



# Paddling Together

Supporting the Remarkable Voyage of New Vice-Principals and Principals



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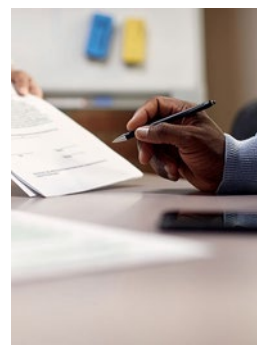
*"Whether you're leading a school community, supporting diverse learners or managing the many behind-the-scenes details that keep schools running, you are the heartbeat of B.C.'s world-class public education system."*

**A Message from Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care**

## 26

*"In British Columbia, Principals and Vice-Principals occupy a distinctive employment position within the education sector. Unlike teachers and other school staff, they are excluded from collective bargaining, and operate under individual contracts of employment with their respective Boards of Education."*

**Contracts of Employment**



## 33

*"As members of your Chapter, you may find yourselves in a situation where your Chapter has accumulated funds over time without a specific and defined purpose. In the CRA's view, this accumulation of surplus could be seen as evidence of profit for the organization."*

**Surplus Safety**

## 80

*"Why do some people have difficulty with addictions from substances or behaviours, while others do not experience any harm? People turn to these methods of self-soothing for different reasons."*

**Precarious Self-Soothing**





## 04 Perspective

BC Leads ... Because BC Cares  
by Dr. Shannon Behan, President, BCPVPA

## 10 Feature

Paddling Together: BCPVPA Compass Leadership Academy  
by Sandra Murphy, BCPVPA

## 16 Partners

A Message from Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care

## 20 Learning

- 20 Building Our Curious Community  
by Peter Johnston, BCPVPA
- 24 BCPVPA Learning Reimagined

## 26 Support

- 26 Contracts of Employment  
by Lynda Bonvillain, Carmen Eberle, David Nelson, BCPVPA
- 32 Surplus Safety: How to Safeguard CRA Compliance in Your Chapter  
by Simon Couture, BCPVPA

## 38 Voices

- 38 Building Story Together: Decolonization Through Human-Centered Design and Joy  
by Deena Kotak Buckley, Stephen Leung, Riley McMitchell (SD39)
- 45 Foundations for New School Leaders: Reflections  
by Misti Askew (SD43)
- 50 Amplification: Transformative Learning  
by Kasha Duff (SD36), Morgen MacDonald (SD83), Navshina Savory (SD38), Gwen Thorburn (SD35), Dr. Andrea McComb, BCPVPA
- 58 Developing Our Leadership Identities: The Role of Intentional Dialogue  
by Dr. Lucinda Wolters (SD71)
- 63 An Invitation to Lead Through a Compassionate Lens  
by Terri Ann Hayes (SD06)
- 68 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging: Integrating DEIB Within Your Literacy Program  
by Michaela Mistal (SD62)

## 74 Wellness

- 74 WorksafeBC's Duty to Cooperate and Duty to Maintain Employment for Injured Workers  
by Rochelle Morandini, BCPVPA
- 80 Precarious Self-Soothing  
by Rochelle Morandini, BCPVPA
- 86 You Are Not Alone  
A BCPVPA member's personal story

## 94 The Last Word

Identity and Leadership: Navigating Selfhood as a New School Leader  
by Scott Robinson, BCPVPA

# Principl(ed)

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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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## BC LEADS ... BECAUSE BC CARES

British Columbia consistently ranks as one of the highest-performing education systems in the world — but the real story isn't in the numbers. It is in what is happening on the ground, in school districts all around our province. It is in Vernon's leadership growth structures, Chilliwack's truth & reconciliation work, New Westminster's culturally responsive schools, Sechelt's collaborative networks, Haida Gwaii's culture-infused learning, Powell River's deep community connections, Nisga'a's pride in cultural identity, and Kamloops' thriving professional learning communities. From small coastal schools to bustling urban centres, our success is built on leaders who put equity, excellence, and relationships first. BC leads: not just because we perform, but because we care.

### Why BC Continues to Lead: Lessons from the Road

If you have been following my journey through the 2024-2025 school year, you will know that I had the great privilege of landing in 28 different districts throughout this province. Armed with a spreadsheet created with the intention of gathering evidence about systemic structures such as leadership development programs, inclusive education delivery models, relationships and structures in Indigenous Education departments, maintenance, transportation, district culture, PAC influence, and more, I have guided my visits with the question: *"What makes BC a high-performing system?"*

A few years ago, while working on my doctorate, I came across a 2018 report written by Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills at

by  
**Dr. Shannon Behan**  
2024-2026 President  
BCPVPA

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the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Schleicher included a focus on Canada's education systems, and captured something many of us know instinctively: British Columbia is a high-performing public education system. My intention was to look closely and figure out *why*, as the numbers alone don't tell the whole story.

In my travels to school districts across BC, I've seen first-hand what fuels those statistics. Behind every data point is a leader, a teacher, a student, a family, and a community that values education, and recognizes that all families want the same things for their children. They want to know their children feel a sense of belonging in schools, that they have opportunities to learn and grow, and that they will be empowered to cross the stage with dignity, purpose, and options. They will have a jumping-off point for a dynamic future.

This is no short order. In my travels, these are just some of the things I have observed – there are exciting projects and thoughtful innovations taking place in every community, and I will continue to share those stories in the year ahead.

## **Equity and Excellence in Action**

In Vernon, I saw intentional investments in structures that allow Principals and Vice-Principals to lead with both vision and focus. Professional learning is tied directly to improving outcomes, and there is a shared language about leadership growth. The district's commitment to supporting the whole child — not just the test score — is evident in every conversation.

In Chilliwack, the deep, ongoing work in Indigenous learning and truth and reconciliation is not a separate initiative — it is woven into the daily life of schools. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders in Chilliwack have built strong relationships that are authentic, sustained, and grounded in mutual respect. Students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and the culture.

In Surrey, I connected with a vibrant and collaborative group of leaders who bring vision, innovation, and a strong commitment to equity and student success in one of BC's most diverse and rapidly growing districts.

## **The Power of Context and Culture**

In New Westminster, I met school leaders who embrace culturally responsive leadership as a cornerstone of their work. They understand that a high-performing system isn't one that ignores differences, but one that recognizes diversity as a strength to be leveraged. Newcomer families are welcomed with intention, and support systems extend beyond the school walls.

On the Sechelt Peninsula, I joined a group of leaders who model collaboration in the face of complexity. Their geography demands creativity, yet instead of seeing distance as a barrier, they have built strong networks of shared leadership and problem-solving that ripple through their schools.

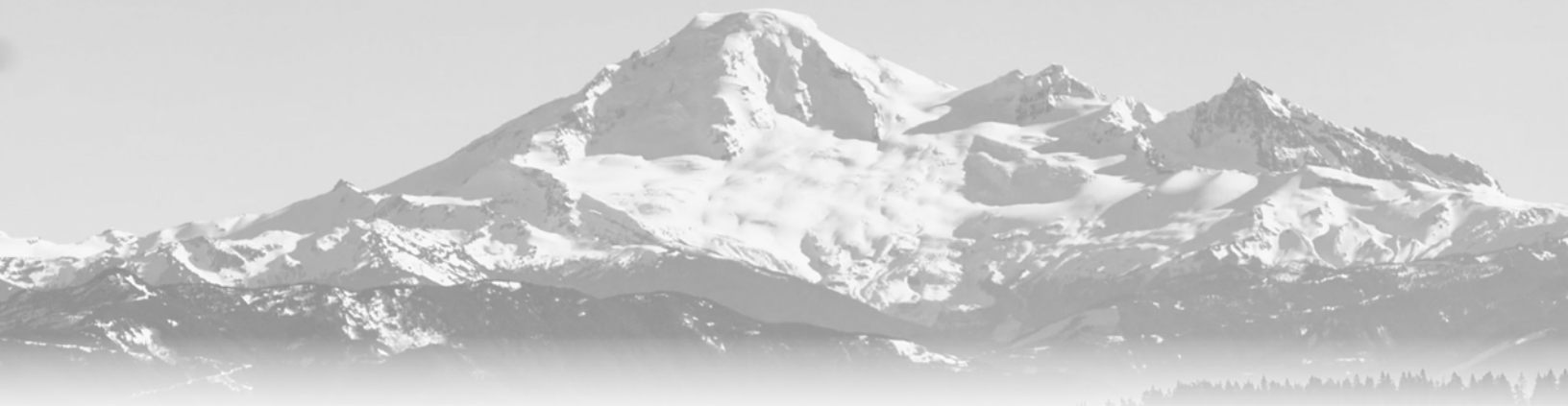
## **Innovation in Remote and Rural Settings**

My visit to Haida Gwaii was a powerful reminder that excellence can take many forms. Graduation ceremonies there celebrate cohorts as small as eight students, each one honoured, known, and celebrated by their community. The integration of local culture into learning is not an add-on; it is a foundation. Students learn science, history, and identity in ways that connect directly to the land and people.

In Nisga'a territory, I witnessed how the power of identity shapes learning. Students are immersed in their language, history, and traditions from an early age, and they carry that pride into every part of their education. Knowing who they are — and being surrounded by a community that affirms it — builds confidence, resilience, and a deep sense of purpose. Here, cultural pride is not separate from academic success; rather, it fuels it.

**"The numbers tell one part of the story.**

**Activities in our schools relate the rest."**



In qathet, leadership is rooted in community connection. Schools are hubs of learning, culture, and care; these are places where students are known deeply, and where Principals and Vice-Principals navigate both the opportunities and challenges of smaller, interconnected communities.

### **Leadership as the Engine**

In Kamloops, I saw the power of a district-wide commitment to professional learning communities. Leaders there prioritize time to work together, examine evidence, and innovate for the local context. The message is clear: leadership matters, and when leaders are supported, students thrive.

In Prince George, I met with a resilient and dedicated leadership team that stewards education across a vast and geographically diverse district, ensuring as leaders that every student – rural and urban – has access to opportunity, connection, and success.

These visits have reinforced my understanding that BC's performance is not the product of a single policy, program, or test. It is the result of leadership at every level — from classrooms to boardrooms — that is committed to equity, excellence, and continuous improvement.

### **The Road Ahead**

We cannot take our standing for granted. Leadership burnout, mental health needs, equity challenges in rural and remote communities, and the pressures of succession planning are all real. If we want BC to remain a high-performing system, we must continue to invest in leadership development, foster collaborative networks, and ensure that every community — no matter how large or small — has the resources and capacity to support its learners.

As Schleicher illustrated, our strength lies in both our achievement and our equity. I have seen it for myself, in the quick turnaround to resume school operations in Campbell River after a devastating fire, in a Chilliwack student-led assembly that brought to life the experiences of both immigrant and Indigenous students, in the songs of the students in Nisga'a New Ayansh, and the artwork of the students in Haida Gwaii, and in the collaborative leadership development program in Kamloops.

The numbers tell one part of the story.

Activities in our schools relate the rest.

And the overarching theme is that BC leads, because BC cares.

### **Reference**

Schleicher, A. (2018). World Class: How to build a 21st-century school system (Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education). OECD Publishing.





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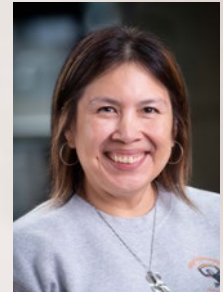
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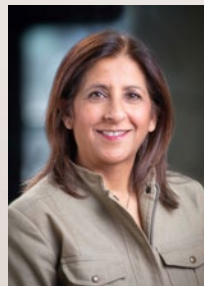
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Each September, BC K-12 public schools open their doors to throngs of students who are buzzing from the events of their summer, and who are keen to reconnect with their peers, teachers, and school leaders. But before those doors even open, each school and district is already a hive of activity. Principals have barely let go of the reins in July before picking them up again in August, coordinating supplies, confirming schedules, assigning spaces, reviewing school and district plans, connecting with school communities and families, and welcoming staff.

Many Principals and Vice-Principals are seasoned in their roles, and experienced in fielding a daily barrage of requests and expectations. But others are stepping into a leadership role for the first time, and are having that “first day of school” sensation in earnest.

The BCPVPA recognizes that our newest members can require different elements of support to help them find success in their roles. The transition from teacher to Vice-Principal – and from Vice-Principal to Principal – can take place as part of a more moderated progression, or it can be a rapid run up the slope when that unanticipated shoulder-tap for leadership has been delivered.

Education systems are continually changing and evolving, and it is important for professional associations like the BCPVPA to keep pace and ensure that our resources are bolstered where they are most needed by our members.

We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic became a powerful driver in shifting people’s thinking and upending established routines. In considering the journey for the next cohort of leaders during that time of immense change in schools, we could

see that teachers with an interest in leadership would benefit from a program that allowed a peek behind the curtain of the Vice-Principal role, and an opportunity – beyond their classroom and local school environment – for attendees to meet current leaders and find out more about their work. Since its inception in 2021, the program “Explorations for Aspiring School Leaders” (formerly “Essentials for Aspiring School Leaders”) has engaged and inspired hundreds of BC teachers, many of whom went on to pursue and accept leadership roles in the province.

The BCPVPA has also traditionally offered new leaders a deeply immersive experience through a week-long learning and leadership program that originated in partnership with the University of British Columbia’s Faculty of Education. “Short Course” was launched more than 45 years ago, and over that time thousands of BC educational leaders have come together in the first week of July to learn and connect. The program was reborn as “Foundations for New School Leaders” in 2022 when we were once again able to gather in person following the pandemic, and it has continued to introduce new leaders to the key responsibilities of their roles, and the nuances of successful leadership.

And, here again, we find ourselves in the midst of change. As the public education system and school operations have grown more complex through societal and technological influences, the roles of educational leaders have continued to rapidly evolve. Principals and Vice-Principals acknowledge that they are wearing more and more hats over time; the requirements of their expanded expertise have been both enriching and taxing, and the specter of burnout has been real. More of the professional learning and support that we have offered to our members in recent years has been focused around the increases in job responsibility and complexity, and how to both build resiliency and develop mechanisms to manage the intensity and demands of the role while providing steady and effective leadership.

There is a recognition in British Columbia that recruitment and retention of both educators and



# Paddling Together

A Two-Year BCPVPA Pilot Program Helps New Educational Leaders to Navigate their Roles

by

**Sandra Murphy**

*Director, Communications*

**BCPVPA**



educational leaders is critical, particularly in some of the more rural and remote areas. With the increased pressures that surround the educational leadership role, a trend has emerged where some Vice-Principals, and even Principals, are returning to classroom teaching for a number of reasons. This has disrupted the cycle of advancement in some districts, as teachers aspiring to leadership are moving into a Vice-Principal or Principal role at an earlier point in their careers. These leaders bring significant skills, knowledge, enthusiasm, and engagement to the work, but often don't have the depth of experience in navigating the diverse requirements of their school and the system.

There is no practicum for school leadership, and Principals and Vice-Principals hit the ground running in support of their students, staff, and school communities. What we hear often from new educational leaders is how little they truly understood about the depth and breadth of the role, despite observing their own supervisors during their teaching years. This is often stated alongside the popular comparison of "drinking from a firehose" as they begin their roles.

BC school districts are focused and intentional in their support of new leaders, ensuring that district direction is clear and that mentorship opportunities are established. To complement the important work of districts in supporting school leaders, the BCPVPA has launched the **Compass Leadership Academy**, a two-year pilot program that will serve as a backstop to local district programming to help support new-to-role Principals and Vice-Principals, with a particular focus on those members serving in rural and remote districts.

This two-year virtual leadership development series brings together BC's new-to-role educational leaders, and opens avenues for personal and professional growth. Compass will introduce practical learning opportunities in many areas of leadership including inclusive education, health and well-being, and human rights and equity. The modules will support members' daily practice in areas such

as understanding fiduciary duty, managing budgets, leading in a unionized environment, time management and prioritization, navigating difficult conversations, and developing decision-making frameworks.

Through Compass, we are placing a special emphasis on our members who lead in rural and remote schools and districts. We recognize that these leaders are often geographically isolated, which can make contact with both the district supervisor and a supportive network of colleagues a distinct challenge. The intent of Compass is to both empower these rural and remote leaders with resources and tools that can support them in their practice, and to introduce them to other Principals and Vice-Principals leading in similar circumstances. The development of a community of practice for rural and remote leaders is a critical component of Compass, with the objective of helping these educational leaders to thrive in their environments, to have access to the assets that they need to be successful, and to develop supportive networks with other leaders.

The Compass learning experience weaves the BCPVPA's Leadership Competencies into each session, offering a competency-based approach that is grounded in core values, beliefs, and system goals. The Competencies use the metaphor and philosophy of school leaders "being in the canoe" alongside teachers, staff, and students. This is extended to our new-to-role leaders who had a different responsibility in the canoe before their move to leadership, yet the need to paddle together, to synchronize and navigate the journey collaboratively through all weather and conditions, remains the same. Ultimately, educators need the support of others in order to travel a route that is at times uncertain, and where the destination may change over time.

We look forward to the participation of our new-to-role members in the Compass program, and to sharing our learning with our education sector partners as we embark on this journey alongside BC's newest educational leaders.

For more information about the Compass program, please contact Executive Director Scott Robinson at [scott@bcpvpa.bc.ca](mailto:scott@bcpvpa.bc.ca)

The BCPVPA is proud to be a member of the International Confederation of Principals, a global association of school leadership organizations that reaches out across four regions: Africa, The Americas, Asia & Oceania, and Europe.

BCPVPA members are invited to join the ICP WhatsApp group to keep up to date on upcoming events. Find the link under Member News in My BCPVPA.

[icponline.org](https://icponline.org)



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# Return-It School Program is Back From Summer Break!

Return-It School is the free beverage container recycling program offered by Return-It, 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.



## **100% Free for BC Schools**

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 for Your School**

Get up to 3 Return-It bins at no charge! They're perfect for launching or upgrading your school's recycling program.



## **Win Up to \$5,000 for Your School**

Enter our annual story contest by sharing your school's creative recycling efforts. You could win up to \$5,000!



## **Free Video Presentation Kit**

Teachers can request a kit featuring an engaging recycling video, and goodies for students — all delivered straight to your classroom.



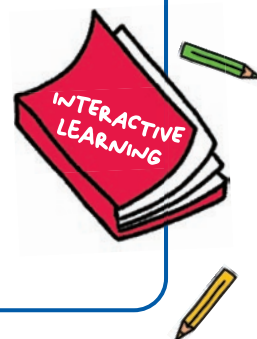
## **Interactive Online Activity Book**

Access fun games, quizzes, comics and recycling facts through our online Activity Book — available to all registered schools through the Teacher's Dashboard.



## **Fundraising with Express**

Return-It Express makes it easier than ever to raise money for your school— with no sorting, counting, or door-to-door collecting. Learn more at [Return-It.ca/Express-fundraiser](https://Return-It.ca/Express-fundraiser).



Sign up today at [ReturnItSchool.ca](https://ReturnItSchool.ca) and join hundreds of BC schools.

## STORY CONTEST WINNERS FROM 2024/25

### Elementary \$5,000 Grand Prize Winner: Maaqtusiis Elementary



Maaqtusiis Elementary's Grade 5 class in Ahousaht, a remote First Nations community on Flores Island (north of Tofino), launched a bottle drive to fund their first-ever class field trip. Faced with the high costs of travel—including a \$1,000 round-trip by water taxi to Tofino—they set a \$5,000 fundraising goal to ski at Mount Washington.

Despite challenges like transporting refundables off-island, the class collected 12,161 containers, raising \$1,208.20 through the Return-It Express & GO station in Tofino. Students sorted donations, collected littered cans, and set up recycling points at the local medical centre and school.

### High School \$5,000 Grand Prize Winner: British Columbia Christian Academy



BC Christian Academy, located in Port Coquitlam, turned its annual bottle drive into a meaningful, school-wide initiative in January 2025. Over two days, students, staff, families, and community members worked together across three campuses to collect refundable beverage containers while promoting environmental responsibility.

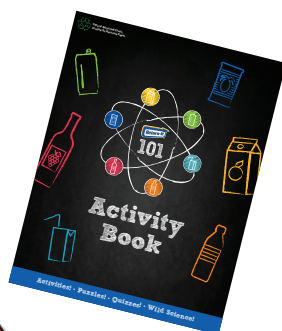
In total, the school collected 7,977 refundable beverage containers, raising \$1,026 for student programs. Encouraged by the success, the school continued its efforts on Earth Day by sending home pre-labelled Return-It bags, making ongoing recycling easy for families.

Read the full stories at

[ReturnItSchool.ca/SchoolNews](https://ReturnItSchool.ca/SchoolNews)

## RETURN-IT SCHOOL ONLINE 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 [returnschool@returnit.ca](mailto:returnschool@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 Your School.** Create a free Express account at [Return-It.ca/Express](https://Return-It.ca/Express).



**Share Your Referral Link.** In the app, you'll find a custom referral link to help supporters set up automatic donations to your group through their own Express accounts. Learn more at [Return-It.ca/Donations](https://Return-It.ca/Donations)



**Supporters Drop Off Their Containers.** Your supporters bring unsorted containers in clear or transparent plastic bags to an Express location. [Return-It.ca/Locations/Express](https://Return-It.ca/Locations/Express).



**Let Us Do the Rest.** We'll sort their containers and credit your Express account.

Learn how to get started at  
[Return-It.ca/Express-fundraiser](https://Return-It.ca/Express-fundraiser)



## A Message from Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care

As we welcome the 2025-26 school year, I want to express how hopeful I am for what lies ahead. British Columbia's public education system continues to grow stronger thanks to the care, compassion, and commitment of the people who serve in it. This year is no different – we are building on momentum and investing in student success, well-being and equity, from kindergarten to graduation, despite the current fiscal and global uncertainty we are all facing.

This work could not be done without the leadership of educators, Principals and Vice-Principals throughout B.C., and I'd like to express my heartfelt appreciation. The work you do every day to support students is nothing short of inspiring. Whether you're leading a school community, supporting diverse learners or managing the many behind-the-scenes details that keep schools running, you are the heartbeat of B.C.'s world-class public education system.

Your leadership has also been essential in expanding access to licensed child care on school grounds – helping provide continuity for children, supporting families and ensuring more kids can have the care they need, where and when they need it. We continue to recognize the vital connection between early learning and K-12 education. That's why our government is expanding access to licensed child care, particularly on school grounds, so families can access quality care where and when they need it.

Let me state here that creating a safe, inclusive and welcoming school environment remains top priority for our government. Every student deserves to show up as their full, authentic self and to know they belong. We are also celebrating the continued

increase in graduation rates, especially among Indigenous learners, made possible through strengthened partnerships with First Nations and continued implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and Action Plan in our education system.

This school year, we continue to support policies that create focused, healthy learning environments. Policies to limit cell phone use in classrooms were in place provincewide beginning last school year – thank you for championing this. School food programs have also seen expansions. Since Feeding Futures funding was introduced, almost 90% of B.C. schools now offer food programs. Our combined efforts work towards ensuring that students are not hungry so they can focus on their learning.

Student safety both in and out of the classroom is strengthened by introducing Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) learning into the Grade 10

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*"Whether you're leading a school community, supporting diverse learners or managing the many behind-the-scenes details that keep schools running, you are the heartbeat of B.C.'s world-class public education system."*

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Physical and Health Education curriculum this year. Thank you for your work as a new policy begins to be rolled out this year to ensure life-saving equipment like AEDs and naloxone are available in every school.

Our education system must meet the needs of every learner. That's why, with your schools' continued work, early literacy screening will begin in all school districts this year, starting with kindergarten students. Many of your schools are already doing this important work. By catching challenges early, we can provide timely supports and give students a strong foundation in literacy. We've more than doubled funding to school districts for inclusive supports since 2017, bringing that total to more than \$1 billion this school year. Two Provincial School Outreach Teams made up of learning services teachers, behaviour analysts, counsellors and therapists are also supporting schools in regions throughout the province, especially rural and remote communities. Their work is having a real, positive impact on students and educators alike. Even with the incredible challenges we are facing, we're protecting and supporting the education services that students and their families need because we know that's how to keep B.C. strong.

And we know that strong schools need strong educators. That's why we're investing \$12.5 million over three years to support teacher training, recruitment, and retention – with a focus on increasing the number of Indigenous teachers and supporting rural and remote communities with their recruitment needs. And, because mentorship plays a key role in retention and professional growth, we are working with sector partners to re-establish a Provincial Teacher Mentorship Program.

In addition, we're making the largest-ever investment in school infrastructure in B.C.'s history. Through our new Ministry of Infrastructure, we're investing \$4.6 billion over three years to build and upgrade schools including new classroom spaces, seismic safety upgrades, and accessible, modern learning environments.

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*"We continue to recognize the vital connection between early learning and K-12 education. That's why our government is expanding access to licensed child care, particularly on school grounds, so families can access quality care where and when they need it."*

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Since 2018, we have also funded the creation of tens of thousands of new licensed spaces on school grounds throughout the province. By expanding access and reducing the cost of child care, we're working together to help provide children with early learning experiences that set them up for success in school and beyond.

I am filled with appreciation for your leadership, your resilience, and your dedication to students. While I know that we do face challenges in our current circumstances as we all face an uncertain global context and a demanding fiscal reality, your continued collective efforts are helping create the kind of school system we can all be proud of: one that is inclusive, responsive, safe and rooted in the values of care, equity, and opportunity.

As we step into this new school year, I look forward to continuing our work together. Thank you for everything you do to make British Columbia's education system strong, innovative, and welcoming for every learner.

*Warm regards,*

Hon. Lisa Beare

Minister of Education and Child Care



**BRITISH  
COLUMBIA**

## **BC Ministry of Education and Child Care**

### **Minister**

Honourable Lisa Beare

### **Parliamentary Secretary**

Rohini Arora

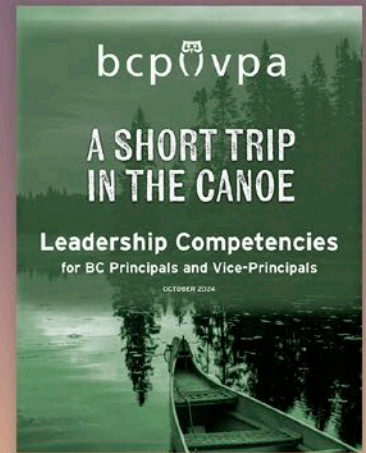
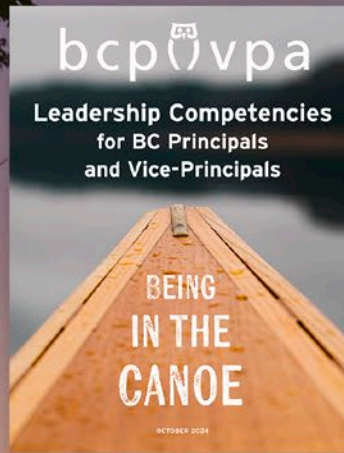
### **Deputy Minister**

Kathryn Krishna

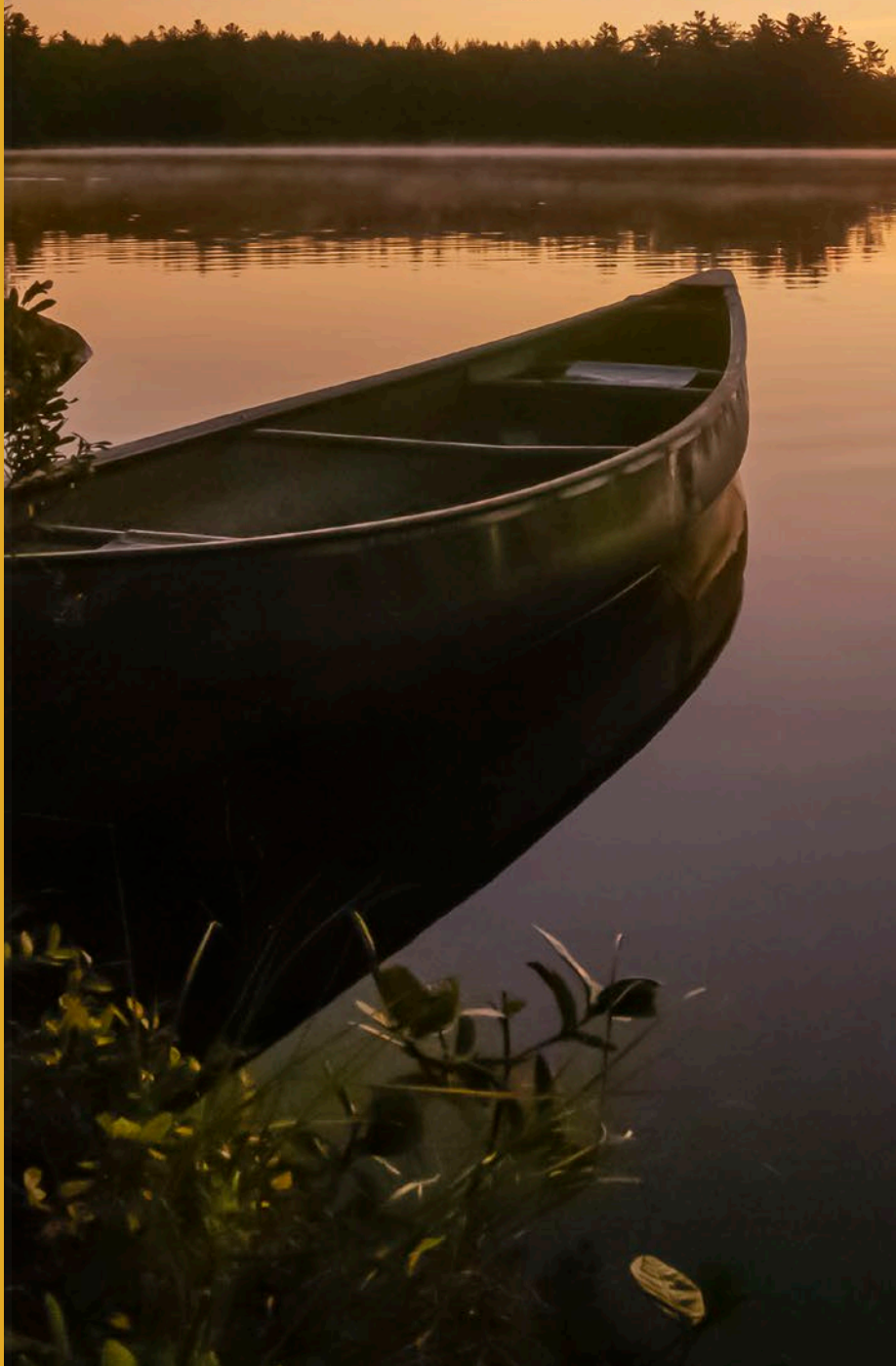
### **Associate Deputy Minister**

Jennifer McCrea

Read the latest  
BC education and  
child care news



**bcpvpa.org**  
**Resources/Competencies**

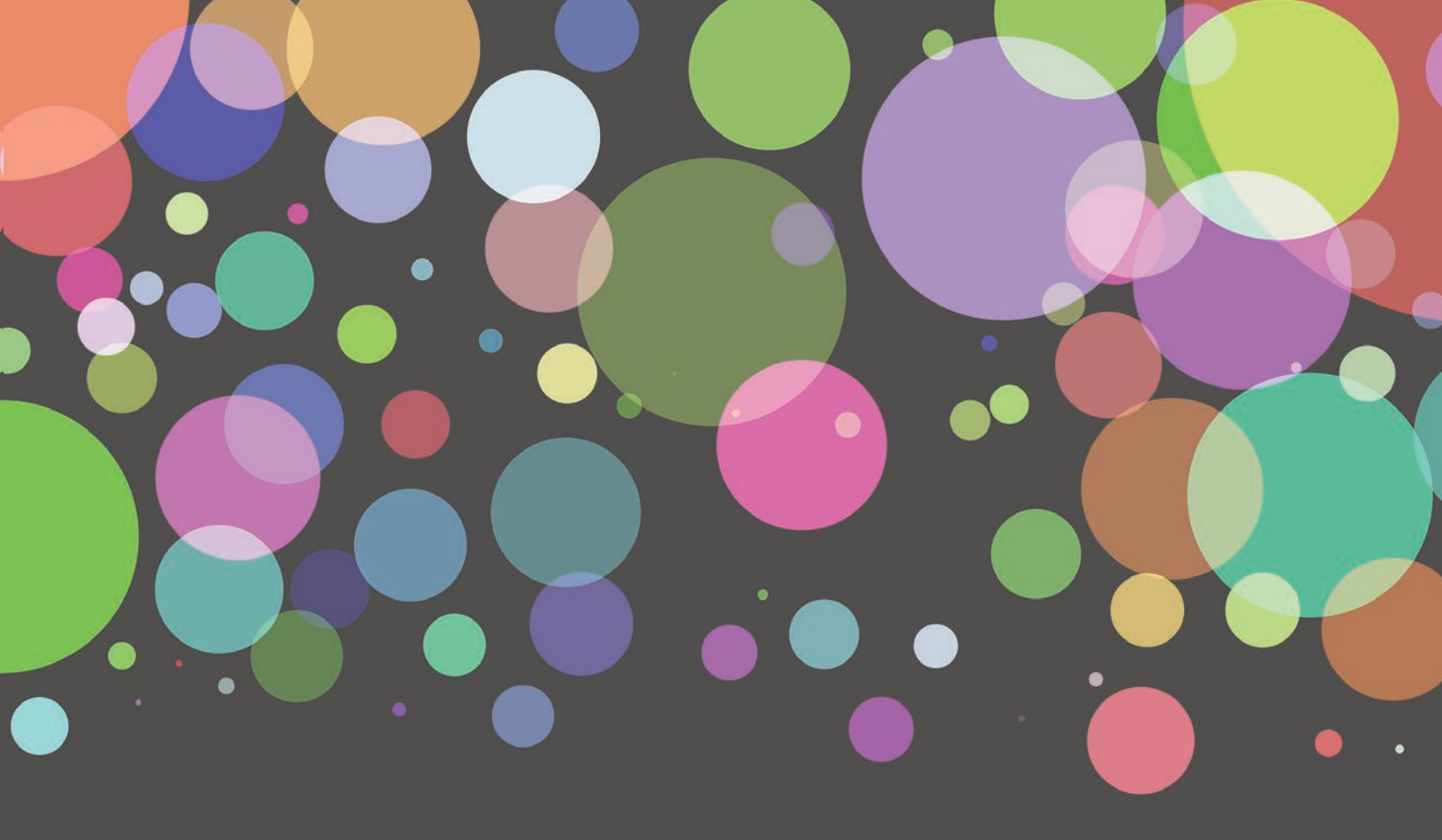




# Building Our Curious **Community**

One of the greatest joys of my role as Director of Professional Learning and Development is traveling across our beautiful province and experiencing the incredible diversity of school and district contexts navigated daily by our members. From the coastal communities of Vancouver Island to the mountain districts of the Interior, and from urban Vancouver to rural northern communities, each conversation reveals the unique challenges and innovative solutions that define educational leadership in British Columbia.

Whether I am facilitating **Who Owns the Learning (School Attendance)**, watching colleagues dive deep into **School Safety**, or seeing the energy around our upcoming **Explorations for Aspiring School Leaders** series,



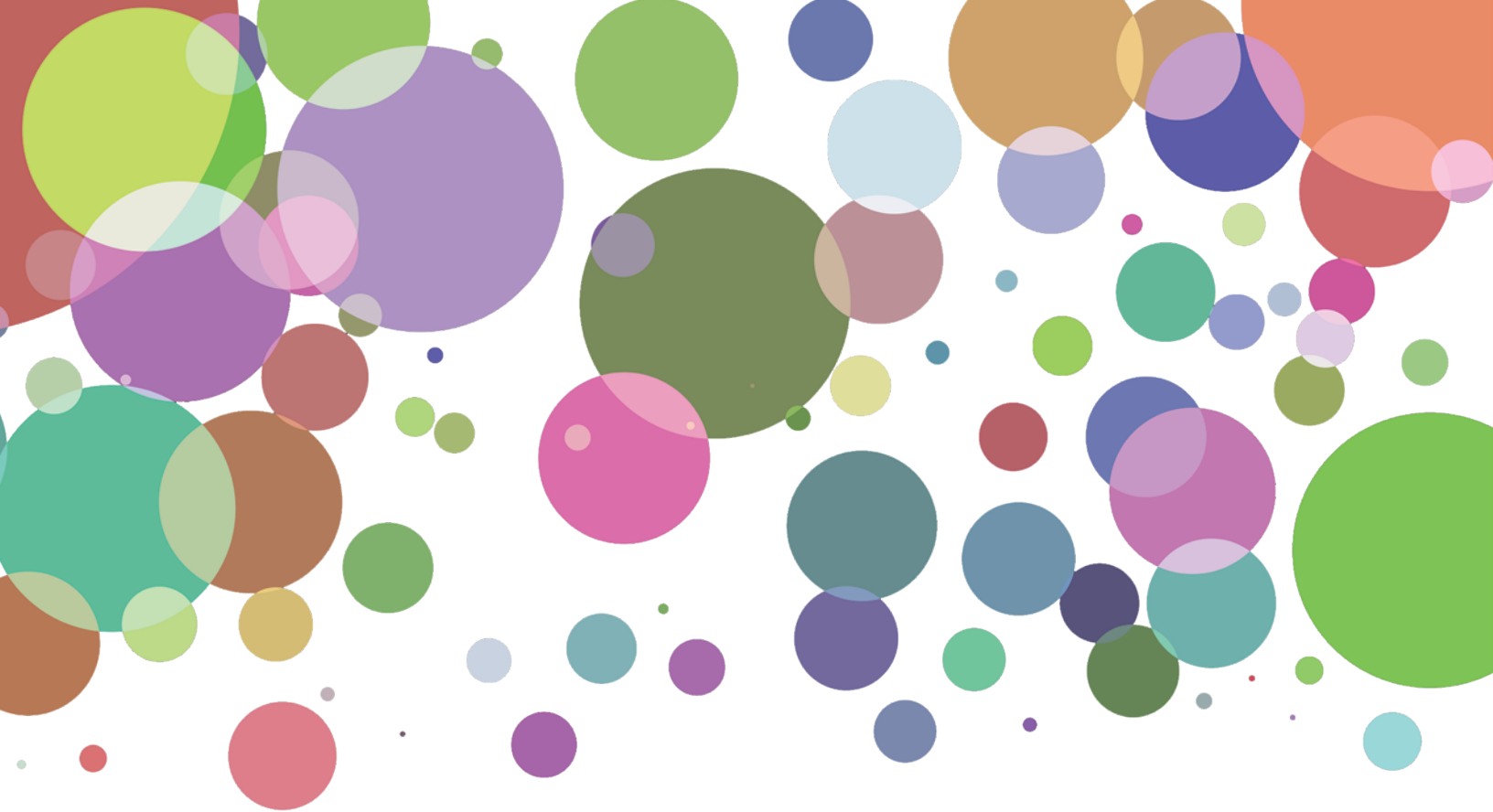
# Where BC Principals **Connect** Beyond the Workshop

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

there is one constant that never fails to inspire me: the moment when Principals and Vice-Principals from different districts connect and begin sharing their stories.

I often say that if you want to get a Principal talking, just ask them about their school. The passion is immediate, the challenges real, and the solutions often brilliant in their creativity. But here is what I have noticed over years of facilitating workshops from **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People** to our **Multipliers** sessions – the most valuable learning doesn't always happen during the formal presentation. It happens in those precious moments during the table talks, the discussions with your “elbow partner,” and between sessions – over coffee, during lunch





– when colleagues from Kamloops connect with peers from Prince George, when Island educators share strategies with Fraser Valley leaders.

These connections are powerful, but they are also fleeting. When a two-and-a-half day workshop ends, we return to our schools, and that brilliant conversation about student engagement, or that innovative approach to staff well-being, gets buried under the daily demands and whirlwind of your school leadership. The Principal who shared that game-changing strategy for parent communication becomes a fond and fleeting memory, rather than an ongoing connection and resource.

### ***What if it didn't have to end there?***

What if that colleague from the Okanagan who had the perfect solution to your scheduling challenge was just a message away? What if the Vice-Principal from the North who pioneered an incredible approach to Indigenous education could continue mentoring others across the province? What if every challenge you face as a school leader could be met not just with your own experience, but with the collective wisdom

of 2,700 dedicated educators who truly understand your world?

This winter marks an exciting milestone for the BCPVPA. Alongside our robust programming – from our **AI Roundtable Series** to **Resiliency and Multipliers** destination learning, and from **IDEAS Forum 2026** to our ongoing **webcast series** – we are launching a pilot project that has been years in the making: an exclusive online community designed specifically for BC Principals and Vice-Principals.

This isn't another social media platform. This isn't a locale for vendors or consultants. This will be **our space**, a digital gathering place where the conversations sparked at our workshops can continue year-round, where the wisdom shared in our destination learning at Sparkling Hill can reach those colleagues who couldn't attend, where the insights from our **Connecting Leaders Conference** can stimulate ongoing collaboration.

Imagine logging in after a particularly challenging day and finding a thread where colleagues are sharing strategies for supporting anxious students. Picture

posting a question about innovative scheduling, and receiving thoughtful responses from Principals who have been there. Envision accessing resources shared by peers who attended workshops you missed, or contributing your own hard-won wisdom to help a struggling colleague in a remote district.

Our community will complement – not replace – the incredible learning we already provide through our programming. It will be the space where the Principal who missed our **Inclusive Leadership** workshop can still benefit from the insights shared by those who did attend. Where the Vice-Principal juggling a crisis during our **Time Management** webcast can access the strategies later, when they need them most.

Most importantly, it will be a place where we can be authentically ourselves – school and district-level Principals and Vice-Principals who understand the unique rewards and challenges of being an educational leader in British Columbia, who know what it means to balance Ministry of Education and Child Care directives alongside community needs, who recognize that leadership looks different on the Island than it does in the Peace Region, but who

share the common commitment to serving students and families across our province.

As we prepare for this launch, I'm reminded of something a Principal told me recently during our **Foundations For New School Leaders** conference:

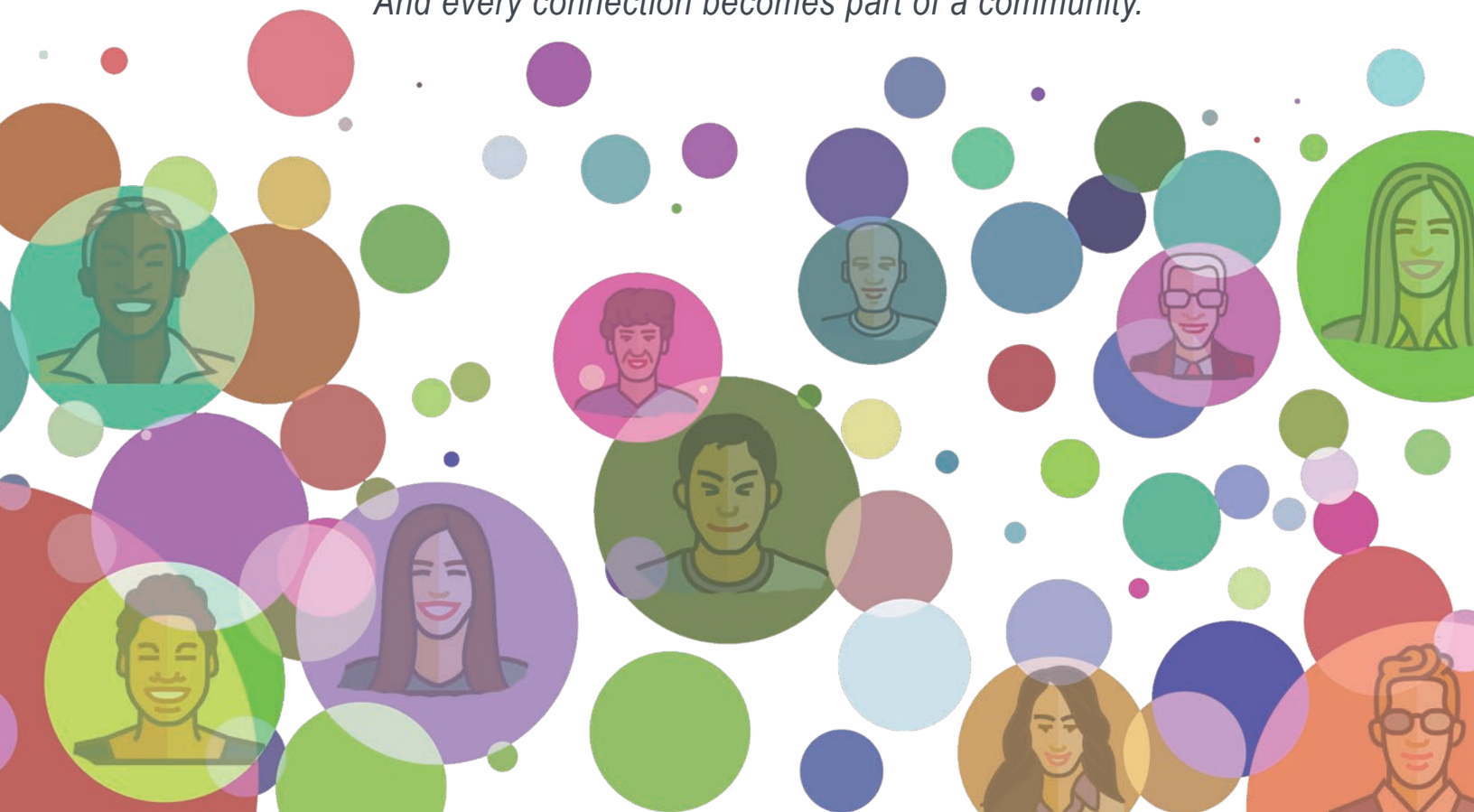
*"The best professional development isn't just about learning new strategies – it's about remembering that you're not alone in this work."*

Our online community will ensure that no BC Principal or Vice-Principal ever has to feel alone in their leadership journey. The wisdom, support, and innovation that flow through our workshops, webcasts, and conferences will continue to grow and evolve in this new digital space we are creating together for our members.

Because the best learning happens when curious minds connect; and now, those connections won't have to end when the workshop does.

*Stay tuned for more details about our community launch. Together, we're building something remarkable for BC educational leadership.*

*Strangers become colleagues ... Colleagues become friends ...  
And every connection becomes part of a community.*





## Plan your Team's 2025-2026

### Learning With Us!

**Learning Reimagined** means  
choice, flexibility, and relevance.

#### Our 2025-2026 offerings include:

- Virtual webcasts for accessibility and convenience, all recorded for flexible access
- In-person workshops for hands-on collaboration
- Destination learning for deep reflection and connection
- Blended programs combining webcasts with optional regional in-person sessions
- Regional delivery bringing learning closer to you
- Innovative scheduling like our early-morning productivity sessions
- Comprehensive materials included with every program for ongoing reference and reflection

Here are just a few of our programs - visit  
[bcpvpa.org/professional-learning/](https://bcpvpa.org/professional-learning/)  
to find out more!

Contact  
[pldinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca](mailto:pldinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca)

### Destination Learning

#### Amplification I & II

**Sparkling Hill, Vernon** Assess your life balance, priorities, and craft your personal mission in these powerful retreat-style experiences.

#### Leading a Culture of Learning I & II

**Vancouver Island** With sessions set in serene retreat environments, you will engage in reflective practices and collaborative discussions to align your leadership vision with practical skills.

#### Resiliency & Multipliers (New in 2025-2026)

**Inn at Laurel Point, Victoria** Combining personal resilience building with the power of multiplying intelligence in others, this new destination experience helps you lead from the inside out while unlocking your team's potential.

A black and white photograph of several hands reaching down, each wearing a bracelet made of small, round beads with letters. The bracelets spell out words like 'INSPIRATION', 'LEADERSHIP', and 'RED'. The hands are positioned in a way that suggests they are about to clasp together.

## Requested Programs

### **The 6 Critical Practices for Leading a Team®**

February 18, 25, March 4, 2026 | Virtual Webcasts

This webcast series equips you with the mindsets, skillsets, and toolsets needed to develop high-performing teams.

### **The 5 Choices to Extraordinary Productivity®**

January 14, 21, 28, 2026 | Virtual Webcasts

Transform your approach to time and energy management with this innovative early-morning format, perfect for busy leaders who want to start their day with powerful learning.

### **Multipliers® & 7 Habits®**

Regional offerings. Locations & Dates TBD

These cornerstone leadership development programs continue to help you unlock the intelligence and potential in your teams while building your own effectiveness.

## Innovation Meets Impact

### **AI Roundtable Series**

Webcast Series | Optional Regional Sessions

Our exclusive four-part series brings together local and international experts to help you navigate the AI revolution in education.

### **School Safety: Leading Through Digital Threats**

Webcast Series | Optional Regional Sessions

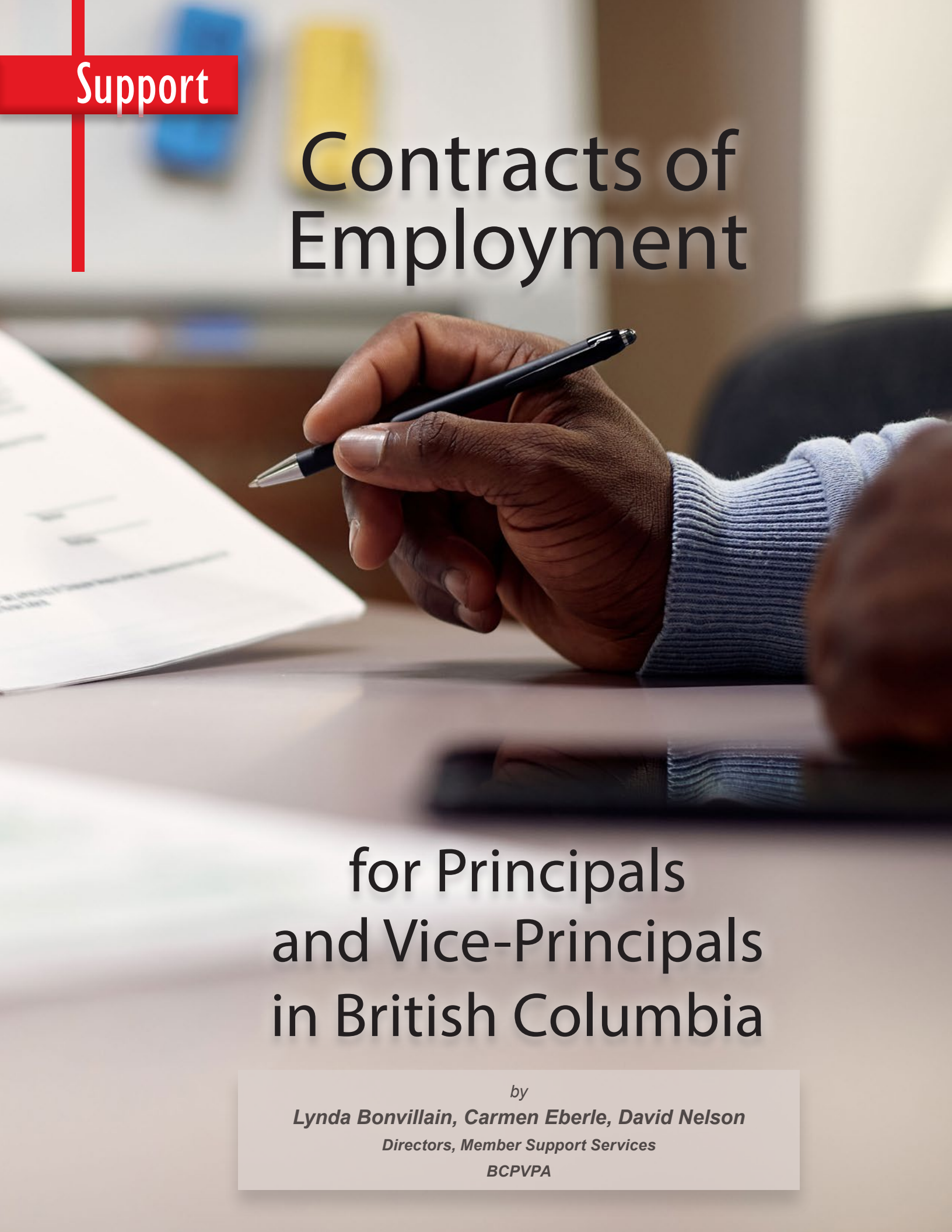
Navigate the complex landscape of digital safety, cyberthreats, legal liability, and violence prevention with frameworks designed for today's educational environment.

### **Reimagining Schools: Design & Timetabling**

Webcast Series | Optional Regional Sessions

Explore innovative systems and structures from BC and around the world, engaging in discussions about creative approaches to school organization and student learning.



A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a black pen, poised to sign a document. The hand is dark-skinned and wears a blue ribbed sweater. The document is white with some faint text and lines. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an office setting with a desk and some colorful objects.

Support

# Contracts of Employment

for Principals  
and Vice-Principals  
in British Columbia

by

*Lynda Bonvillain, Carmen Eberle, David Nelson*

*Directors, Member Support Services*

*BCPVPA*

In British Columbia, Principals and Vice-Principals occupy a distinctive employment position within the education sector. Unlike teachers and other school staff, they are excluded from collective bargaining, and operate under individual contracts of employment with their respective Boards of Education. This article examines how individual employment contracts differ from collective agreements, looks at some key components of these contracts, and provides an overview of the legislative framework governing these unique employment relationships. The article also outlines important considerations for local Chapters in negotiating terms and conditions of employment.

## The Nature of Employment for Principals and Vice-Principals

BC Principals and Vice-Principals are classified as excluded management employees, meaning they do not belong to a union or engage in collective bargaining. Instead, they have a contractual employment relationship with their Board of Education, which must be explicitly agreed upon by both parties. Essential terms such as salary, benefits, and job position must be negotiated and documented before an employment contract becomes legally binding. Neither the employer nor the employee can unilaterally modify these contractual terms once they are in place.

Contracts of employment are invaluable for both the Board (employer) and the Principal or Vice-Principal (employee) as they provide a written, legally binding record of the agreement between the two parties. They outline the obligations of both parties and help mitigate potential disputes. As such, it is crucial that all clauses within an employment contract are clear and easily understood to prevent future misunderstandings that may arise from alternate interpretations.

## Legislative Framework Governing Employment Relationships

What is often overlooked are the several provincial statutes that impact the employment conditions of Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia. These statutes establish minimum employment standards, provide protection against discrimination, and define professional obligations and responsibilities.



### 1. Employment Standards Act

Establishes the minimum employment requirements for workers in British Columbia.



### 2. Human Rights Code

Prohibits discrimination based on various protected characteristics, such as race, gender identity, age, disability, etc.



### 3. Public Sector Employers Act

Provides for the creation of the Public Sector Employers' Council and corresponding employers' associations for public education.



### 4. School Act

Defines the legal framework for K-12 education in British Columbia and grants Boards of Education the authority to appoint Principals and Vice-Principals.



### 5. Workers Compensation Act

Implements an insurance system for workplace injuries, funded by employer contributions based on payroll and industry risk.



### 6. Professional Standards for BC Educators

Establishes the knowledge, skills, and values required of educators in the province.



### 7. Teachers Act

Governs the regulation of the teaching profession within the K-12 education system.



## Collective Agreements vs. Personal Services Contracts

The Labour Relations Code in British Columbia does not apply to Principals and Vice-Principals. Their employment relationships are instead governed by Contracts of Employment, along with applicable laws and regulations. This contractual arrangement distinguishes their roles from those of teachers, who operate under collective agreements that are negotiated by unions.

## The Individual Contract of Employment: Key Components

The individual Contract of Employment is a formal written agreement between an employer (Board of Education) and an employee (Principal or Vice-Principal) that outlines the conditions of employment. There are two primary types of employment contracts in this context:

- **Term Contracts** – These contracts establish a fixed duration of employment, after which the agreement must be renewed or renegotiated.
- **Continuing Contracts** – These contracts persist indefinitely unless either party provides reasonable notice of termination. Continuing contracts are preferred by the BCPVPA. Local Chapters are encouraged to work with their district to try and put continuing contracts in place whenever possible.

Another form of contract often used for teachers who take on an "acting" role is a Temporary Contract. Employees on a Temporary Contract are not eligible for coverage under the BCPVPA Long-Term Disability Plan, but can remain under the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) Long-Term Disability Plan for up to one year. If the Temporary Contract extends for longer than one year, individuals on this contract would not have long-term disability coverage under either the BCTF plan, or the BCPVPA plan.



*"Local Chapters are encouraged to work with their district to try and put continuing contracts in place whenever possible."*

## Termination and Suspension

An individual Contract of Employment outlines specific procedures for termination:

- **Termination Without Cause** – If an employer terminates a contract without cause, the affected employee is entitled to compensation in accordance with the contractual terms and employment termination standards as outlined in the Public Sector Employers Act.
- **Termination With Cause** – In cases of serious misconduct that fundamentally undermine the employment relationship, an employer may terminate a contract immediately without providing any compensation.

Suspension of a Principal or Vice-Principal is generally not permitted unless explicitly allowed by the employment contract or relevant legislation. Under the School Act, Boards of Education are granted the authority to suspend an employee when necessary to safeguard students. Additionally, courts have upheld the practice of placing employees on administrative leave with pay during investigations into alleged misconduct. Although being on **administrative leave with pay** can feel punitive, it is often the best course of action to protect all parties until the matter is resolved.

BCPVPA members are encouraged to reach out to BCPVPA Member Support Services for support and guidance with administrative leaves, suspensions, or termination of employment discussions.

## Negotiating Contracts of Employment

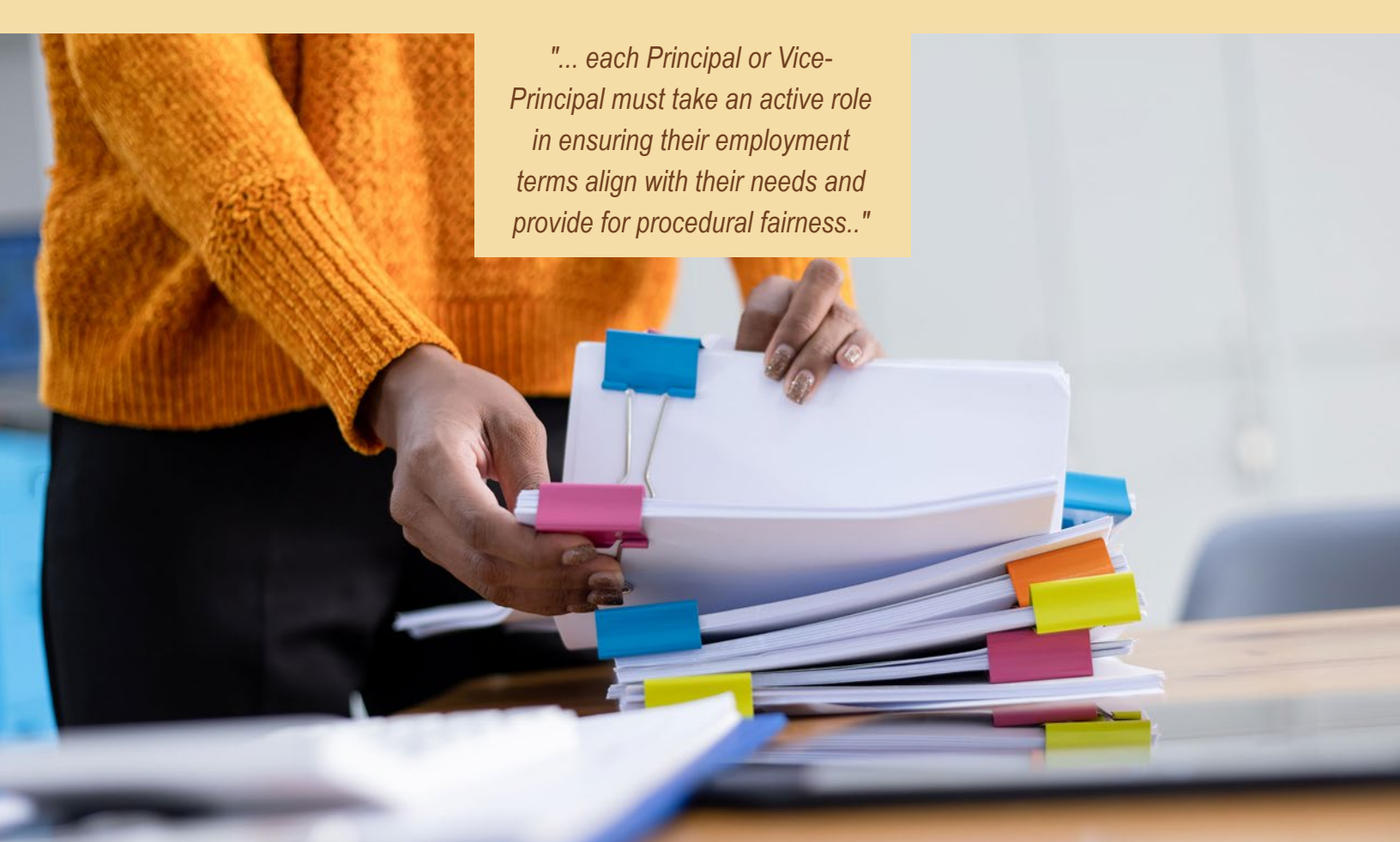
Under the School Act, the current structure of British Columbia's education system allows Principals and Vice-Principals to negotiate a master contract while requiring each individual employee to sign their own individual contract of employment. While school districts and local BCPVPA Chapters typically negotiate standard contracts within a district, each Principal or Vice-Principal must take an active role in ensuring their employment terms align with their needs and provide for procedural fairness given the natural employee-employer power imbalance that exists.

The BCPVPA Member Support Services team is available to provide professional guidance and support to local Chapters entering contract negotiations. Although BCPVPA staff cannot directly negotiate on behalf of local Chapters, they can provide data, research, and counter proposals that are both reasonable and grounded in current legislation. The approach taken is always one of shared interest between employees and employers. The BCPVPA advocates for embedding procedural fairness into contracts, which can help mitigate the risk of future conflicts between employees and employers.

During negotiations and before signing a contract, Principals and Vice-Principals should:

1. **Carefully review and understand the contract terms and conditions.** Employment contracts often contain intricate legal language. BCPVPA provides professional guidance and can consult legal counsel on your behalf if needed.
2. **Seek clarification of ambiguous language.** Some clauses can be open to interpretation. BCPVPA regularly liaises with local Chapters to assist them in seeking clarity as to ambiguous language in contracts.





*"... each Principal or Vice-Principal must take an active role in ensuring their employment terms align with their needs and provide for procedural fairness.."*

Enlisting the experience of the BCPVPA can provide local Chapters with a province-wide perspective on employment agreements. When necessary, the BCPVPA may seek legal counsel on behalf of the local Chapter to assist with drafting or reviewing proposed clauses.

Contracts of Employment are legally binding. Seeking professional guidance from the Association or independent legal counsel before signing your contract is strongly recommended, as it mitigates your risks and may protect your rights.

## Conclusion

It is crucial for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia to understand the nuances of Contracts of Employment. As exempt employees, Principals and Vice-Principals must negotiate and sign individual employment contracts. The contract must be in compliance with all relevant statutory regulations. By staying informed and seeking professional guidance from the BCPVPA, Principals and Vice-Principals can secure fair and equitable employment terms reflective of their unique roles within public education.

## Seeking Support and Guidance

For further inquiries please contact the BCPVPA Member Support Services team. The team helps with employment-related questions and can provide formal representation or professional guidance as appropriate.

To connect with the BCPVPA office, members are encouraged to contact [mssinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca](mailto:mssinfo@bcpvpa.bc.ca) and ask to speak with a Director of Member Support Services.

# support

**The BCPVPA is all about people, and  
ensuring that our members are successful  
and supported in the important work they do.**

Our Member Support Services team has a wealth of experience in school and district based administration in BC, and training in negotiation, investigations, and school law. They are available to support members and provide guidance in a variety of areas relating to employment as Principals and Vice-Principals in the public sector.



The BCPVPA supports more than 2,700 Principals  
and Vice-Principals in BC's public education system.

**bcpvpa.org**

bcp  vpa



# SURPLUS SAFETY



HOW TO SAFEGUARD  
CRA COMPLIANCE  
IN YOUR CHAPTER

by  
**Simon Couture**  
Director, Finance  
BCPVPA



The BCPVPA is a non-profit professional association that is the provincial body representing the interests of Vice-Principals and Principals working in BC's public school system. Alongside this support, there are local Chapters operating in each of the sixty school districts, and providing their members with localized representation and learning opportunities. The BCPVPA strives to equip our members with the information and resources that they need to lead effectively in their districts, and to maintain good practices in the operation of their local Chapters.

Two years ago, I joined the BCPVPA as Director of Finance. Since my arrival, I have wondered what specialized advice and guidance I could offer to the members of the Association. I am aware that some may consider the work of those in the finance profession to be boring, or even intimidating. In consideration of that, I have been pushed to find different engaging topics to introduce to our members so that they can gain some professional insight, no matter their level of involvement in their local Chapters.

This article offers commentary on a situation that I have noted since my arrival: the surplus of funds accumulated in some Chapters. These surpluses are largely due to the accumulation of contributions from Chapter members, member dues that – for a number of reasons – have not been continually reinvested in the Chapter's operation.

It is important to be aware that, in the eyes of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), this accumulation of money could jeopardize a Chapter's non-profit status. Even though this situation is likely to apply more to local Chapters with many members, it is important for all members and Chapters to have a general awareness of the potential risks.

## A BIT OF CONTEXT

In order to be eligible for a tax exemption for your Chapter/organization related to member dues – and whether or not the Chapter is incorporated – each Chapter must comply with the criteria of Article 149 (1)(l) of the Income Tax Act. The criteria granting this exemption to an entity are that the organization:

*(a) is not a charity;*

*(b) is organized exclusively for social welfare, civic improvement, pleasure, recreation or any other purpose except profit;*

*(c) is in fact operated exclusively for the same purpose for which it was organized or for any of the other purposes mentioned in (b)*

## HOW TO RECOGNIZE IF YOUR CHAPTER IS AT RISK

According to the CRA, the grounds for surplus accumulation are determined on a case-by-case basis.

The key question for Chapters to consider is whether there is a specific reason that the organization is accumulating surplus. An accumulation must always be for activities and purchases that remain within the purpose of the organization, as defined by criteria listed in 149(1)(l)(c). To further establish this point, I also refer to your constitution in regard to the purpose or *raison d'être* of your organization. For example, accumulating money for a training project that could benefit all Chapter members could be a good reason for accumulating funds. Alternatively, constantly renewing your organization's term deposits could also be a sign that your Chapter has an accumulation of funds, and could jeopardize your not-for-profit status in CRA's view.

It is critical to also maintain a certain latitude in case of unforeseen events, to ensure the continuity of the Association. As a general rule, it is recommended



that an organization carry six to twelve months of their current operating expenditures as their surplus.

For example, if an organization has \$50,000 in annual expenditures, it should have accumulated a surplus between \$25,000 and \$50,000. This prudent amount would allow the organization to carry on activities in the event of an unexpected disruption to cash flows.

It is very possible that over the years, the accumulation of surpluses has grown without a profit motive; however, due to the nature of Chapters, with their continual cycle of executive turnover, an accumulation may not be as easily surfaced or recognized and subsequently scrutinized.

It is important for Chapters to remain aware of their own financial picture and history.

## WHAT TO DO IN A SITUATION OF ACCUMULATED FUNDS

As members of your Chapter, you may find yourselves in a situation where your Chapter has accumulated funds over time without a specific and defined purpose. In the CRA's view, this accumulation of surplus could be seen as evidence of profit for the organization. In this scenario, it is crucial to have measures in place to mindfully manage and reduce the surplus.

It is recommended that each Chapter be diligent in maintaining documentation of their internal financial planning, including the recording of proposed and planned actions. If the actions taken regarding your Chapter's accumulated surplus align with your Chapter's mission, tax exemption should be maintained. It is recommended that your Chapter validate finances with a professional accountant so that the actions your Chapter takes are aligned with the CRA criteria.

## IN CONCLUSION

Whatever your level of involvement in your Chapter, this information can help you to better understand what is happening in your local Association, and how to ensure compliance with the CRA criteria. Perhaps an increased understanding as a member of your Chapter's operation will lead you to increased involvement. *You may even consider a career change, to become a financial professional!*



Please feel free to reach out to me at [simon@bcpvpa.bc.ca](mailto:simon@bcpvpa.bc.ca) if there are financial topics that you would like to see covered in a future issue of *Principi(ed)* magazine.



Visit [bcpvpa.org](https://bcpvpa.org) to find articles related to professional learning, workplace well-being, employment relationships and much more.

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Health/Articles  
Equity/ Articles



@bcpvpa



# One small community is powering mighty change

When Brent Cook's youngest daughter, Isabella, was diagnosed with cancer, his world was completely shaken. Brent suddenly found himself navigating two worlds: one inside BC Children's Hospital, where world-class experts cared for his daughter around the clock, and the other back home in Nakusp, where he served as principal of the town's only elementary school—and where his school community was quietly planning something extraordinary.

In support of Isabella and kids like her, everyone at Nakusp Elementary had come together for a big fundraiser. Staff and students made food and crafts to sell, and residents of Nakusp came out to show their support. To the community's surprise, Isabella was also cleared for a two-day visit, so the Cooks could attend the fundraiser themselves. "It was amazing to see everyone pour their hearts into supporting both Isabella and the fundraiser. It became more than just an event. It became a symbol of unity, compassion, and hope," says Brent. Together, the community raised over \$5,000.

Nakusp Elementary is no stranger to supporting important causes. Brent believes that the potential to drive positive change is possible no matter where you are, no matter the size of your community.

**SUPPORT BC CHILDREN'S  
BY STARTING A FUNDRAISER  
AT YOUR SCHOOL.**

*"Nakusp has a population under 2,000, so to raise over \$5,000 through a school-led initiative is truly extraordinary. This experience was a powerful reminder of the strength and heart that exists in small communities."*

— Brent Cook, Principal of Nakusp Elementary

"As principals and vice principals, our role is to create an environment where everyone feels safe, valued and empowered to make a difference. That includes supporting your staff when they come forward with a cause or initiative that's close to their hearts," says Brent. "When people are given the freedom and support to pursue meaningful work, the ripple effects through your school community can be profound."

Thanks to the BC Children's Hospital Foundation Schools Match Program, Nakusp Elementary's \$5,000 donation was doubled by Odlum Brown\* for a total of \$10,000. From staff to students, this community has proven that small can achieve mighty things—just like Isabella, who's finally back at Nakusp Elementary, learning and playing alongside her classmates.



**ODLUM BROWN**  
Investing for Generations®

\*Odlum Brown is proud to once again be the official School Fundraising Match Partner for 2025. Gifts will be matched up to a cumulative total of \$20,000.

Visit [bcchf.ca/schools-youth](https://bcchf.ca/schools-youth)

# Small is MIGHTY.



ISABELLA, AGE 6

BC   
Children's  
Hospital  
Foundation

[MakeUsMighty.ca](http://MakeUsMighty.ca)



# Building Story Together

## Decolonization Through Human-Centered Design and Joy

by

**Deena Kotak Buckley, Stephen Leung, and Riley McMitchell**

**2024-2025 VEPVPA Executive**

**SD 39 (Vancouver)**



Each year, Indigenous Focus Day invites us not only to reflect, but to act... to move from awareness to meaningful change. This is the heart of "ReconciliACTION".

At the April 2025 Indigenous Focus Day, keynote speaker Dr. Dustin Louie offered a powerful reminder:

"The goals of decolonization are to expand whose story and truth matters, the ways of knowing and being that are represented in society, and the disruption of centuries of White supremacy."

*(Barriers to Engaging with Reconciliation in Canadian Education: Confusing Colonial and Western Knowledge, 2024)*

Inspired by this call to action, we challenged ourselves to identify the places and spaces where we could begin this work.

We started to understand that decolonization doesn't always require a radical break from the past. Instead, it can be an expansion – an invitation to build upon the wisdom, care, and collective strength that already exists within our communities.

In June 2024, a new executive team was elected to the Vancouver Elementary Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association (VEPVPA), united by a shared commitment to center decolonization in our leadership. As our own governing body, VEPVPA became a safe and supportive space to begin this journey. We were fortunate to inherit a strong

foundation laid by those who came before us, one rooted in care, accountability, and a deep sense of collective purpose.

We did not see strong governance as a barrier to decolonization. In fact, it became the platform that made experimentation and transformation possible. It provided us with:

- **Clarity of purpose** to align our efforts with our core values
- **Structures of accountability** to take bold, grounded steps
- **A culture of trust** to co-create, take risks, and learn together

These structures offered us the groundwork needed to imagine something even more liberatory. Therefore, rather than rushing into executive meetings in September, we intentionally chose to begin by connecting as people, to center relationships.

Carolyn Roberts (St'át'imc and Stó:lō) shared in her book *Re-storying Education* that, “decolonized education focuses on the whole being rather than the parts, and relationships are the key.” So, in early July we gathered informally for dinner and opened with a circle practice, taught to us by Carolyn. We asked: “If your school year were a movie genre, what would it be?” This relationship-focused prompt marked our first shift from *me* to *we*, seeing each other not just as colleagues, but as humans with stories.

## Human-Centered Design: A Pathway Forward

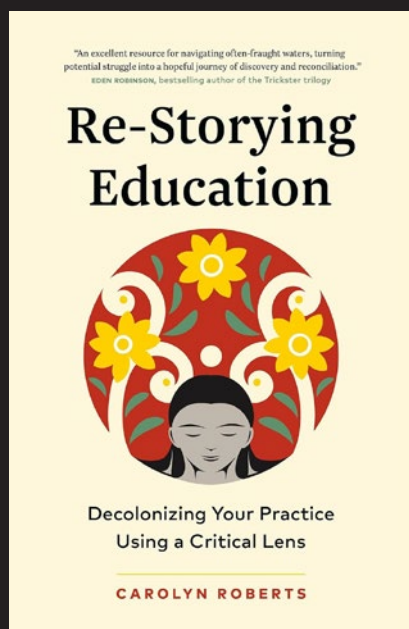
Following this informal gathering in July, we reconvened in late August for a facilitated session with Dr. Andrea McComb, BCPVPA Director of Professional Learning and Development. Together, we shaped a shared vision and framework for the year. What emerged was a commitment to inclusive leadership, guided by the KLSS framework, where everyone is **Known, Loved, Safe, and Successful**.

*“Circle Work is a practice of **decolonization**, in the way the physical space encourages engagement with the knowledge-making process. Positioning the educator as a facilitator and a participant, in the learning community, this removes the hierarchy of power and domination found in western colonial classrooms.”*

Carolyn Roberts

*Re-Storying Education:  
Decolonizing Your Practice  
Using a Critical Lens*

Page Two, 2024



*The work undertaken by VEPVPA has been based on a body of work by Kendall Zoller and Ochan Kusuma-Powell.  
In the commentary below, Zoller and Kusuma-Powell comment on their framework.*

What has surfaced over time for those who experience our work is the continuing importance of relationships. When working with groups:

1. There will always be enough work
2. Time will always be too short to do everything
3. The higher the quality of our relationships, the more work we get done (and with greater quality)

Of course, others have said the same thing, so this is not new. What Ochan and I have been focusing on is the “how” of creating a culture with the attributes you want. We know that when you focus on something, you change it. All of us have engaged in professional development around teaching, assessment, collaboration, and more, and have seen the positive impacts.

We asked ourselves: if you focused upon culture, can you change it? The important piece for us around culture is exemplified in the 5 Intentions. By focusing on these 5 Intentions, you can develop a more robust culture centered on relationships.

Here is a recent writing Ochan and I created that describe the 5 Intentions in more detail.

### **Intentions Needed to Develop Inclusive Cultures**

1. **Embracing Equity of Voice:** Not only is everyone, regardless of position or background, invited to participate and voice their perspectives, everyone also feels invited to contribute: their thinking is sought. Each one of us should feel capable of contributing and feel valued in doing so.
2. **Honoring and Valuing Cultures:** Knowing that prevailing culture within an organization often reflects the values, norms, and assumptions of a privileged group, space is made so the cultures and experiences of historically underestimated or overshadowed groups can be elevated. Regardless of whether or not we have membership in the dominant school culture, we need to develop a curiosity about the cultures of those with whom we work.
3. **Being Compassionate:** Empathy on its own is insufficient. The Buddhist scholar Thupten Jinpa writes the components of compassion to be empathy (feeling), cognition (thinking), and action (doing). Exercise kindness; be nonjudgmental. Seeing others in a generous light, and doing what it takes to recognize the humanity in others, serves to make our communities kinder places.
4. **Living Collective Purpose:** Understand, embrace, and live shared vision and goals. Help everyone find their place in the story so the work of the group is aligned and shared. We know that every school has a story, and every school serves the community in which it is located. Living collective purpose allows us to bring together the strengths and contributions of each community member so they feel a true sense of belonging.
5. **Dialoguing for Generativity:** We engage deliberately in collaborative conversations with the intention of exploring possibilities and seeking innovative and creative outcomes. This requires that we actively listen, maintain an open mind, and seek diverse perspectives. Each of us can serve to extend the thinking of others. When we dialogue for generativity, we build on each other’s ideas and create something far more complex than we could have done on our own.

*Ochan Kusuma-Powell, EdD – has had a lifelong interest in developing inclusive schools and currently serves as a consultant to International Schools in the areas of coaching, collaboration, and inclusion.*

*Kendall Zoller, EdD – is an author and global consultant on communication, facilitation, and leadership.*



## To Be Known, Loved, Safe and Successful

We define inclusion as the extent to which members of a group or community feel known, loved, safe and successful: acknowledged, cared for, secure and accomplished. These dimensions are easily recognized as essential to human well-being and provide the environment necessary for collaboration. They are also scalable across multiple and diverse stakeholder groups, including all members of a school community: ranging from students and teachers to non-teaching professionals and parents. When these dimensions are prioritized and integrated, they create a culture of acceptance and inclusion. When an individual feels included, they experience these four dimensions in the following ways:

### Being Known

People in the organization recognize and value me • People know who I am • I matter and feel respected - I enjoy status within the organization • Others listen to me when I speak • What I say counts - I have voice

### Feeling Loved

People in the organization care about me • They are interested in my growth and development • I can be my authentic, best self • I am accepted for who I am • Others show me personal regard - I feel appreciated and valued

### Being Safe

People engage with me without judgment • I can take risks and others will not be judgmental towards me • I can make mistakes and be forgiven • I am not bullied • Others are careful and conscious of not committing micro-aggressions against me or others

### Being Successful

I find meaning in the work I do • I am encouraged to be self-directed • Even as I work towards the organization's success, I also have my own, personal goals • I have a sense of achievement about my work - I can grow and learn in this environment • My values are aligned with the values of the organization - they are a good fit

Read the full article in  
*International Schools  
Magazine*, Summer 2023



This framework helped us shift our focus from systems to people. It led us to embrace human-centered design, not as a trend, but as a deeply relational way of working. It means:

- Listening deeply to voices long underrepresented
- Co-creating solutions that honour diverse ways of knowing
- Iterating with humility, knowing transformation is a journey

It was not about perfection – we wanted it to be about presence. We wanted to show up with open hearts and a willingness to be changed by what we hear.

## Centering Joy in the Work

During our August session, we also co-created collaboration norms. The list was solid, but we felt something was missing. When Andrea asked, “What are we missing?” someone responded, “Where is the joy?” That moment was pivotal. We realized joy wasn’t an add-on – it was essential. Joy would be the thread that brought us together, kept us engaged, and made people look forward to gathering.

Joy can often be misunderstood in justice work, seen as frivolous or indulgent. But joy is resistance. Joy is resilience. Joy is what sustains us.

When we center joy, we:

- Celebrate cultural resilience and community wisdom
- Design spaces of belonging where people feel safe to be their full selves
- Reclaim our right to thrive—not just survive

Joy reminds us why we are here. It connects us. It sustains us. Research shows that it also makes things better for the students we serve. As shared by author, leader, teacher, and coach Elena Aguilar, “when adults thrive, schools transform into joyful, resilient, and equitable places of learning”.

## Our Journey: What We Are Learning

Throughout the year, we recognized that this work is ongoing – and that it is messy, beautiful, non-linear, and deeply human. Across all our structures and touchpoints, we have purposely created space for joy, engagement, and belonging. Here is what we have tried:

- **From Me to We:** Starting every general meeting with connection activities related to one of the traits of inclusive leadership: Known, Loved, Safe, and Successful
- **Modelling purposeful land acknowledgments:** Opening Friday virtual meetings with learning about the land
- **Guest Speakers:** Inviting speakers aligned with our theme, decentering our voices, and sharing meals afterward
- **Personal Outreach:** Reaching out individually to support, and personally inviting colleagues to meeting and socials
- **Meeting Flow:** Flipping agendas – starting with connection and leadership, ending with governance: decentering systems, recentring humans

- **Leadership Series:** Launching a speaker series focused on relationships
- **Social Connection:** Creating relaxed spaces for people to connect at all levels of the 'hierarchy'

## Our Impact

Over the year, we saw a significant increase in attendance at general meetings and socials, so much so that we have had to increase the budgets for these events next year. We also saw an increase in the number of people putting their names forward for working groups. We even ended the year with a fulsome election, with multiple people running for the positions, demonstrating to us that more people wanted to be part of the executive. Most importantly, the tone of our gatherings shifted – less formal, more joyful, more human.

We received feedback from our colleagues:

- *"The tone and tenor of the VEPVPA leadership – heart, clarity, good humour, and humanity. Thank you!"*
- *"I loved the opening activities, especially the one highlighting LOVE as a pedagogical centre."*



## Norms

**Notice discomfort, stay curious**

**Speak with (not to) others**

**Listen to understand and ask questions for clarity**

**Name and acknowledge contributions**

**One process at a time, one topic at a time**

**Leave with a little more joy than you came with**

- *“The check-in messages from colleagues were meaningful. Keep bringing in relevant speakers with practical leadership insights.”*
- *“You created places of belonging where joy and love led to human flourishing.”*



## Looking Ahead

As we look to next year with a new executive, we will take with us the knowledge that decolonization is not a checklist – it is a mindset, a practice, and a way of being. It asks us to lead with humility, to center relationships over results, and to recognize that joy is not a luxury: it is a necessity. Through this journey, we have learned that transformation begins with connection. It is nurtured through trust, sustained by care, and made meaningful through shared purpose. It is a shared story. As said by the late Richard Wagamese, Ojibwe Canadian author and journalist from the Wabaseemoong Independent Nations, “We

are story. All of us. What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we’re here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship – we change the world, one story at a time.”

As we continue to learn, we remain committed to listening deeply and growing together – with care, with courage, and with joy – so that we may build a community that is not only inclusive, but truly rooted in belonging, the creation of the best possible story together.

**VEPVPA thanks the 2024-2025 Executive: Deena Kotak-Buckley, Janine Lamb, Steven Leung, Amber Logie, Riley McMitchell, Laura Rhead, Rose Thomas, Sharon Vieira, and Trevor Wrinch**





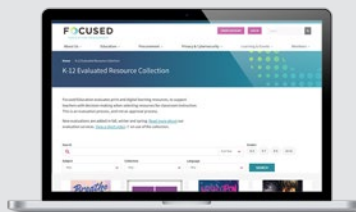
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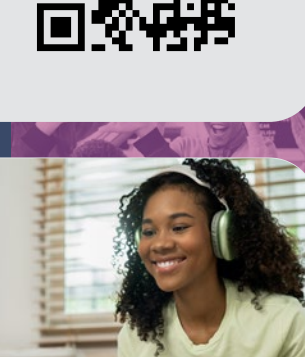


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Lessons for  
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**Selecting Learning  
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**TEAR** out this  
page, **MAKE  
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your staff!





# FOUNDATIONS

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## for **New** School Leaders

### \*REFLECTIONS\*

by  
**Misti Askew**  
Principal  
SD 43 (Coquitlam)

I have been part of the SD No. 43 (Coquitlam) community for more than 25 years and, throughout that time, my passion for both learning and leadership has continued to grow. Most of my career has been spent in middle schools, where I have had the privilege of working as a teacher and Vice-Principal. Each role has taught me something new about the power of connection, collaboration, leadership, and the importance of creating spaces where students, their families, and staff feel seen and supported.

This past year, I stepped into a new chapter as Principal of École Westwood Elementary in Port Coquitlam. It has been a year of learning, listening, and leading with heart. Transitioning from middle school to elementary has deepened my appreciation for the foundational years of education, and the incredible impact that early learning environments have on a child's development.

At the core of my leadership philosophy is a simple but powerful belief: strong relationships and shared vision are the heartbeat of a thriving school community. I strive to lead in a way that builds

trust and encourages open communication while empowering others to grow. Whether it is supporting staff in their professional journeys, partnering with families, or celebrating student successes, leadership is about lifting others up and creating a culture where everyone feels they belong.

To me, leadership is about helping others thrive while staying grounded in my personal values. It is about creating a space where people feel safe, heard, and inspired to bring their best selves forward. I don't see leadership as issuing orders — it is about listening deeply, supporting thoughtfully, and leading by example. The most impactful leaders I have known ask meaningful questions, spark reflection, and empower those around them to grow their own strengths. Leadership, especially in education, is about building trust, making thoughtful decisions, and lifting others up, especially when things get tough. And, boy: I know you can all relate!

My journey into educational administration began during one of the most challenging times in recent history: the global pandemic. My personal



Dr. Andrea McComb, BCPVPA Director of Professional Learning,  
and Misti Askew, Principal, SD 43 (Coquitlam) at the  
2025 Foundations for New School Leaders

I gained new professional tools that have helped me to support others with empathy and intention, and to grow both as a reflective leader and in my personal life.

So, when the call went out for the 2025 Foundations facilitators, I didn't hesitate. I jumped at the chance to be part of something that had shaped me, and to help in creating the kind of experience I had longed for during my own Foundations journey. Being selected was an honour and, as the week approached, I felt a mix of emotions — nervousness about the unknown, and excitement about the adventure ahead. Although I had just finished a very hectic but rewarding first year as a Principal, I knew this experience would be a great way to kick off my summer!

Thankfully, once I arrived, the nerves began to melt away. Gathering with the other facilitators to prepare for the week felt like stepping into something familiar and energizing. There was quiet reassurance in knowing I wasn't alone. I was surrounded by others who were just as committed to creating a meaningful experience for our participants. As we settled in, I realized that my role was exactly what I had longed for during my own Foundations experience: the chance to listen to inspiring presenters, guide thoughtful conversations within my table group and, most importantly, foster genuine connections amongst our table group.

On 'Day 1', I woke up early — I was excited, a little anxious, and full of anticipation. I made my way to the venue, wondering who I would be spending time with over the next five days. As participants began to arrive, one by one, I started to hear familiar stories. Many had come with similar intentions: they had heard glowing feedback about Foundations,

Foundations for New School Leaders experience occurred in the thick of COVID, sitting in my basement on Zoom, trying to connect through a screen. While the professional learning was rich and meaningful, I found myself craving the relationships and human connection that are so central to my leadership style.

In 2023, I had the opportunity to take Cognitive Coaching through the BCPVPA, and it was a turning point in my leadership. I discovered a deep passion for coaching not just as a skill, but as a way of being.

*"My personal Foundations for New School Leaders experience occurred in the thick of COVID, sitting in my basement on Zoom, trying to connect through a screen. While the professional learning was rich and meaningful, I found myself craving the relationships and human connection that are so central to my leadership style."*



and were eager to connect with others who were navigating similar leadership journeys. That shared sense of purpose created an immediate bond. It was comforting and affirming to know that we were all here not just to learn, but to grow together.

Throughout the week, I found myself deeply moved by the openness and vulnerability in the room. Our guest speakers presented meaningful content,

participants shared their stories, their challenges, and their hopes, and in doing so, we created a space that felt safe, authentic, and alive. I saw firsthand how powerful it is when educators come together with curiosity and compassion. The conversations at my table were rich and layered, filled with laughter, reflection, and moments of real insight. I felt honoured to witness and be a part of the growth happening around me and grateful to play a small part in it.

*Misti Askew connecting with her Foundations table group, Table 1*





*"I saw firsthand how powerful it is when educators come together with curiosity and compassion. The conversations at my table were rich and layered, filled with laughter, reflection, and moments of real insight."*

Foundations was a chance to connect, to learn, and to lead alongside others who care deeply about education. It reaffirmed my belief that leadership is not a solo act — it is a shared journey, built on relationships, curiosity, and a commitment to growth. The week provided a much needed opportunity for me to reconnect to my purpose and vision, and gave me space for personal reflection along with the ability to make lasting relationships with other attendees.

This experience reminded me why I chose educational leadership in the first place. It's not about titles or roles — it's about relationships, connection, and the courage to keep learning. Through Foundations I stepped into that space with intention and heart, and I left feeling more inspired than ever to continue my educational leadership journey.



BCPVPA Foundations for New School Leaders takes place the first week of July. Foundations is an exceptional opportunity for leadership development, networking, learning, and growth that supports new leaders to 'think like a Principal and Vice-Principal'.  
*Watch for details of the 2026 learning event!*



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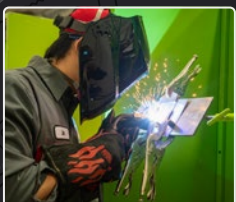
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Resources/Publications



# learning

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# Amplication

for **Experienced** School Leaders





# Transformative Learning



by

***Kasha Duff, SD36  
Morgen MacDonald, SD83***

***Navshina Savory, SD38  
Gwen Thornburn, SD35***

***Dr. Andrea McComb, BCPVPA***

Leadership in education demands constant reflection, adaptability, and a deep sense of purpose. For experienced school leaders, the Amplification for Experienced School Leaders program — I and II — provided the perfect setting to step away from daily pressures and engage in intentional self-discovery.

In this transformative leadership course, participants embark on a journey of self-discovery, reflection, and intentional growth. Amplification goes beyond traditional leadership training; it invites participants to connect deeply with their purpose as a school leader.

## **A Setting That Inspires Reflection**

Located in Vernon, Sparkling Hill Resort & Spa offered the perfect balance of relaxation and introspection. The stunning environment, complemented by guided workshops and reflective activities, allowed participants to truly decompress and refocus. One participant described the retreat as "completely magical and relaxing," an opportunity to pause, reassess, and reconnect with their leadership vision.

Beyond structured discussions, the peaceful setting enabled participants to engage in personal reflection—whether by journaling, walking the scenic trails, reading a leadership book, or simply soaking in the quiet moments before and after sessions. For many, this space was essential in gaining clarity and renewing their leadership mindset at such a busy time of year.

## **Assessing the Balance of Our Lives**

An impactful element of Amplification I, as guided by Dr. Andrea McComb, was the values exercise that was used to assess life's balance and priorities. When we hold up what we value the most and look through the lens of time and energy, we discover imbalances. Setting an intention to prioritize relationships and things that are important to us supported us in setting

our vision and commitments to return to our daily lives fueled by clarity.

For one participant, an unexpected takeaway was the nuanced difference between the values of inclusion and belonging. The distinction sparked deeper reflection on the intentionality behind leadership language and how the choice of words influences school culture.

Another attendee likened their leadership journey to "navigating a river with many tributaries." This metaphor powerfully illustrates the constant evolution of leadership, the diverse influences at play, and the need for adaptability when faced with uncertainty.

## **Rediscovering Purpose and Mission**

One of the most compelling components of Amplification II was the guidance of Peter Johnston, who led participants through a reflective exercise in crafting personal mission statements. This was not just a professional realignment – many participants found that their personal and professional values were deeply intertwined, making the exercise both introspective and transformative.

A Vice-Principal noted that, "There seemed to be no way to separate the personal from the professional. Peter guided us with grace and empathy through these emotions to places of confidence, renewed energy, and pride." This deep introspection helped leaders solidify their core beliefs and leadership philosophy, setting the foundation for more intentional and authentic decision-making.

## **Meaningful Moments That Left a Lasting Impact**

The Vision Board exercise was particularly transformative for participants, allowing them to visually map out their leadership aspirations. Though some had created vision boards in their personal lives, doing so in a professional context proved to be a powerful experience.

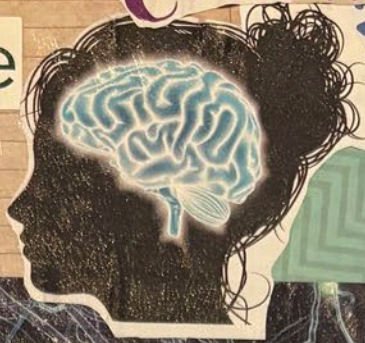


LAUGH

Hope

Heal

Communities



Support  
System

“Don't make assumptions around the students. Doing well academically doesn't mean students are doing well overall, especially internally.”

Student quote from regional well-being engagement session

## Learning and the Brain

Disciplined courage is the ability to remain focused and unwavering in light of setbacks or failures. With discipline courage, you stay true to your vision and the impact you want to make on the world, community, or self.



REAL IS RARE

In every school, the first trauma-informed step should be mapping out all the ways students, families, and even we, as educators, experience trauma at school.

—Paul Gorski, p. 14

people  
aren't  
our  
greatest  
asset  
people  
are  
our  
only  
asset.

“All My Relations”



@gapingvoid





(Left to right) Kasha Duff, Gwen Thornburn, Jodie Perry, Erin Potts

One participant anchored their board with a Brené Brown quote:

*"If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path."*

Using this quote as inspiration, they curated quotes, images, and powerful words that reflected their core values, professional goals, and leadership philosophy. Returning to school, many display their vision board in their office as a daily reminder to lead with authenticity and courage.

Other participants cherished the structured reflection time, followed by paired conversations, which allowed them to refine their thoughts and share meaningful insights with colleagues.

The balance of solitude and connection made their reflections even more impactful.

## Carrying Intentions Forward

As participants transitioned back to their schools, they carried forward newfound clarity and concrete goals. One leader emphasized their intention to foster connections and networking, understanding that intentional collaboration strengthens leadership effectiveness.

Another participant committed to amplifying student voices within their school community. Following the Amplification experience, they launched a student-led Racial Equity Committee, creating opportunities for youth empowerment and systemic change. Their leadership goal was not just about advocacy, but about providing space for students to lead and influence their environment.

Additionally, leaders left the program with a renewed sense of balance, determined to prioritize their well-being while remaining focused on student success.



## The Lasting Impact of Amplification

Ultimately, Amplification was far more than a professional retreat: it was a transformative journey of renewal, reflection, and connection. By stepping away from the immediate demands of their roles, participants found clarity in their leadership

purpose, strengthened their vision, and built lasting relationships with fellow leaders.

For those seeking inspiration, direction, and a deeper understanding of their leadership journey, Amplification will be offered again in the 2025-2026 school year, fueling leadership growth in profound ways.





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Faculty of Education

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**Tanya Azak**

Director of Instruction – Indigenous Education & Early Learning | Nisga'a

*"As a Nisga'a woman and educational leader, this learning was more than professional development-it's a journey of reconnection. It helped me deepen my understanding of how my identity, values, and community shape the way I lead. It honours diverse ways of knowing and proves that strong leadership can be both relational and transformative."*



**Sarah Browning**

Vice Principal | Okanagan Similkameen

*"I gained new tools to balance high expectations with relational leadership, and approach challenges with a mindset of possibility. The mentorship of leaders involved in this program strengthened my resolve to lead with curiosity, humility, and courage. I would strongly recommend TELP to any educational leader looking to deepen their impact."*



**Joe Osbaldeston**

VP Education Headlands School | Wales

*"Dear TELP past, present and future: TELP has provided me with such valuable insights to inquiry work and how this supports improvement and growth in schools. TELP connects you to an abundance of amazing fellow educators to learn from and share stories with. Judy, Linda and the various guest speakers are truly inspirational. Thank you TELP!"*





**Jennifer Adams**  
Principal  
Kootenay Lake



**Cori Anderson**  
Vice Principal  
Richmond



**Lee Banta**  
Acting Principal  
Richmond



**Joshua Campbell**  
Vice Principal  
Delta



**Laury Carriere**  
Director of Instruction - Indigenous  
Education & Learning Services  
Kootenay Lake



**Bronwyn Fackler**  
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Richmond



**Kirstin Funke Robinson**  
Director of Instruction  
Nanaimo-Ladysmith



**Erin Kidd**  
Learning Support Teacher  
West Vancouver



**Danielle Klassen**  
Principal  
Kootenay Lake



**Kelli Lundie**  
Vice Principal  
Delta



**Jennifer Mailley**  
Grade 3 Teacher  
New Westminster



**Shasheen Musani**  
Teacher Consultant  
Richmond



**Nona Navin**  
Principal  
Richmond



**Colleen Orzen**  
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**Kirsten Paterson**  
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Coquitlam



**Ellen Reid**  
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Developing

OUR

*THE ROLE OF  
INTENTIONAL  
DIALOGUE*

Leadership  
Identities

by

**Dr. Lucinda Wolters**

*Principal*

*SD 71 (Comox Valley)*

## *A LEADERSHIP AWAKENING*

.....

There was a time early in my leadership journey, as the lone administrator of a small rural school, when I realized something was missing in how I was engaging teachers. On paper, everything was running smoothly: tasks were completed, timelines were met, information was relayed, procedures were followed. But in staff meetings, the energy was flat, and the communication patterns were stagnant. There was a lack of engagement, curiosity, or shared ownership. Educator agency did not appear to be present, and collective meaning-making about our students and their needs was pretty much absent. The focus on the status quo was, frankly, boring!



As the person facilitating some of these meetings, I did most of the talking. The communication direction was predominantly one-way or two-way, and not multi-directional. I noted a similar pattern and feeling in district meetings. I recognized that meeting facilitation tended to be from a traditional approach that I had experienced in classrooms growing up. You know, the “sage on the stage” teaching style? Increasingly, it became apparent to me that the way adult meetings were structured in our schools and systems wasn’t just mirroring this telling approach – it was actively reinforcing it! Meetings were quietly normalizing passive participation and limiting the possibility for authentic connection and shared leadership development. And I was contributing to this unhelpful pattern in my role at the school level.

FROM TELLING TO ENGAGING

This awareness lingered, and it set me on a path to explore a different way of leading, one that focuses not just on what we do and what needs to get done, but on developing a **sense of being** and **who we are** from a clear – yet multi-layered and evolving – individual and collective leadership identity. This kind of approach prompts an on-going narrative of rich engagement that involves not only the quest to understand oneself, but to see and seek to understand others, their worldviews and experiences, and to influence leadership development.

Such an understanding of self and others can create space for powerful emergence through the ongoing interplay and exchange between people within place-based contexts. It invites people in their setting to ask, “Who are we? Why are we doing this? Why are we doing it this way?” (Garmston & Wellman, 2016). Rather than centering procedures and routines, it is the *meaning-making* and the *ritualization* of shared

experience that becomes the fuel for authentic engagement and leadership identity.

LEADING FROM IDENTITY,  
NOT JUST ACTION

Embracing identity-centered leadership reminds us that leadership is not just about what we do, but about who we are in relation to others.

The introduction of our new BCPVPA Leadership Competencies highlights the central role of *identity*, a concept also deeply rooted in the First Peoples Principles of Learning. Embedded within these competencies is an awareness of “*being in the canoe*,” that includes a commitment to relational leadership grounded in collaboration and shared responsibility with both district leaders and teachers. Framed through the lens of *leadership identity*, the Competencies invite us to deepen our understanding of *equity* and, I believe, encourage us to thoughtfully unpack and reflect on how our social identities – race, gender, sexual orientation, age, spirituality/ religion, ability – inform our leadership identities.

A critical truth tends to be overlooked in leadership: who we are, how we relate to and with others, our values, beliefs, and worldviews, fundamentally shape how we lead and how we include others in diverse and dynamic educational contexts. Moreover, I suggest that typical, traditional colonial approaches to meetings miss the mark for engaging all voices or identities in the room. Furthermore, if we truly endeavour to liberate our education systems for **all** learners, we must start with who we are and relentlessly explore in psychologically safe spaces what our leadership identities mean in relation to diverse others. Our leadership identities are certainly not “one and done”.

"Meetings were quietly normalizing passive participation and limiting the possibility for authentic connection and shared leadership development."

.....

Dilts' model outlines the different levels at which learning, change, and development can occur within individuals or organizations. These levels are typically represented hierarchically, without suggesting a strict top-down influence, but to highlight how higher levels often shape and give meaning to those below. The levels move from the more concrete to the more abstract: environment (where and when we act), behaviour (what we do), capabilities (how we do it), beliefs and values (why we do it), and finally, identity (who we believe we are). While each level can influence and be influenced by the others, shifts at the higher levels – particularly at the identity level – tend to be seen as creating deeper, more sustainable transformation. However, because they are more abstract, these levels also require greater intentionality and reflection to access and influence.





"When we pause for intentional dialogue, we lay the foundation for a more authentic, collective identity to emerge."



## UNPACKING COLONIAL PATTERNS

.....

What I have come to notice in education is that we tend to prioritize the lower levels of Dilts' model – **environment** and **behaviour** – most likely because these elements are easiest to influence even though the impact is less profound. The traditional emphasis contributes to the procedural focus and "telling" style in meetings, as previously mentioned. More precisely, we may be inclined to focus on external expectations and observable actions, then hope that this will somehow lead to deep, transformative change. We might see such a tendency when we overemphasize information-heavy meetings, specify checklists, create prescriptive plans, and provide manuals, flowcharts, and role descriptions, but remain anchored at the behavioral level.

Quite predictably, we might surmise that we will remain entrenched in these more colonial approaches. And while these tools and structures have their place – that is, they *are* necessary – they are far from sufficient. They alone cannot generate the kind of change we seek, especially when it comes to making a resonant impact for our priority learners. When we do not explore leadership identity *within* these routines, we are doomed to repeat them.

Is it any wonder that our schools really haven't changed that much in the last fifty years, with our extreme focus on the lower levels of Dilts' model? Given the increasing complexity of our world, there is no time like the present to come from a place of understanding who we are, as individuals and collectively, for our students and their future. So, in

practical terms, how do we go about prioritizing the other levels – such as our identity – and what does this mean for meetings?

## DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP IDENTITY THROUGH DIALOGUE

One of my favourite quotes, shared by a deeply respected mentor and Adaptive Schools trainer Carolyn McKanders, is, “The quality of the adult conversations directly relates to the quality of the work that gets done for kids.” This quote draws attention to the profound impact of both how we talk, and what we talk about. When considering leadership identity, to focus on the higher levels of Dilts’ model, we must engage in richer, more multidirectional dialogue. These kinds of conversations allow us to clarify and express not only our thoughts and feelings, but also our values and beliefs. They create space for mutual influence and shared understanding and lead to decisions that build collective ownership and commitment.

When we pause for intentional dialogue, we lay the foundation for a more authentic, collective identity to emerge. Simply put, if we continually limit our conversations to the same voices and focus primarily on tasks and information, we also limit our growth. In doing so, we risk stalling the development of our leadership identities and, more critically, perpetuating systems that continue to leave priority learners behind. Developing leadership identities through intentional dialogue is never a waste of time.

## SOURCES & RESOURCES

Garmston, R., & Wellman, B.,  
*The Adaptive Schools Sourcebook* (2016)

Thinking Collaborative:  
[www.thinkingcollaborative.com/aboutas](http://www.thinkingcollaborative.com/aboutas)

Read "The Best  
Leaders Encourage  
'Spacious Thinking'"  
by Megan Reitz &  
John Higgins



*Dr. Lucinda Wolters is a Principal for Comox Valley Schools at Huband Park Elementary. She is also a Training Associate for Thinking Collaborative and facilitates the Adaptive Schools Foundation Seminar. In her dissertation, she explored "The Influence of Adaptive Schools Training on the Development of Principals' Leadership Identity," (2022), with clear and positive results. [smallfires.ca](http://smallfires.ca)*

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[bcpvpa.org/membership/application](http://bcpvpa.org/membership/application)





# An Invitation

## To Lead Through a Compassionate Lens

by

**Terri Ann Hayes**

*Principal*

*SD 06 (Rocky Mountain)*

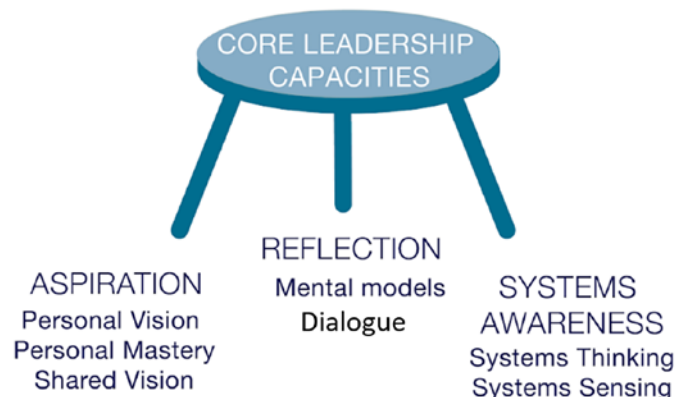
You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself in any  
direction you choose.

*Oh, the Places You'll Go*  
Dr. Seuss

From my early career as a primary school teacher, to my surprising and unexpected transformation into a school leader, I have been a self-professed Queen of Professional Development. As you know, educational leaders are presented with myriad directions we can choose. I have shelves full of books on educational leadership, and I have attended countless leadership workshops over the years, always striving to move myself and my school toward a more authentic, student-centred model of education. But nothing has had such a profound impact on how I engage with this work as my encounter with Compassionate Systems Leadership.

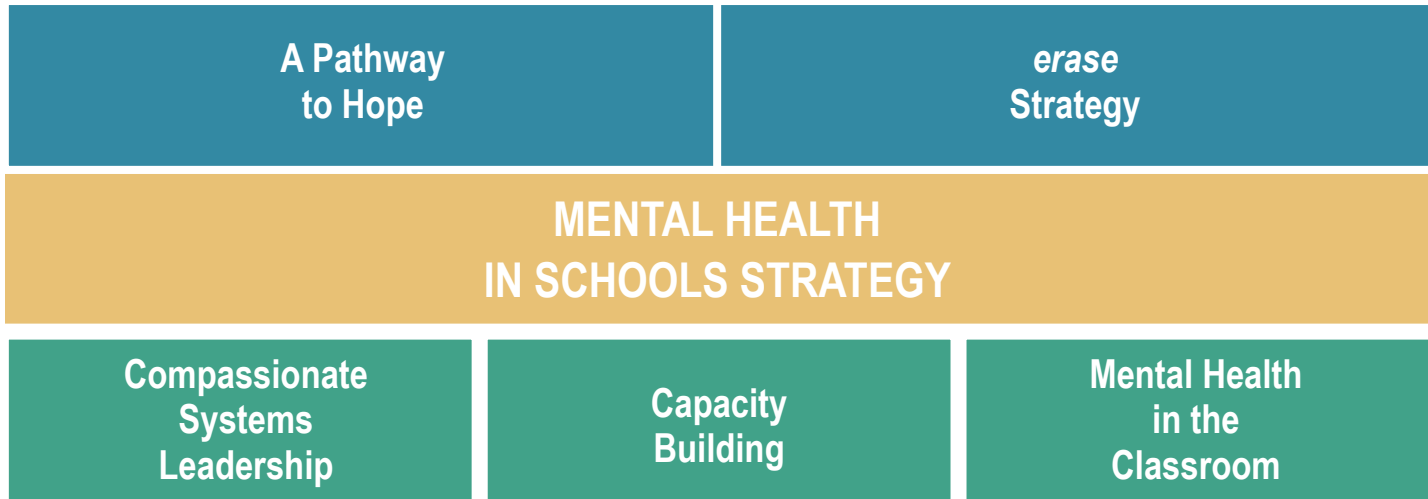
Compassionate Systems Leadership is best visualized as a three-legged stool, with each leg representing the capacities we, as leaders, strive to build: personal mastery; awareness of our relationship with others and with Mother Earth; and systems thinking, or recognizing how our decisions and actions impact the systems in which we live and work.

THREE LEGGED STOOL



Graphic courtesy of the Center for Systems Awareness: [systemsawareness.org](http://systemsawareness.org)

Compassionate Systems Leadership is endorsed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care as one of the foundations of their Mental Health in Schools Strategy.



In fact, Compassionate Systems Leadership recognizes that every person in our system – from the bus driver to the Education Assistant to the Superintendent – is a leader, and encourages shared leadership and shared responsibility for the conditions within our schools and school districts.

In some ways, Compassionate Systems Leadership confirmed what I already knew: that how we show up matters, and that authentic relationships are key to meaningful change. It provides tools and dispositions to support the mental health of the adults working in our buildings, acknowledging that **we** must be well before we can hope to address the alarming levels of stress, anxiety, and depression presenting in our students.

In other ways, Compassionate Systems has challenged me, and my staff, to slow down and examine many of our traditional practices, acknowledging their colonial foundations. It has allowed us to recognize that, for many educators, we “do” school the way we *experienced* school, because it worked for us, without thinking about all of those students for whom school was – and is – associated with failure. Sadly, these are often our most vulnerable and marginalized students.

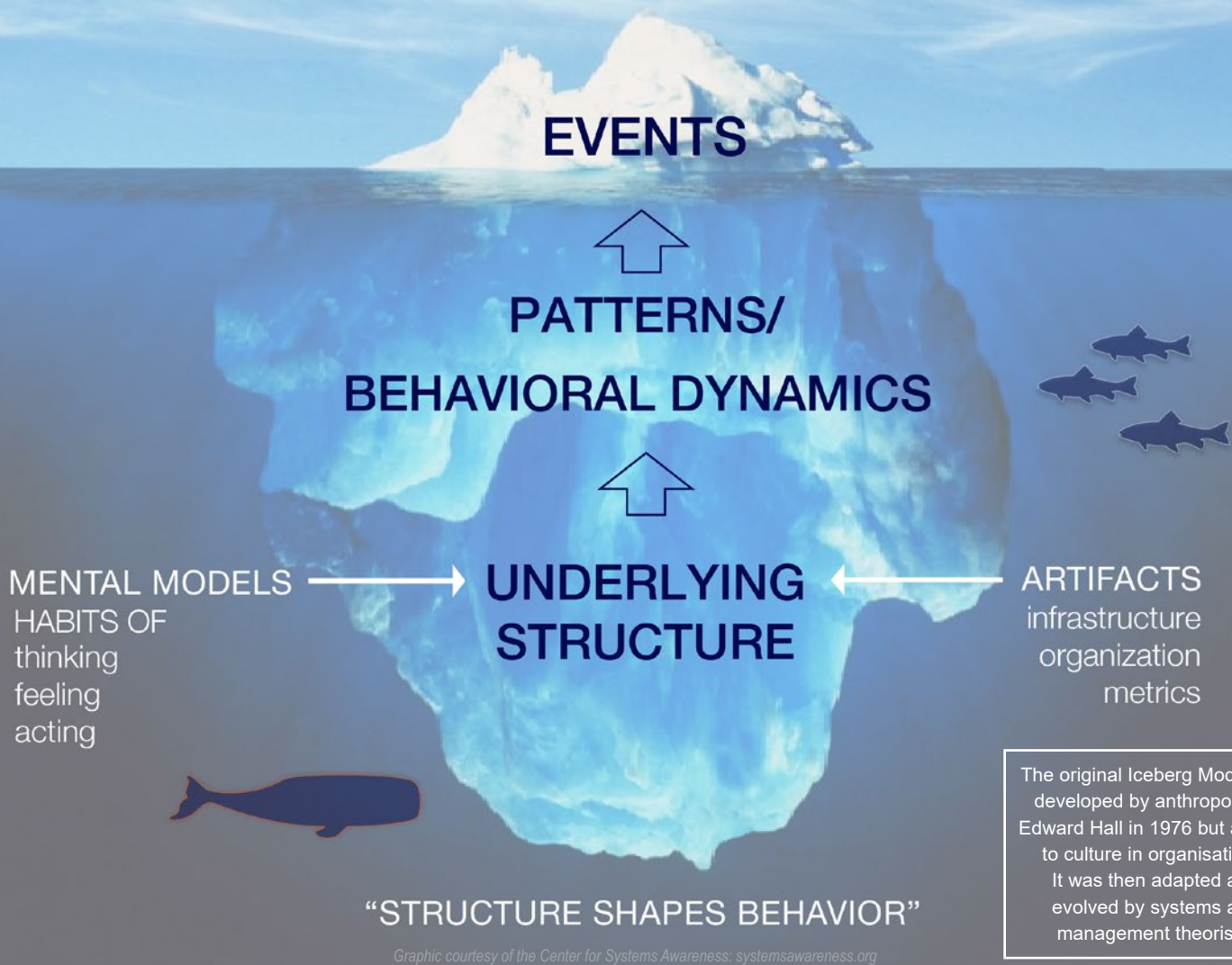
Let me provide you with one example of how Compassionate Systems thinking helped us, as a school, to address a problem of practice. When I arrived at my current school, our Student Code of Conduct mandated that, if a student intentionally hurt someone, they would be suspended from school. This put me in a difficult position, where I was dishing out suspensions to students, knowing that my actions alienated them from school, and from opportunities to learn. Using systems tools, we were able to collectively examine our school’s Code of Conduct.

Using the Systems Thinking Iceberg (*shown on next page*), we were able to dive below the surface and examine why some of our students hurt others. We recognized that, in many cases, they had been taught to “fight back” if someone bothers them, and they did not have any other strategies to deal with conflict. We also realized that these students were often targeted by other students, who were quick to use hurtful words, choosing to use them when we were out of earshot.

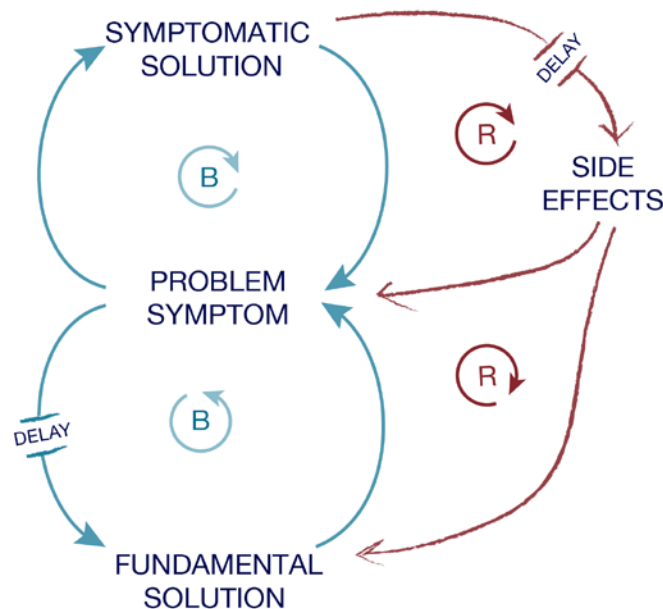
Another tool, Shifting the Burden (*shown on next page*), helped us to interrogate why we, as a staff, kept returning to the suspension model of discipline. We recognized that when a student is suspended, we all breathe a collective sigh of relief because, for a few days, we don’t have to worry about the student “getting into trouble” at school. In addition, the community looks upon suspension as us “doing something” about the problem. An interesting observation is that those parents who demand punitive consequences for students who have harmed their child often seek



# SYSTEMS THINKING ICEBERG



## SHIFTING THE BURDEN



Shifting the Burden is recognized as a systems archetype that is part of the palette of systems thinking tools

**B = BALANCING LOOP** **R = REINFORCING LOOP**

Graphic courtesy of the Center for Systems Awareness: [systemsawareness.org](http://systemsawareness.org)

compassionate and restorative consequences when it is their own child who perpetrates harm against another.

Shifting the Burden also supported us in recognizing that there are alternative ways of dealing with hurtful students, ways that build long-term skills and a greater sense of belonging. When they return from a suspension, most students do their best not to get into trouble again. However, because they don't have conflict resolution tools in their toolbox, and because, inevitably, someone will come along and say something mean, the cycle begins again. Soon we end up with students on chronic suspension, negatively impacting both their academic and social development. By taking proactive steps to address the root cause of the behaviour, we began to see more positive outcomes for our students. In some cases, we provided additional supervision and coaching to help students learn new ways to deal with conflict. We also addressed the negative and hurtful comments being handed out by other students with the same lens we applied to the violent responses.

Although we did not see overnight results with this more compassionate approach, we have certainly seen many students, over time, learn to deal with their emotions in pro-social ways. I wish I could say that this process was seamless, but in fact it was often messy and uncomfortable, and frequently forced us to confront our biases and core beliefs.

Compassionate Systems Leadership is not a quick fix, a course, or a program: it is a journey. It is an

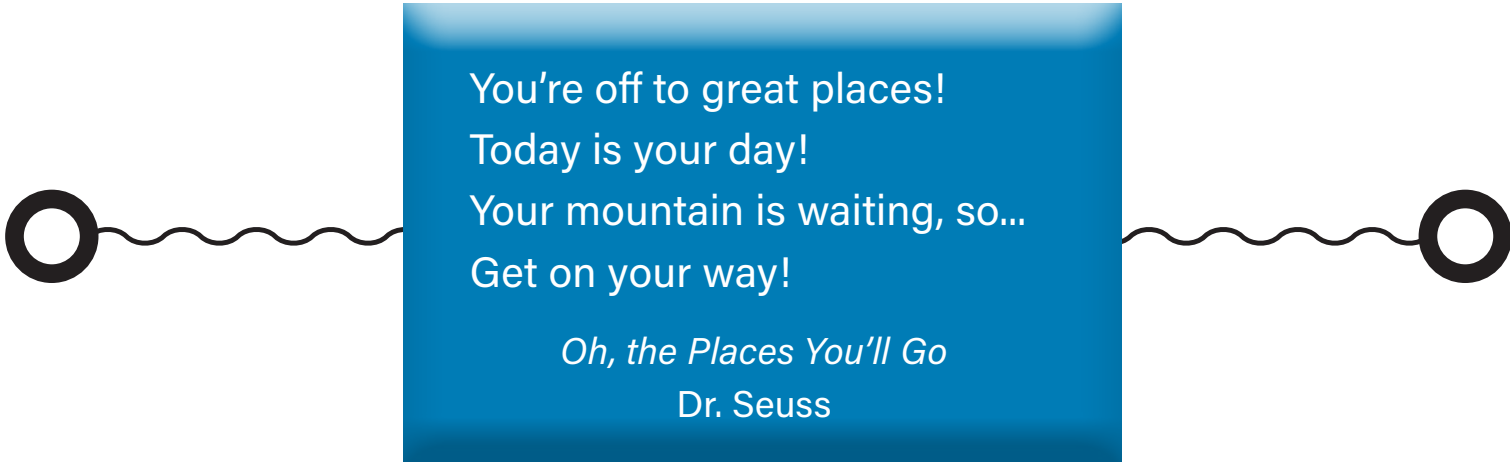
invitation to develop a deep, reflective relationship with yourself, with those around you, with the earth that sustains us, and with our shared history. For me, that journey has often been difficult, as I began to explore dark crevasses and unfamiliar terrain. However, in a world that presents uncertainty across so many realms, Compassionate Systems Leadership encourages us to be leaders who, in Margaret J. Wheatley's words, "use their power and influence, their insight and compassion, to lead people back to an understanding of who we are as human beings, to create the conditions for our basic human qualities of generosity, contribution, community, and love, to be evoked no matter what." It provides tools and opportunities to reimagine our schools as "islands of sanity in the midst of a raging, destructive sea." <sup>1</sup>

I am coming to the end of an amazing career, filled with powerful learning, wonderful staff and students, and awe-inspiring mentors and colleagues. My biggest regret? That I did not come to Compassionate Systems Leadership sooner.

If you, like me, are looking for new ways to look at yourself and your role as an educational leader, new perspectives on teaching and learning, and new tools to address an increasingly complex world, I invite you to embark on this incredible journey. It will not be easy, but it will be infinitely worthwhile. Whether you are new to your role, or a seasoned school leader, you cannot help but be transformed by the Compassionate Systems experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Wheatley, Margaret J., *Who Do We Choose to Be?* p.8

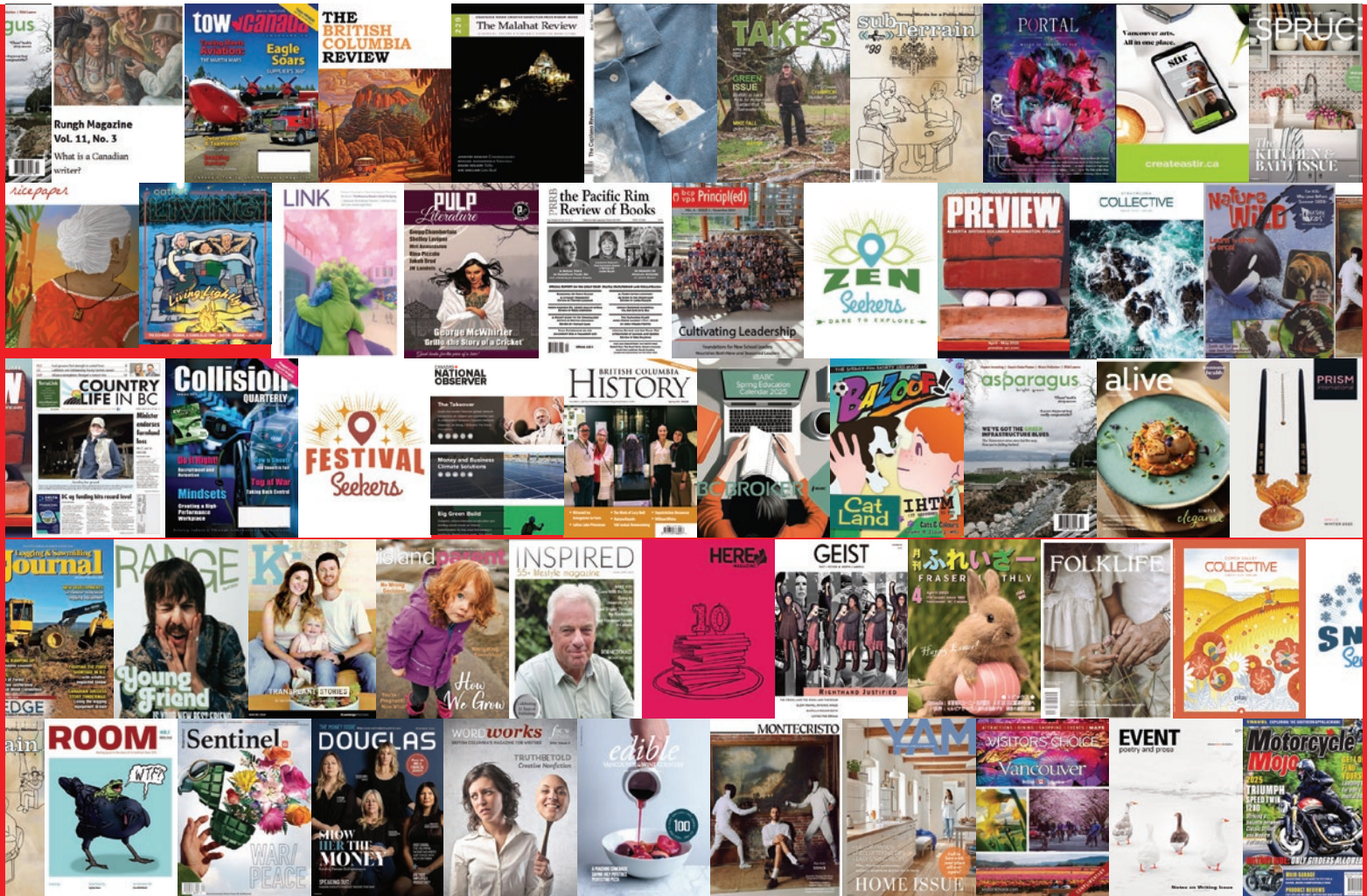


You're off to great places!  
Today is your day!  
Your mountain is waiting, so...  
Get on your way!

*Oh, the Places You'll Go*  
Dr. Seuss



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# Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging

# Integrating DEIB Within Your Literacy Program

*Fostering Empathy, Understanding, and Critical Thinking through Diverse Texts*

by  
**Michaela Mistal**  
Vice-Principal  
SD 62 (Sooke)

## I. Understanding DEIB in Literacy Strategies

In today's classrooms, creating an environment where every student feels valued, heard, and empowered is essential. One powerful way to achieve this is by integrating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) within literacy instruction. When we weave DEIB principles into our literacy programs, we not only enrich students' academic growth, but encourage the development of critical social and emotional skills that prepare them for a more empathetic and inclusive world.

### ■ What Does DEIB Mean in Literacy Strategies?

Literacy is more than just reading and writing – it is a way for students to understand themselves, others, and the world around them. Embedding DEIB in literacy means creating opportunities for all students to see their identities reflected in texts, while also engaging with diverse perspectives and experiences.

A DEIB-focused literacy approach ensures:

- **Representation:** Students see characters, authors, and stories that reflect a variety of races, cultures, abilities, languages, and identities.
- **Equity:** Instruction removes barriers and supports all learners in accessing and engaging with texts meaningfully.





- **Inclusion:** Classrooms become spaces where every voice is valued, and every student feels safe to participate.
- **Belonging:** Students feel seen, respected, and connected to their learning environment.

Through intentional text selection, inclusive practices, and meaningful dialogue, literacy becomes a powerful tool for building empathy, critical thinking, and social awareness.

## II. Background and Research

Research consistently shows that diverse and inclusive curricula lead to better academic and social outcomes. According to the National Education Association, students who engage with texts that reflect their own experiences are more motivated and connected to their learning. Exposure to diverse voices also broadens students' worldviews and cultivates empathy.

As classrooms become increasingly diverse across local and global contexts, DEIB-focused literacy instruction plays a vital role in bridging opportunity gaps. This ensures that all learners - regardless of background, identity, or lived experience - engage with texts in ways that reflect and affirm who they are, and develop an understanding of those with diverse and different experiences. It also helps to bridge identity in context of what makes us unique, and our shared experiences as human beings. This work not only supports academic achievement, but also equips students with the empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness needed to thrive in a complex, interconnected world.



### III. What Does DEIB Look Like in Literacy Strategies?

#### ■ Embedding DEIB into Literacy Instruction

- Review the options for students to select their diverse texts asking:
  - Whose stories are being told?
  - Who are the authors?
  - Are multiple perspectives being told?
- Choose literature that represents diverse authors, cultures, languages, and lived experiences.
- Ensure books serve as mirrors and windows, reflecting students' identities and offering views into the lives of others.

#### ■ Interweaving DEIB with Literacy Practices

- **Reading Comprehension:** Analyze characters' motivations, challenges, and growth in context.
- **Writing:** Encourage students to write personal stories and reflect on their values while considering the experiences of others.
- **Discussion:** Facilitate conversations exploring differences and shared experiences to build empathy and critical thinking.

"As classrooms grow more diverse, DEIB-focused literacy instruction helps bridge opportunity gaps, ensuring all students learn in ways that are meaningful to them."





## IV. Examples of DEIB in Action

### ■ Example 1: Using a Diverse Text to Discuss Empathy

- **Book:**

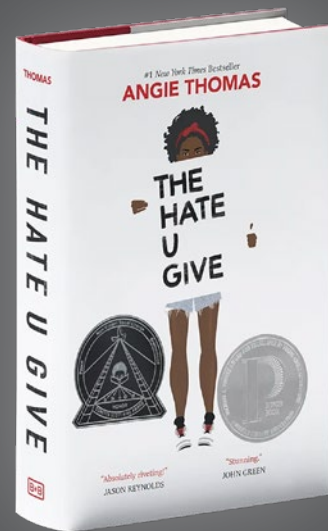
*The Hate U Give*  
by Angie Thomas

- **Activity:**

Explore Starr's journey navigating race, class, and identity. Use discussions and reflective writing to deepen understanding.

- **Prompt:**

How does Starr's experience reflect the challenges of marginalized communities? How can we promote empathy in our community?



### ■ Example 2: Using Historical Literature to Explore Equity

- **Book:**

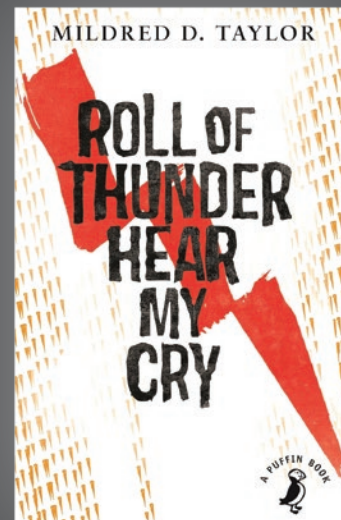
*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*  
by Mildred D. Taylor

- **Activity:**

Analyze social and racial dynamics. Create a “Then and Now” chart comparing 1930s inequities with today. Respond with a letter, poem, comic strip, or journal entry.

- **Prompt:**

What does equity mean to you now? Why is it important to explore these issues through literature?



## V. Application in the Classroom

### ■ Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment

- Establish respectful routines and discussion norms.
- Use visual schedules, key vocabulary, and first-language supports.
- Apply trauma-informed practices, recognizing lived experiences and supporting emotional processing.

## ■ Engaging Students Through Creative Expression

- **Poetry:** Write a poem exploring a book's theme (identity, empathy, social justice).
- **Letters:** Describe a book and its relevance in a personal letter.
- **Role-Playing:** Introduce characters by acting out roles.
- **Art:** Create paper characters or book art.
- **Music:** Find or write a song representing a character's personality.

## VI. Promoting Critical Thinking and Emotional Growth

- **Ask Thoughtful Questions:** What would you do in this character's place? How does this book connect to your life?
- **Build Empathy:** Use role-play and discussions to explore diverse perspectives.

## VII. Creating Safe Spaces for Critical Conversations

- Begin with grounding or soft start activities to build trust.
- Prioritize psychological safety where all voices are valued.
- Support emotional processing of sensitive content through reflection and support.

## VIII. Developing Social and Emotional Skills through Literature

- **Self-Awareness:** Analyze characters' emotions and behaviors.
- **Self-Management:** Reflect on emotional regulation.
- **Social Awareness:** Understand and respond to others' needs.
- **Relationship Skills:** Explore communication and conflict resolution.
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** Evaluate values behind characters' actions.

## IX. Fostering an Inclusive Literacy Classroom

Integrating DEIB into literacy is about more than improving reading and writing skills – it is about shaping compassionate, socially-aware individuals who are prepared to engage with the world thoughtfully and empathetically. When we intentionally incorporate diverse texts, inclusive discussions, and opportunities for creative expression, we create a learning environment where all students feel seen, valued, and empowered.

Literacy becomes a tool not just for academic achievement, but for understanding complex social issues, building empathy, and developing a strong sense of identity and community. It invites students to question, to connect, and to grow. By embracing DEIB in our literacy programs, we are planting the seeds of equity and belonging that extend far beyond the classroom and nurturing the next generation of critical thinkers, advocates, and changemakers.

Ultimately, fostering inclusion through literacy is an ongoing journey, one that requires reflection, courage, and a commitment to elevating all voices.





## Some Suggested DEIB Texts

### ***The Poet X***

by Elizabeth Acevedo

*Identity, culture, family, feminism*



### ***The Hockey Sweater***

by Roch Carrier

*Identity and cultural expectations*



### ***Walking in Two Worlds***

by Wab Kinew

*Complexities of cultural identity, societal pressures, and the transformative power of self-acceptance and community support*



### ***The Paper Boat***

by Thao Lam

*A wordless picture book that tells a story of a young girl and her family's journey to Canada*



### ***Hu-Ubuntu: I Am Because We Are***

by Patrick Makokoro

*Community and building relationships*

### ***Long Way Down***

by Jason Reynolds

*Gun violence, grief, choices, masculinity*

### ***Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You***

by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi

*Racism, history, social justice, activism*



### ***The Water Walker***

by Joanne Robertson

*The true story of an Anishinaabe woman who fought to protect the waters of her homeland.*

### ***Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe***

by Benjamin Alire Sáenz

*LGBTQ+ identity, friendship, self-discovery*

### ***I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter***

by Erika L. Sánchez

*Cultural expectations, family, mental health, identity*



### ***When We Are Kind***

by Monique Gray Smith

*A picture book that explores the power of kindness and its impact on others*

### ***The Hate U Give***

by Angie Thomas

*Racial injustice, police brutality, activism*



### ***Pemmican Wars***

by Katherena Vermette

*Cultural identity, historical awareness, and personal growth*



# Wellness

*"... with this new language within the Workers' Compensation Act, WSBC has an increased ability to provide resources to help facilitate reasonable accommodation, as well as an ability to enforce compliance..."*

by

**Rochelle Morandini**

**Director, Member Health & Well-Being  
BCPVPA**



# WorkSafeBC's Duty to Cooperate and Duty to Maintain Employment for Injured Workers

On **January 1, 2024**, WorkSafeBC (WSBC) incorporated Compensation to Injured Workers and Their Dependents, Division 3.1, Sections 154.1 to 154.6 into Part 4 of the Workers Compensation Act. Specifically, two sections – Section 154.2, the duty to cooperate, and Section 154.3, the duty to maintain employment – set out the obligations for employers and workers to cooperate in a timely and safe return to work. In addition, this language defines the requirements for employers – including school districts – to maintain employment with their injured workers.

According to WSBC, the goal of this new legislation is to recognize that there are benefits to injured workers when they remain connected to employment following a workplace injury, including:

- Promotion of a timely, suitable, and durable return or continuation of work
- Preservation of, or restoration of, employment relationships
- Reduction in the risk of joblessness and worklessness, and potentially reduction of the financial impact of the workplace injury

## The Duty to Cooperate

Under Division 3.1, Section 154.2 of the Workers Compensation Act, **the duty to cooperate** creates obligations for workers and employers to cooperate with each other, and with WSBC, to identify and make suitable work available to workers in a timely and safe manner following an injury.

The Employer and Worker expectations include:

### The Employer

- Is to contact the worker as soon as practicable after the worker is injured to maintain communication (except where communication with the worker may cause harm or delay recovery).
- Is to identify and make available suitable work that, where possible, restores the full wages the worker was earning pre-injury.
- Is to provide WSBC with information required to help the worker return or continue to work.

### The Worker

- Is to contact the employer as soon as practicable after the injury and maintain communication (except where this may cause further harm or a delay in recovery).
- Is to assist the employer to identify suitable work.
- Is to provide WSBC with information required to help return or continue to work.
- Is to not unreasonably refuse suitable work when offered at any time from the injury employer.

The duty to cooperate legislation applies to all claims with a date of injury after January 1, 2022, and all decisions after January 1, 2024.

## The Duty to Maintain Employment

Under the duty to maintain employment, a school district has an obligation to maintain the employment of an injured worker who has been employed at that district for at least one year prior to their injury.

If a worker is fit to carry out the essential duties of their pre-injury work, the employer must:

1. Offer that pre-injury work to the worker, or
2. Offer to the worker alternative work of a kind and at wages that are comparable to the worker's pre-injury work and wages

If a worker is fit for work, but not fit to carry out the essential duties of their pre-injury work, an employer must offer the first suitable work that becomes available.

The employer must make any changes to the work or workplace necessary to accommodate, up to undue hardship. Undue hardship is determined upon the specifics of each case. There are limits to this obligation; examples include accommodations which are unsafe, or which impact the seniority clauses in collective agreements. The accommodation does not need to be the worker's preferred accommodation: the employer only needs to provide a reasonable option. Simply because an accommodation may require a financial investment from the district does not make it an undue hardship.

*"While accommodating teachers and support staff seems to happen regularly, accommodating school-based leaders is often challenging due to the complexities of their roles."*







*"with this new language within the Workers' Compensation Act, WSBC has an increased ability to provide resources to help facilitate reasonable accommodation, as well as an ability to enforce compliance through penalties (for both workers and employers)."*

If an employer terminates a worker's employment six months after the worker begins carrying out suitable work or the essential duties of their pre-injury job, the employer may be found to have failed in their duty to maintain employment.

The duty to maintain employment legislation applies to all claims with a date of injury after July 1, 2023, and all decisions after January 1, 2024.

## Non-compliance

Division 3.1, Section 154.5 defines the consequences for employers who breach their Return to Work (RTW) obligations under the duty to cooperate and duty to maintain employment. Workers, however, also may experience consequences should they not cooperate in the accommodation process. For example, workers who do not cooperate, or who do not accept reasonable accommodation offerings, may have their WSBC compensation benefits suspended or reduced. Meanwhile, employers who are not in compliance may be charged with financial penalties. In addition, workers may continue to receive wage loss benefits, even if they are fit to return to work, if the employer does not provide suitable opportunities. It is the role of WSBC to determine whether there has been non-compliance and to establish any potential penalty.

## Members Needing Accommodation

While the percentage of Principals and Vice-Principals injured at work remains low, there has been an increase in accepted WSBC claims for school administrators over the past few years. Principals and Vice-Principals returning

to work after recovering from these injuries often need temporary accommodation to reintegrate them into the workplace. A smaller number require permanent changes to some components of their jobs in order to safely return to work. While accommodating teachers and support staff seems to happen regularly, accommodating school-based leaders is often challenging due to the complexities of their roles.

This new legislation in the Workers Compensation Act does reinforce what is already required under the BC Human Rights Act, but only for workplace injuries causing wage loss that are accepted by WorkSafeBC. The BC Human Rights Act still requires employers to accommodate employees regardless of whether their medical condition is work or non-work related.

Unfortunately, and particularly since the pandemic, individuals launching BC Human Rights complaints for workplace accommodation face a slow and tedious process. In addition, many Principals and Vice-Principals believe that asking for accommodation reflects negatively on them, and that this may threaten their career prospects. However, with this new language within the Workers' Compensation Act, WSBC has an increased ability to provide resources to help facilitate reasonable accommodation, as well as an ability to enforce compliance through penalties (for both workers and employers). This is expected to reduce the overall impact on workers by enabling them to remain employed at their pre-injury salary, to reduce the overall Workers Compensation costs for employers, and to ultimately speed up the time required to reach an acceptable accommodation agreement. Ideally, this will result in a better outcome for all!

## For More Information



The Employer's  
Page

The Worker's  
Page



On the WorkSafeBC website, the **Employers' page** and **The Workers' page** provide more information on the legislation, including:

- WorkSafeBC YouTube presentations that explain the legislation and how it will be applied
- Employer and Worker fact sheets
- Detailed policy and practice directives related to administration of the legislation

If you are looking for ideas on how to accommodate your specific health condition so that you can attend work more regularly and be more productive, you may find tips when you visit specific association websites, such as the Arthritis Society of Canada or BC Cancer, or you can try the Job Accommodation Network and search for your condition for reasonable accommodation considerations.

The Job  
Accommodation  
Network



If you have a health condition that you believe may require workplace accommodation, please feel free to reach out to me at [Rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca](mailto:Rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca)





Early  
Intervention  
Program

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# Precarious

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

# Self-Soothing

## Why is self-soothing important?

Our minds and bodies are programmed to return to homeostasis or balance to maintain our health. When it comes to regulating our emotional state after an upsetting event, self-soothing behaviours help us return to a calm, restful condition, back within our window of tolerance. It is important for us to soothe ourselves after a shock, trauma, or upset, as this helps maintain and protect our mental health.

Healthy self-soothing involves various activities, including grounding techniques, meditation, soothing touch, and engaging the senses. These activities can help us move away from difficult thoughts and feelings.

Click here for an article  
on ideas for self-soothing:



Experience the Calm  
meditation on this topic:



## When Self-Soothing Becomes Unhealthy

Sometimes, we turn to unhealthy means of soothing ourselves. We do this as these behaviours release endorphins – the “feel good” chemicals – into our brains. We may do this to numb ourselves, escape from our thoughts and pains, or feel relief, if only for a short period of time.

Some people turn to **substances** to soothe, such as:

|                                               |                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Alcohol                                       | Caffeine                              |
| Cannabis                                      | Hallucinogens (PCP, LSD)              |
| Hypnotics, sedatives, anti-anxiety medication | Prescription/non-prescription opioids |
| Prescription/non-prescription stimulants      | Tobacco/nicotine                      |

Each of these substances are very different from each other, and they all strongly activate the reward and pleasure centre of the brain.







Some people may turn to potentially harmful behaviours to soothe:

|                        |                                 |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Gambling               | Eating                          |
| Exercising excessively | Dieting                         |
| Shopping               | Shoplifting or risky behaviours |
| Having sex             | Viewing pornography             |
| Video gaming           | Internet use                    |

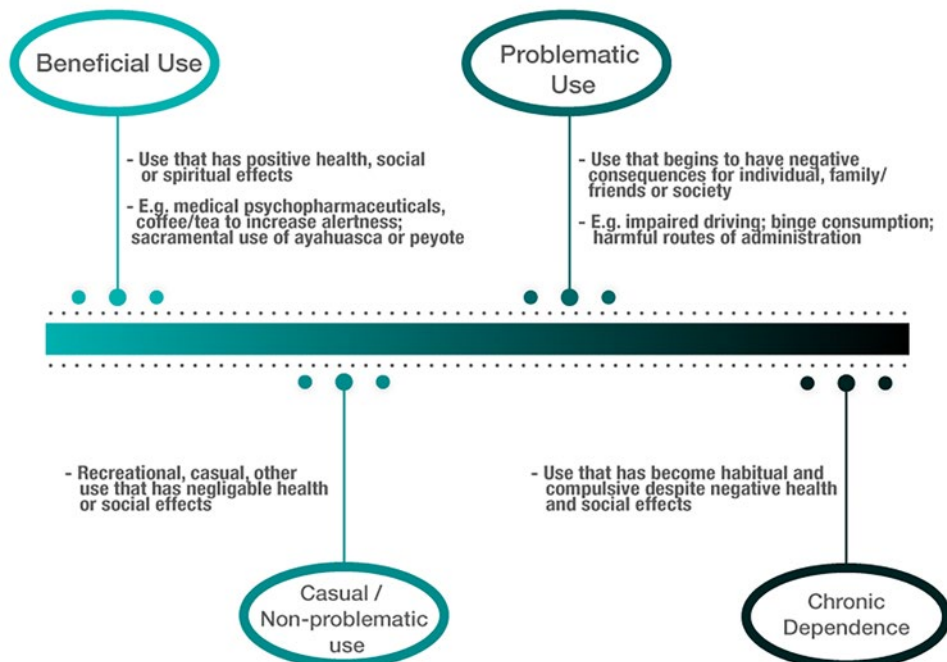
Behavioral addictions can occur with any activity that is capable of stimulating your brain's reward system. These behaviors provide temporary relief, but can negatively affect your mental or physical health. Researchers say unhealthy self-soothing includes any actions that offer short-term comfort but cause long-term harm.

## When to be Concerned

Why do some people have difficulty with addictions from substances or behaviours, while others do not experience any harm? People turn to these methods of self-soothing for different reasons. Someone who does not cope well with stress might find that alcohol may help them ignore difficult feelings. Someone else might use a drug to feel relief from mental and/or physical pain. Another person might use a drug out of curiosity.

Consider this visual related to the spectrum of substance use from the Canadian Mental Health Association:

### Spectrum of Substance Use



*Adapted from graphic presented in A Public Health Approach to Drug Control in Canada, Health Officers Council of British Columbia (2005)*

We may find ourselves at different places on this continuum at different times of our life, and in relation to different substances.

Some people may find themselves on the right side of the spectrum, which moves towards chronic dependence, because of a combination of factors.

- **Genetics:** Studies show that genetic factors are responsible for 40% to 60% of the vulnerability to any substance use disorder. If you have a first-degree relative (biological sibling or parent) with a substance abuse disorder, you are more likely to develop one.
- **How drugs interact with their brains:** Substances will stimulate different people's brains in different ways. People want to repeat an immediate rewarding experience that feels good.
- **Environment:** Access to substances, the opportunity for use, and the attitude and behaviours of those in proximity can all be risk factors. Those with adverse childhood experiences are also at a higher risk.
- **Mental health issues:** More than 50 per cent of people with substance use disorders have also had mental health problems at some point during their lifetimes, particularly mental health conditions, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and bipolar disorder.
- **Coping with thoughts and feelings:** People with poor or depleted coping skills may turn to substances as a way of coping with difficult emotions or situations and may start to rely on substances to regulate their emotions.

## Application to School Leaders

While educators are not usually found in the 'Top 10' careers most susceptible to addiction, it is still a role

that can bring much mental and emotional stress. This is particularly challenging when you are experiencing community trauma and the complexity of student needs, as your coping skills are continuously tested.

The shame and embarrassment that comes with addiction can keep people from seeking help, as does the fear of the impact on their employment if the addiction is exposed. This is particularly problematic in smaller communities, where people may pursue their addiction in their homes, and not seek out local support groups due to their community role and reputation.

## Am I Addicted?

There is not a single cause of addiction: it is a very complex condition. A significant part of how addiction develops is through changes in your brain chemistry. Substances send massive surges of dopamine through your brain, in a way similar to having sex or spending money. Such massive dopamine levels can have damaging effects on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.

This can create an unhealthy drive to seek more pleasure from the substance or activity, and less from healthier activities.

Over time, the substances or activities change your brain chemistry, and you become desensitized to their effects. You then need more of the substance in order to produce the same effect.

For some substances, such as opioids, the withdrawal symptoms are so severe that they create significant motivation to continue using them.

## What are the Signs of Addiction?

The signs of addiction vary from person to person and are based on the substance or activity.

In general, according to the Cleveland Clinic, these signs can include:



- **Inability to stop:** People may use a substance or engage in harmful addictive behaviour even if they want to stop. They may have tried multiple times to reduce the substance use or behaviour, but have been unsuccessful. They may also lie to their loved ones about the behaviour, or try to hide it.
- **Increased tolerance:** Over time, they may need more of the substance or activity to feel the same euphoric effects as they did before.
- **Intense focus on the substance or activity:** People with addictions can become pathologically preoccupied with the substance or activity, to the point that they may feel that the addiction has taken over their lives.
- **Lack of control:** They may feel like they have lost complete control over the substance use or activity, and often feel helpless. They may often feel guilty, depressed, and/or overwhelmed by their addiction and by how much it has impacted their lives.
- **Personal problems and health issues:** Addiction can impact all aspects of their lives, including their physical health, mental health, personal relationships, and career. They may have trouble fulfilling responsibilities at work, school, or home due to substance use or activity. Again, despite knowing the detrimental effects of their addictions, they cannot stop.
- **Withdrawal:** People with addiction may experience emotional and physical withdrawal symptoms when they stop using. Physical symptoms include shaking, sweating, or vomiting. People may also become anxious or irritable.

Visit the  
Cleveland Clinic:



## How are Addictions Treated?

If you are concerned that you may be struggling with an addiction, make an appointment with your physician. Your physician may recommend a combination of treatment options, depending on your behaviour and/or usage patterns and the substances you are ingesting.

- **Hospital management:** This may be required to help you withdraw from the substance you have been using, as reducing the intake quickly can be dangerous and needs to be carefully managed.
- **Medications:** There are certain medications that can help reduce urges, cravings, and ongoing withdrawal symptoms. If you have another mental health condition, such as bipolar disorder or depression, your provider may treat those with medications.
- **Rehabilitation (rehab):** Often called “residential treatment”, you may live at an inpatient rehab facility or visit one for scheduled appointments (outpatient rehab). These programs provide structured counseling, education, support and encouragement during rehab to help you withdraw, manage your addiction long-term, and live a healthier life. With that said, getting into these facilities in British Columbia can be challenging. Government funded options have a long wait list, and private treatment centres can be very costly.
- **Therapy:** Several types of therapy help people with addictions to gain new perspectives and change their behaviour.

Your provider may recommend cognitive behavioral therapy or group therapy.

- **Support groups:** Many people manage addiction with the help of a support group, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. Groups like Al-Anon support family members and friends of people with substance use disorders. These groups offer people the opportunity to share experiences and find ongoing support.

## Looking Ahead

We all need healthy ways to self-soothe; particularly in the role of an educational leader. Self-soothing is a valuable skill for managing emotional distress, and promoting overall well-being, by finding ways to calm and comfort ourselves. However, if you are concerned that your engagement in self-soothing is not healthy, know that you are not alone; it may be more common than you think. Do not suffer alone, reach out to your physician, your counsellor or even to the BCPVPA, and we will direct you to helpful resources.

We invite you to read the the story that follows, an insightful, vulnerable article written by a peer, a Principal in a smaller community whose experience may be relatable to many. They describe how alcohol became a self-soother in their work, the ensuing denial, the tipping point, and the path to affordable help and valuable resources that has allowed them to walk the road to sobriety, in a private, supportive way.

## Sources

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/addiction>

<https://www.addictionhelp.com/addiction/canadian-statistics/>

<https://ontario.cmha.ca/addiction-and-substance-use-and-addiction/>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/6407-addiction>

For a list of local resources for mental health and addiction, members can visit My BCPVPA, click on the Member Health Tile, and select the Mental Health and Addictions folder.



BCPVPA Members can find member news, information on member services and professional learning, contacts, resources, and so much more through My BCPVPA



Visit [bcpvpa.org](https://bcpvpa.org)  
and select My BCPVPA  
Follow the instructions in  
eNews to set up your account



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# YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Principals and Vice-Principals are not immune to the use of substances or unhealthy behaviours to cope or self-soothe.

Addiction can afflict anyone, in any walk of life. High-achieving professionals can find themselves leaning on an addictive practice in order to cope with intensification and complexities in their work and personal lives. People may not recognize – or accept – that they have an affliction, until there is an intervention or a moment of clarity.

*A BCPVPA member approached us with a request to share her personal story of reaching a low point, and taking control to find a way back. We thank her for her courage and hope that by sharing her story, other members may find the strength within themselves to seek help if they are experiencing a similar journey with alcohol or other types of addiction.*





## I AM A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL.

I am a creative woman, a loving wife and mother, and a passionate educator. I also have an addiction to alcohol.

I am 58 years old, and did not begin to address my drinking until five years ago. In August 2024, I celebrated three years of continuous sobriety; I want to share my story with you, in the hope that it resonates for those who need it.

I was born a late-in-life child of older parents in a small Canadian town. My siblings were much older than me, so I grew up as an only child. I had friends, but I always felt like I did not fit in. Sleepovers were particularly painful, but so were most group situations as I looked to others for approval. I did, however, excel at school where I thrived under structure and rules, and was placed in a gifted program after grade 2 to accelerate through elementary school.

My parents doted on me, but my dad was a functioning alcoholic throughout my childhood, and only quit drinking when I left home for university. My mom was a teacher, a gentle soul who loved me dearly and balanced protecting me from my dad's moods, with managing his moods herself.

I was drawn to working with children from a young age and by the time I was 18, I was working with children who had special needs. I was expected to be quiet at home, be an excellent student and work as much as possible. I think some of us who develop an addiction to alcohol have Type A personalities, often encouraged by our families.

I have three children with my husband of 34 years, and raising them was the highlight of my life. My husband and I were very present and supportive parents. I was determined that the family dinner table in my home would be a happy space to laugh and enjoy each other, and it was.

There was no doubt that I would work in education. I started my career at a private school for students

with autism, and it was a challenging position. Our team would head to a local pub on Fridays after work and let loose over tequila shots. I then moved to British Columbia and worked as a primary teacher. I worked in a variety of roles in several districts, including classroom teacher and inclusion support teacher before taking on the Principalship of a small elementary school.

## MY RELATIONSHIP WITH ALCOHOL

As a child, I mixed drinks for my dad and remember sipping from his rum and cokes as I delivered them downstairs. After more than 40 years, I can still remember being halfway down the stairs, sipping and feeling that warm rush, followed by a softening. I loved the taste. From adolescence on, I drank. I felt good when I drank alcohol, less anxious, and more easily able to join the group. "Now," I thought, "I can fit in, and cope."

There was less information available on anxiety and mental health in the 1980s.

*"Most people who fall into addiction tend to blame themselves for it, but when it comes to alcohol, there is an X factor that makes it uniquely problematic. Alcohol is both the deadliest drug and the most socially acceptable one."*

(McKowen, 2023, p.20)

Over the years, alcohol became more and more necessary to manage the stress of marriage and kids, full-time teaching and, eventually, a master's program. I excelled in my career, accepting regular opportunities to enhance my skills and move ahead in the education field. I always saw my work as a measure of my worth. I would pour a glass of wine when I walked in the door to make dinner, which I did every day when working full-time. I would revel in the fact that I did not need a lunch break, or that I could work harder than many folks around me. Even though I never drank during the day, I did not understand



at the time that my evening alcohol fueled my over-functioning workdays.

When my mother died after a long stay in extended care, I really started to struggle with alcohol. Before then, I had experienced blackouts and overdrinking, but it was manageable. I was never called out on my drinking, and was never charged for impaired driving. Alcohol was a part of our work culture and drinks out were common. However, when my colleagues went home after the bar to their tea, I went home to more wine.

Around that time, I read my first memoir about alcohol: *Drinking - A Love Story* by Caroline Knaff. It resonated deeply with me. Caroline described how she always watched the height in everyone's wine glass to see who was poured more; always having a drink or two to prepare for going out; and always worrying about not having enough. I had tried to moderate my own drinking for years, constantly breaking promises to myself. I recognized my own exhaustion in hers.

Despite that, the idea of letting go of alcohol was unthinkable, and filled me with terror. And so, I kept on going. For years, I had few alcohol-free days, except while pregnant. I was an involved parent and educator, but the pull of wine in the early evening was always there, tempting me as I made dinner, read bedtime stories, or worked on reports at home.

*"You just need to have that singular nagging suspicion that alcohol has robbed you of a presence you would have otherwise had without it. It's a small turning away toward the numbing and not the present."*

(McKowen, 2020)

During that time, on more weekend mornings than I would like to count, I tried to piece together what had happened the night before. In hindsight, I recognize that I had started to have regular blackouts. It shocks me now to think that I kept drinking because I saw myself as high-functioning and successful. I was blind to what was actually happening to me.

## MY TIPPING POINT

One morning, I woke up in my beautiful hotel room in downtown Vancouver where I was staying for an annual professional conference. I was on my bed, fully clothed. My Fitbit said I had not slept much. The last thing I remember was sitting in my hotel room with my colleagues, talking, laughing, and drinking wine. I had no memory of anyone leaving. So began the detective game to figure out the end of the night. Not my first blackout, but the first time it had happened so publicly.

As it turns out, a dear friend and colleague had bailed me out that night by shoosying folks from my hotel room with excuses of how tired I was. The next day, she was gracious, and I was full of shame.

Thus began my journey to sobriety. I found the author Annie Grace, listened to her 2018 audiobook, *This Naked Mind*, and quit drinking for 30 days. As I listened to her talk about what alcohol does to your brain, I started to realize I was not alone in this experience.

I first encountered my favourite author, Laura McKowen, through the *HOME Podcast*. The vulnerability and honesty I heard in those conversations was a relief. I also read author Allen Carr's work, and with his statement, "you will be so much happier sober," I realized how badly I wanted this.

I bought the audiobook *Drink* by Ann Dowsett Johnston – as with an audiobook, no-one can see what you are reading – and found my first role model in this older, well-educated woman who had travelled the same path toward sobriety.

I had many sober days and one-month stints, which helped me gain more clarity. But with a new job in school administration, I had increased responsibility and increased anxiety. I had no trust left in my own ability to moderate my drinking. How could a woman like me, educated and smart, not be able to handle alcohol? The shame of not recognizing the issue for

years, alongside the onset of menopause, disturbed my mental health in ways I could not have predicted.

It all culminated in this revelation:

- I could no longer drink safely.
- I could no longer enjoy alcohol.
- There is no moderation (third door) for me with alcohol.
- I had to give up the illusion of having control over alcohol.

### REACHING SOBRIETY

With the COVID epidemic raging around us, I had my last drink of alcohol.

I had no idea that in many ways my journey was just starting. I thought giving up alcohol would be the hardest part, but living without the buffer of alcohol

and learning to be emotionally sober is an altogether different beast.

I had never moderated work well, so without wine as my nightly coping, I instead overworked. It wasn't even that the administration job was too stressful; it was that I could not separate myself from the stress of the job. With alcohol removed, I did not have the tools to manage the stress.

It felt too public to attend local in-person 12 step meetings, but as I had followed the work of Laura McKowen, I found an online sobriety support group and it became my lifeline. While friends and family may be supportive of our journey to get sober, you need people who truly understand the experience (McKowen, 2023). Community is key to attaining long term sobriety.

Daily online sobriety meetings – in the early morning and on the drive home from school – fed my soul





through the next year. My non-negotiables included morning writing, meeting with my favourite leader and sober coach, running or walking daily in the woods, and enjoying my favourite non-alcoholic beer and nightly teas. Has it been easy? No. However, it gets easier with time, and the joy of deep sleep and waking with a clear head never gets old.

## LESSONS TO SHARE

What sneaks up on many of us is the shame of realizing that we do not have control over our drinking, and not knowing how to face it. I did not personally know any professionals in education who were questioning their drinking. Many keep it well hidden.

At a certain point, drinking takes up too much space in your head, and no longer allows you to live within your values. What I learned through this journey is that alcohol stopped me from acknowledging my feelings. I had trauma as a child and, as I grew up and encountered situations that were really stressful, really sad, or even when I felt joy, I needed to escape the feelings, and a drink helped.

Until it didn't.

I have built a toolkit of things that do help. Breathing deeply helps me to slow down and regulate my emotions when I feel them. I even taught my students box breathing at my weekly assemblies, as it is a tool we can all carry with us everywhere we go. It is critical to my healing to let myself really feel things in my body, knowing I can tolerate being uncomfortable as feelings will pass.

Exercise and daily online sobriety meetings empower me to listen and share with other people who are on this journey, and have allowed me to start to understand myself.

*"Emotional sobriety is the work of a lifetime, with learning to have appropriate emotional reactions to things and just being comfortable in one's own skin."*

(Valli, 2022)

## THE RELATIONSHIP WITH ALCOHOL

Is your relationship with alcohol stopping you from building your best life?

Alcohol is social, it is marketed heavily, and it is normalized. You are often questioned when you don't say 'yes' to a drink.

*"Directly and indirectly, what is transmitted to us and what we transmit to one another when it comes to alcohol is this. It's normal, it's the answer, but if for some reason you can't handle it, then it's not the answer and it's also not the problem. The problem is you."*

(McKowen, 2023, p.23)

I never drank in the morning or during the day, and I did not miss one day of work in my 30-year career due to the effects of alcohol, so how could I see that I had a problem?

I did not realize at the time that I was using alcohol to cope with feelings and emotions, never mind that the thought of not drinking was unimaginable (Valli, 2022).

If you are questioning your relationship with alcohol, you are not alone.

In the prologue to Ann Dowsett Johnston's 2012 novel *Drink*, she poignantly describes alcohol as the stranger standing at the corner of the bar. I fell in love as a teenager with that stranger. Alcohol gave me courage. I could rely on it. It felt good and it worked, until it didn't. That stranger was magic in my younger years when it gave me a sense of belonging and made me feel better in my skin. Then, as time went on, I relied on that stranger like medicine, pouring wine after work before I even took my coat off. Then it became misery (Vargas, 2016). I was ashamed about what was happening. I didn't even look forward to drinking in the last few years, as I did not know where the night would end up. This, I now realize, is addiction.

There are excellent resources available. The Luckiest Club, a worldwide sobriety support group offers many online meetings a week for anyone interested in changing their relationship with alcohol. You can join for free to check it out and can remain anonymous for as long as you like. Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) also has 12 step meetings in communities all over the world.

You are not alone.

*We are grateful to the BCPVPA member who chose to share her journey with Principi(ed) magazine. While she was willing to author the article under her name, the BCPVPA chose to provide anonymity to the member, in order to ensure her privacy and that of her district community. School districts make available many resources that can support those struggling with addiction to alcohol or drugs, and those who have decided to make a change in their lives through pursuing sobriety. BCPVPA members can contact the Director of Member Health and Well-Being to find out more, or visit the Member Health tile in the member portal, My BCPVPA, for links and resources.*

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BCPVPA members can find a variety of resources in the Member Health tile in the member portal, My BCPVPA.

Additional resources include:



**Government of BC**



**Government of Canada**



**Alcoholics Anonymous**



**Information on Gambling,  
Gaming and Technology Use**



**Canadian Centre on  
Substance Use and  
Addictions**



**SMART Recovery through  
Vancouver Coastal Health**



**Cleveland Clinic:  
Information on Sexual  
Addictions**



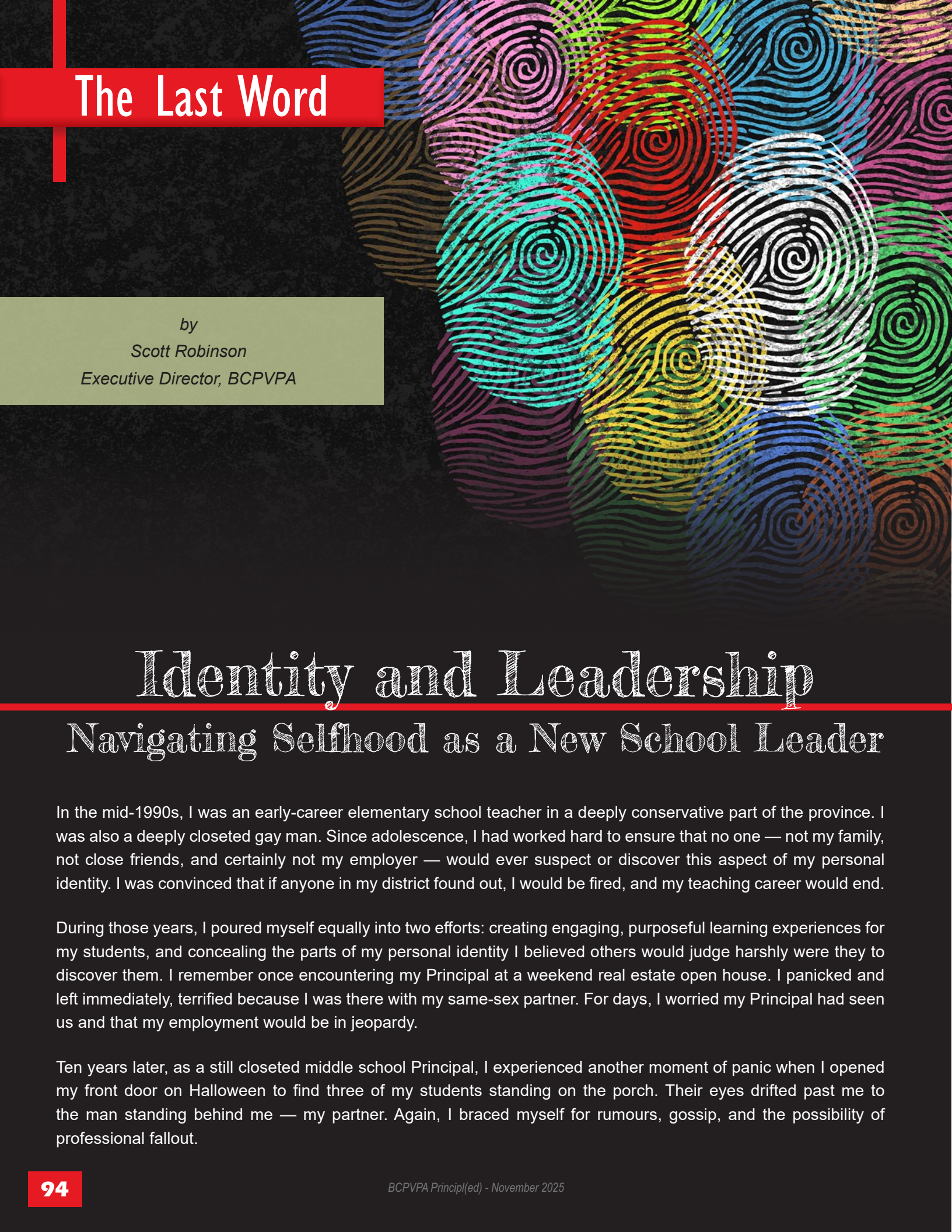
**British Columbia Centre  
on Substance Use**



**Canadian Centre for  
Addictions:  
Information on Video  
Game Addictions**



**BC Mental Health and  
Substance Use Services:  
Provincial Specialized  
Substance Use Programs  
for Adults Referral**



# The Last Word

by

Scott Robinson

Executive Director, BCPVPA

## Identity and Leadership

### Navigating Selfhood as a New School Leader

In the mid-1990s, I was an early-career elementary school teacher in a deeply conservative part of the province. I was also a deeply closeted gay man. Since adolescence, I had worked hard to ensure that no one — not my family, not close friends, and certainly not my employer — would ever suspect or discover this aspect of my personal identity. I was convinced that if anyone in my district found out, I would be fired, and my teaching career would end.

During those years, I poured myself equally into two efforts: creating engaging, purposeful learning experiences for my students, and concealing the parts of my personal identity I believed others would judge harshly were they to discover them. I remember once encountering my Principal at a weekend real estate open house. I panicked and left immediately, terrified because I was there with my same-sex partner. For days, I worried my Principal had seen us and that my employment would be in jeopardy.

Ten years later, as a still closeted middle school Principal, I experienced another moment of panic when I opened my front door on Halloween to find three of my students standing on the porch. Their eyes drifted past me to the man standing behind me — my partner. Again, I braced myself for rumours, gossip, and the possibility of professional fallout.



Fast-forward another decade, and I found myself walking in the Vancouver Pride Parade as the first openly gay Superintendent of Schools of the Vancouver School District. While the experience continued to be personally uncomfortable after years of holding that truth, it also signalled a change both in my own perspective and in how some people's beliefs about diversity had begun to shift. As I walked, I reflected not only on how far I had come, but also on how much society had shifted since my first years as a teacher.

Those twenty years marked a journey of personal and societal evolution. Along the way, I met many others from marginalized communities — staff, students, and parents — who were also concealing aspects of themselves they feared would bring judgment or exclusion. Some felt shame. Others believed their identities would prevent them from ever being given an opportunity to lead. Gradually, I began to feel a responsibility, especially to students, to show that people like us could indeed be accepted, and that being a school and district leader does not require hiding who we are.

For many Principals and Vice-Principals, the first years in the role often feel like stepping into an entirely new landscape. The pace is relentless, the responsibilities are heavy, and the shift from teacher to school leader requires a profound transformation in how one understands both their professional and personal identity. For those who carry an identity that has historically been marginalized — whether based on ethnicity, sexual or gender identity, or physical or non-visible disability — this transition brings added layers of complexity and potential vulnerability.

At the heart of this challenge lies a deeply personal question: *How much of myself should I reveal as I step into leadership?* The answer is not simple. It involves balancing authenticity with self-protection, representation with vulnerability, and leadership presence with personal safety.

Leadership is not just a set of skills; it is an expression of self. A Principal or Vice-Principal does not shed their identity when they step into the office each morning.

Their ethnic background, gender expression, sexual identity, or lived experiences with disability, among other characteristics, inform not only how they see the world but also how they are seen by others.

For many new Principals and Vice-Principals, the transition into school leadership can intensify awareness of identity. As teachers, many may have felt freer to express elements of who they are in classrooms or among colleagues. Moving into a formal leadership role often brings heightened scrutiny: from staff, from families, from the wider community. Suddenly, aspects of personal identity may feel like risks that could influence credibility, trust, or career trajectory.

Yet identity is also a profound strength. Leaders who understand who they are bring authenticity, empathy, and courage into their work. The challenge lies in discerning when and how to share elements of self in ways that enhance leadership rather than diminish feelings of personal safety.

For Principals and Vice-Principals who belong to identity groups that are subject to bias or discrimination, disclosure can feel fraught. A leader who identifies as LGBTQ2S+, for example, may wrestle with whether to be open about their partner in community conversations. A leader who is Indigenous, Black, or from another racialized community may feel pressure to minimize or hide cultural practices to fit into dominant norms. A leader with a disability may wonder whether to disclose an accommodation need, fearing that doing so might undermine perceptions of competence.

For those new to role, these tensions are often amplified by inexperience and uncertainty. The stakes feel higher: credibility has not yet been firmly established, and the path to advancement still seems precarious. At the same time, silence can be costly. Hiding or fragmenting identity requires emotional labour and can erode resilience, authenticity, and relational trust with colleagues.

When Principals and Vice-Principals bring their full selves into leadership — carefully, intentionally, and

safely — the impact can be transformative. Students who see leaders who share aspects of their identity experience a sense of belonging and possibility. Families feel affirmed when leadership reflects the diversity of the community. Staff benefit from working in schools where difference is not only acknowledged but valued.

Representation matters deeply in education. A student who sees a Principal acknowledging and celebrating their Indigenous identity, using a wheelchair, or openly identifying as queer receives a subtle but powerful message: *There is a place for me in leadership, in community, and in the future.*

With all that being said, for new-to-role leaders, finding the balance between self-disclosure and self-protection requires both reflection and strategy. Some guiding considerations might include:

1. **Context Matters.** Not every environment is equally safe or supportive. Leaders must read their school and community culture carefully before disclosing personal details.
2. **Gradual Disclosure.** Sharing elements of identity can be done incrementally, starting

with trusted colleagues or allies before moving into broader circles.

3. **Building Support Networks.** Having mentors, affinity groups, or professional associations provides a space for leaders to process experiences and gain perspective.

Importantly, self-protection is not weakness. It is wisdom. New Principals and Vice-Principals should know that they can both safeguard their personal well-being and still lead with courage and authenticity.

Leadership development is often framed in terms of competencies, strategies, and technical skills. Yet for many Principals and Vice-Principals, professional growth is inseparable from personal identity. Navigating who they are — and how that identity is perceived — shapes resilience, decision-making, and leadership presence.

A leader who has experienced marginalization may bring heightened empathy to students who struggle on the margins of school life. A leader who has wrestled with identity disclosure may become an advocate for safer and more inclusive spaces. These experiences enrich leadership, adding depth and



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authenticity that cannot be learned in workshops or policy manuals.

It is important to note that representation should never rest solely on the shoulders of the individual leader. Systems must provide the structures of support and protection that allow Principals and Vice-Principals, and leaders at all levels, to lead authentically without undue risk. The ongoing work of integrating identity with leadership requires support. District leaders, mentors, and colleagues must create conditions where Principals and Vice-Principals can explore these questions openly.

District leaders, in particular, play a pivotal role in supporting new Principals and Vice-Principals as they navigate identity in leadership. This may include:

1. **Creating Safe Opportunities for Conversation.** It is helpful when district supervisors signal that it is safe to engage in identity-related discussions without judgment or risk to career progression.
2. **Providing Mentorship.** Structured opportunities for identity-based mentorship

or professional networks can normalize and support disclosure decisions.

3. **Modeling Inclusivity.** District leaders who openly value diversity send a clear message that identity is not a liability but a strength in leadership.

When districts intentionally create these supports, new leaders can step into their roles with greater confidence, clarity, and authenticity.

For new-to-role Principals and Vice-Principals, identity is not an optional layer that sits on top of leadership; it is the foundation upon which leadership is built. Navigating the tension between authenticity and safety, disclosure and protection, is part of the developmental journey for many school leaders who belong to historically marginalized groups.

While the challenges are real, the rewards can be profound. We must all ensure that identity is not seen as a barrier, but as a source of strength. When Principals and Vice-Principals can safely bring their authentic selves into leadership, they embody a powerful message for students, families, colleagues, and the community: *Leadership is for all of us.*



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