small communities may not have the same kind of access.

ArtStarts believes that people can engage in the arts, no matter their resources. "We try to be sympathetic and to find ways of accommodating performances, as many artists are flexible and want to find ways to help those communities."

If you would like to bring an artist from ArtStarts into your school, you can look at their artist directory on their website to learn about their specific offering and see if it matches your school's or class's needs.

Find out more artstarts



artstarts.com



[@artstarts](https://twitter.com/artstarts)



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[/artstarts](https://www.facebook.com/artstarts)

ArtStarts in Schools is a charitable organization that expands the role of art in education to activate learning and nurture creativity in British Columbia's young people.

Since 1996, ArtStarts has collaborated with educators, artists, families and community to promote art as an essential part of learning and life.

ArtStarts' key areas of activity include booking school performances, an annual showcase conference for young audience presenters, artist residencies, grants to schools and districts, professional learning opportunities for artists and teachers, gallery exhibitions of young people's art and free family programming.

From Kindergarten to Grade 12, in public and private schools throughout the province, ArtStarts supports a wide range of arts based experiences that activate learning for young people.



The Last Word

The school I attended as an elementary student recently celebrated its 150th birthday, and I was fortunate to attend the celebration. Among other people, my former Principal was there; astoundingly, he looked much the same as he did when I attended elementary school in the 1970s. I remember him as a stern figure. I only saw him at school assemblies or if I happened to pass him in the hallway, with my head down and avoiding eye contact. Less well-behaved friends remember him with a combination of fondness and fear, as they'd had more frequent interactions with him one-on-one in his office. Seeing him reminded me of the many Principals I've encountered in roles I have held in public education over the past 50 years. From a student to Superintendent of Schools – and several roles in between – I've had the opportunity to know hundreds of school Principals and have noticed an evolution in the relationship between who Principals are at work, and the person they are elsewhere.

I considered first the Principals I worked for as a teacher. You will note my use of the term 'for' rather than 'alongside'. They were all well-intentioned, hardworking, decent people who ran their schools in the way they had seen schools run earlier in their own careers. As benevolent – or not-so-benevolent – dictators, most of them laid down the law, ruled through positional authority, presented an image of omniscience, and never let the cracks show. It was clear who was in charge and, from an outside perspective, things seemed to run smoothly most of

the time. As a teacher, did I respect these Principals? Absolutely. Did I like these Principals? Usually. Did I have any sense of personal connection to these Principals? Not particularly. Could I tell you a single fact about who they were as human beings? Absolutely not.

The first school administrator to whom I felt a personal connection was viewed by many in the district as a renegade, an upstart who refused to conform to the norms of the district and who sometimes got into trouble for saying what they felt. I thought they were *amazing*. They regaled the staff with stories about their life away from work, their foibles, their mistakes, their successes and failures, and their adventures as a human being. They were the first administrator I ever heard use the term, "I honestly have no idea," in response to a staff member's question. I remember thinking at the time how refreshing it was to experience an administrator as a human being, rather than as a unidimensional supervisor. Until that time, I'd never considered a move into school leadership, but that person's humanity touched something in me, and made me realize that 'leadership' might be different than I'd perceived it to be.

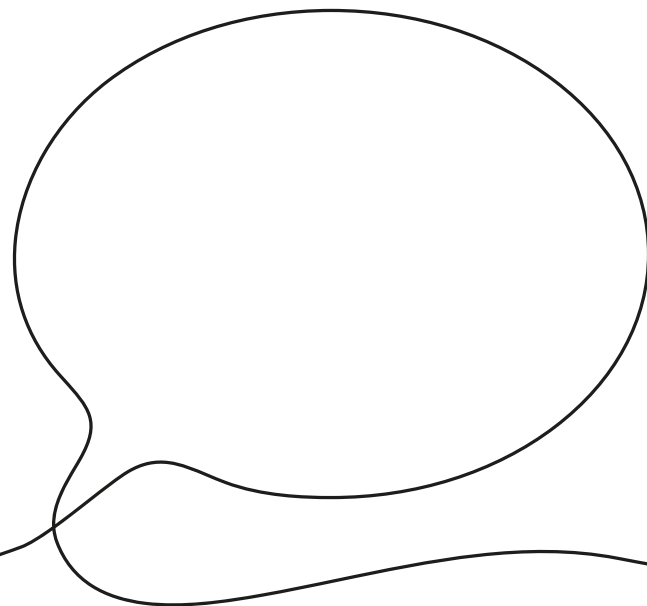
Like most early-career Principals, I experimented with determining my 'style'. Early on, I worked hard to keep my personal and professional lives separate, for a variety of reasons. I shared very little of myself with my staff, and avoided conversations that would unmask me as a multi-faceted human being with a life away from work. I was accused of being a 'Man of Mystery' which, at the time, I took as a compliment. Gradually, though, I began to see that sharing parts of myself could result in closer connections to my staff, increased trust, and a willingness of staff to share who they were, both with me and with each other. These connections strengthened us as a staff and as a team, and led to a sense of vulnerability, authenticity, and stronger bonds.

As a senior school district leader, my perceptions of the role of school Principal continued to evolve. I worked with some folks whose style mirrored that of

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Sharing Your Stories: Authentic Leadership

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my Principal from the early 1970s. I also worked with Principals and Vice-Principals who questioned the idea that the Principal needs to be fundamentally different or separate from the staff; those leaders intentionally forged deeper, more meaningful relationships with the people they worked alongside. I saw courage, vulnerability, and authenticity in their leadership, resulting in powerfully interdependent relationships in their schools. There was no sign of hierarchy or positional power: these were deeply powerful relationships based on common understandings and experiences, and mutual caring and respect.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as the world tipped sideways and we all learned to experience life through a new lens, it became increasingly clear to me as a Superintendent that I needed to lead the district in a different way. People were not just looking for direction, they were looking for reassurance, compassion, and understanding. More than anything, they were looking for connection, with their families

and friends, with their colleagues, and – as it turned out – with the larger school district team.

Through letters to our almost 4,000 employees in the district, I shared stories of how I was experiencing the pandemic, not only as their Superintendent, but as a fellow human. I shared my fears, my frustrations, and my sense of loss. I also shared my hopes, and my strong conviction that if we all worked hard to see each other as people, despite our differing beliefs around polarizing issues like vaccination and masking, we would ultimately be stronger alongside each other. I was astounded by the response I received. Employees across the district, many of whom I may never have interacted with otherwise, contacted me with their own stories, and shared that my willingness to be open about my own experiences had encouraged them to do the same, with those they led or with their co-workers. Receiving that feedback was a powerful experience for me, and it solidified my belief in the following:

1. Effective leaders are human beings first and formal leaders second. They deliberately identify and integrate aspects of their personal identity, and are willing to share their own life experiences to seek common ground with those they lead.

2. Effective leaders model courage and vulnerability through acknowledging their mistakes, struggles, and failures, and by admitting when they do not know 'the answer'. They do not make attempts to appear infallible, and therefore unrelatable.

3. Effective leaders are not one person within the workplace, and someone completely different elsewhere. They are, fundamentally, authentic.

When I think back to my early days as a school leader, I realize that my hesitation to share much of myself was rooted in a misguided belief that it is weak to express fear, to make mistakes, and to admit to not knowing, and that it was somehow inappropriate to share certain parts of my life in the workplace. What I

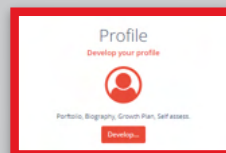
learned over the years was that exactly the opposite is true. Rather than adhering to an outdated model of leadership which supports the notion that, "Because I belong to a different employee group, I'm different from you, I know better than you, I have more power than you, and I need to keep a wall up between us", authentic and courageous school leaders model that "We're all human beings, I'm learning alongside you, I may have different responsibilities than you but, underneath, we are more the same than different".

Am I suggesting that, as school leaders, we should disclose our deepest and darkest secrets to all those we lead? Absolutely not. Professional boundaries exist for a reason, and there are some aspects of our lives that do not belong in the workplace. Like everything else in life, it is a balance. Ultimately, though, I think it is worth considering what we can share appropriately with those we lead, the aspects of ourselves that will encourage warmth and connection, engender trust, and, in the end, forge connections that create a work environment that is infused with humanity and authenticity.

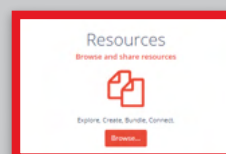


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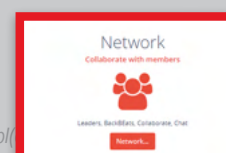
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