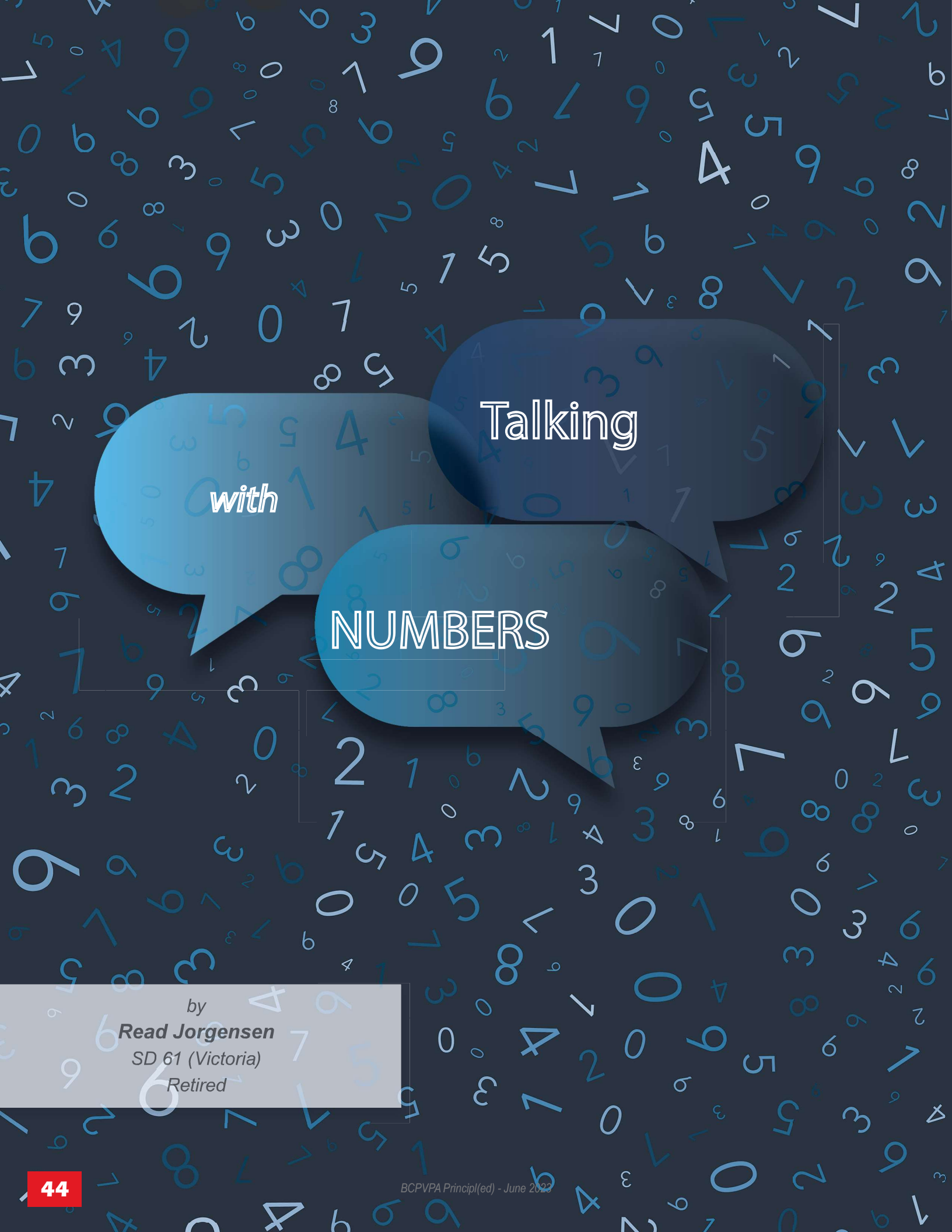


The background is a dark blue field filled with numerous light blue and white numbers of various sizes, scattered randomly. Overlaid on this are three speech bubbles. The top bubble is dark blue and contains the word 'Talking'. The middle bubble is light blue and contains the word 'with'. The bottom bubble is dark blue and contains the word 'NUMBERS'.

Talking

with

NUMBERS

by
Read Jorgensen
SD 61 (Victoria)
Retired

I met an investment broker a few weeks ago; we chatted, and I asked him about his work. “We’re a small boutique firm, in business for 21 years, with 17 employees. We have 2.3 billion dollars under management and care for around 1,200 high net worth investors.” His answer was short, but full of relevant numbers so I easily got the picture. Businesspeople have a different way of talking. Their work is often described using numbers and ratios, like ‘total capital’, ‘revenue’, ‘rates of return’, or ‘units sold’. In education, we usually tell people-driven stories, but I think we are missing out. Numbers have a hard veracity that can create powerful pictures, and we can use them to help monitor our efforts and bring clarity to the challenging work of in-school administrators.

Here are some suggestions for using numbers that you could find in any school.

Rather than say, ‘I am a Principal of an elementary school,’ you could say, ‘I am the Principal of a K-8 school with 342 students, a staff of 49 full and part-time employees, and an annual payroll of just over \$2.1 million. We serve 231 families in a middle to low socio-economic neighbourhood.’

If you, like many administrators, have challenges around ‘fail to fill’, don’t just complain that you are always missing staff. Be more impactful, and let the numbers speak. ‘In our school of 342 students we lost just over 100 instructional and supervision hours last week due to non-replacements, and we are fast approaching 370 lost educational hours this month alone.’

Here are some other ideas:

Working long hours

At 53 hours a week you are working ‘132% of a normal work week.’

Long district meetings

Our three hour administrators’ meeting with 52 employees cost around \$14,000 in salary¹ and upwards of \$4,500 in TTOC (Teacher Teaching on Call) costs every month.’

Too many emails

‘I receive close to 80 emails a day and one in five do not pertain to me at all.’

Busy day

‘Yesterday, according to my iPhone, I walked 5.7 kilometers just inside my school.’

Parents shifting responsibility to the school

‘Students spend more than 75% of their waking hours per year outside of the school.’

Absence notification

‘Brett has 15 absences, which equates to missing one out of every five school days.’

¹ Need some fun at your next meeting?
Try the Harvard Business Review
Meeting Cost Calculator:



"In education, we usually tell people-driven stories, but I think we are missing out. "

"If you, like many administrators, have challenges around 'fail to fill', don't just complain that you are always missing staff. Be more impactful, and let the numbers speak."

Numbers and ratios help you manage your school by de-personalizing concerns. At one school, we were burning through our copy budget at an alarming rate, so I crunched the numbers from the photocopier. The average teacher used fewer than two copies per day for each student, with an eyewatering 15.1 copies per day per student for the heaviest user. I created a report, respectfully removed teachers' names and divisions, and distributed the findings at the staff meeting. Once everyone had an accurate picture of the issue, we were able to bring the copy budget back in-line.

In another example, we calculated the salary cost to provide the Reading Recovery™ program – a highly regarded intervention at the time – at nearly \$4,600 for a single student. A good discussion ensued, as we investigated more cost-effective interventions that could support greater numbers of struggling readers, without the teacher feeling targeted or slighted.

In schools, we readily talk about our work, but our stories often lack a point of reference. Talking with numbers and ratios helps create meaning by generating vivid pictures of what you do, how hard you work, and what it really means to do the work of a in-school administrator.

Speaking of struggling readers, I highly recommend this article, "At A Loss for Words":



And this one, about rethinking our approach to teaching reading:



Have you harnessed the power of numbers to illustrate the complexity of your work, celebrate your team's efforts, or illuminate a challenge?

 **Tweet about it, and tag @bcpvpa @MrJVictoria**