

The Delicate and Intentional Art of Transitions for Principals and Vice-Principals

Changing

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by

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Being a Principal or Vice-Principal is extremely rewarding. No day is ever the same, and this brings with it a unique set of challenges and rewards.



When a Principal or Vice-Principal is faced with a transfer to a new school or site, this can bring a whole new set of emotions, challenges and rewards.

In most districts, changing schools usually occurs either in January or at the end of the school year, although it can also happen at any time. Despite the many tasks that school leaders have in December and June, it is important to take the time to ensure that there is thoughtful and intentional transition time.

Changing Districts

It can be an exciting yet daunting prospect to consider applying for – or accepting – a Principal or Vice-Principal position in a district different from where you currently work. While it is important to weigh the factors that may seem the most obvious – the commute, housing, impact on your family or personal connections – there are questions and factors that we encourage you to take into consideration.

During the application process and before accepting a position, ask questions about any potential differences in that district's contract, benefit plan or compensation package. What impact would those differences have on you? What are the options within the district for advancement? What are the professional development opportunities within the district? What is the district strategic plan, and does this align with your educational philosophy? Are you leaving behind a retirement gratuity? Will the new district provide you with sick days when you begin?

If you do take the leap and accept a position as a Principal or Vice-Principal in a new district, then congratulations on your new journey! Districts, like schools, are all unique and have their own sense of culture, priorities, and traditions. Taking the time within the first year of your appointment to listen,

learn, ask questions and appreciate the change of culture will go a long way to ensuring that you become fully integrated and involved in your new district environment. You will undoubtedly have fresh ideas to share with your new colleagues once you have had the time to understand your new educational context.

If this is a consideration for you, don't hesitate to reach out to the Member Support Services Team at BCPVPA, and we can answer your questions about specifics. Or, we can make sure to point you in the right direction.

Changing Schools

Different districts have varied processes and practices when it comes to Principals and Vice-Principals moving schools. In some districts it can be common practice for a school administrator to be moved to a new school every few years. In other cases, depending on the size and culture of a district, a Principal or Vice-Principal may remain in their assigned school for many years, making a change of school something of an anomaly. A change of assignment might be at the request of the school leader, or it might be initiated by the district.

Regardless of the reason for the administrative move – retirement, attrition, the needs of the district – ensuring a seamless transition for the school community and for the incoming administrator is crucial. Here is what to consider in the delicate and intentional art of transitioning from school to school.

"If I've done my job well as a Principal, the school will run smoothly without me when I'm gone".

BCPVPA member

If you are the outgoing leader

It may feel hard to leave!

Perhaps you have been well-loved in the school community, and your departure is not by choice, or perhaps this is your final school before retirement. Or, you may be grateful to be leaving your current site, and you are ready for a change. Regardless of the reason, it is crucial that you do everything possible to foster success for the incoming leader, and continuity for the school community.

Some things to consider in the weeks prior to your last day:

- Arrange meetings with your successor prior to the change of assignment
- Send a letter of introduction to the community, welcoming the new administrator
- Invite your successor to come to the school and meet staff, PAC and students
- Ensure your successor has the information they need, including the school plan and planning process, plans for individual students with high needs, relevant PAC information, budget information, staff committees, staffing/hiring needs, school activities and traditions, student initiatives, admin portfolios
- Leave all relevant school-related files for your successor

- When parents, staff and students see that you and your successor are working as a team, this will relieve anxiety about the change in leadership
- If your successor is new to their role as Principal or Vice-Principal, do what you can to help ensure they have the necessary supports – introduce them to colleagues, encourage them to take BCPVPA's Short Course I, and encourage them to attend district workshops
- After the change in leadership has occurred, stay in contact with your successor in case they have any questions

Once your successor has taken leadership of the school, it's time to step back and let them lead. Although visits to the school community can be tempting, they can unintentionally make the new administrator uncomfortable.



If you are the incoming leader

Hopefully, your predecessor has invited you to the school, and reached out as the outgoing leader!

Prior to your assignment:

- Reach out to the current administrator, and ask to meet and review the needs of the school
- Every situation is different, but remember that the current administrator is the school leader for now – avoid the temptation to ‘play the role’ too early
- It is possible that your predecessor and you have different philosophies or styles. Or, it’s possible that the school culture is different from your own educational beliefs. Avoid the temptation to jump in and make changes too quickly. Take time in your first year to listen, ask questions, learn. Make notes for yourself, discuss with a trusted colleague, and take time and care before suggesting any major changes

Once your assignment starts:

- You may wish to connect with each staff

member of your new school to gain their perspectives, with questions like:

During your tenure here, what has been one of your most memorable moments?

What are the important traditions of the school?

What do you value most about the school?

In your view, what is something that needs attention?

- Remember that building relationships and understanding the culture and traditions of the school will be your first important task before you embark on any initiatives, projects or changes
- If you are new to the role, participate in any program or workshops offered by your district for new administrators. Network with your new colleagues and the BCPVPA as much as possible



Change within an AdminTeam

For schools that have Vice-Principals or an administrative team, it will be important to ensure a smooth transition when there are changes within the team. Regular check-in meetings with the team are crucial. Sometimes, portfolios might benefit from being shifted, based on the expertise and growth plan of each member of the admin team. Even in extremely busy times, having a scheduled admin team meeting is important. Discussions will ideally focus not just on the operational needs of the school, but on the growth and efficacy of the team as a whole.

Moving to a new school as a Principal or Vice-Principal can be both exciting and scary, and there is always something new to learn. The list is endless: it might be your first time administering a French Immersion program, supporting students with a particular learning need, overseeing a construction project, working with an administrative team or supporting an active PAC. Regardless of the specifics, every BC school community is unique and will require an individualized approach. As Principals and Vice Principals, we can help these school communities through times of transition, and we can take pride in supporting our administrator colleagues as they embark on their journey of leading a new community of learners.

Good luck: you've got this.

Don't hesitate to reach out to your colleagues or to BCPVPA for support and guidance.



Remote Learning Made Easy

WebTESS Student Information System

Online learning has become a necessary tool for educators and students in the current environment.

Create an Online Hub

Establishing a single online hub for students to visit for up-to-date information is ideal. A single online hub, such as WebTESS, allows students to feel comfortable visiting the same site and using the same online tools consistently.

Self-Paced Learning

Focusing on assignments that are longer term with clear milestones and reporting points is important. The Course Documents module allows students to download course material and class descriptions,

syllabi and other documents. Students can work at their own pace while teachers track accomplishments. The Homework module allows teachers to assign work and set deadlines by date. Links to course documents and external resources can also be included.

Consistent Contact with Students

Checking-in with students regularly (telephone calls, emails, chat messages, etc.) provides students with a sense of belonging to the school community. The Email-Out and Homework modules enable clear communication with parents and students on a regular basis.