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A Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development

Ottawa Catholic School Board

Background

Covering an area of approximately 2,900 square kilometres, the Ottawa Catholic School Board serves urban, suburban and rural communities located in Eastern Ontario. With a full-time equivalent teaching and non-teaching staff of approximately 4,000, it operates 82 schools (65 elementary, 2 intermediate, 15 high schools) as well as one (1) special education centre, one (1) adult high school and four (4) adult education centres. The board provides a distinctive education with a special emphasis on student success and spiritual growth to approximately 39,100 full-time students.

Problem of Practice

How can we recruit, prepare and select the best possible leaders, and assist them in the development of the personal leadership resources as outlined in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)?

Identification

A need was identified in updating our Formal Leadership Pathways to reflect the Ontario Leadership Framework, and more specifically the personal leadership resources. Candidates being recruited brought a wide variety of experiences and formal leadership training. Our goal was to support our aspiring leaders, as well as continuing the professional growth with those currently in formal leadership roles. A leader may serve as an elementary vice-principal for as little as a year, whereas in the secondary panel, vice-principals may be in their role for up to 8 years and at different schools. Each of these scenarios offers its own unique challenges.

Initial Conditions

The Ottawa Catholic District School Board currently offered the Principal's Qualification Program on-site, and with a modified schedule to accommodate the needs of this current generation of potential leaders. The online portion was enhanced, and daytime sessions were provided with supply coverage. Our Leadership Journey Program offered a variety of excellent leadership courses run after school and attended on a voluntary basis. Candidates were being recruited who came with a myriad of experiences and professional learning. Our recruitment sessions were well attended, and our eligibility list was filled with mainly Board

employees. When new appointees were experiencing difficulties, it was mainly in the area of the personal leadership resources.

Creating Conditions For Success

Based on a systematic review of existing programs we have updated our Aspiring Leaders Program to reflect the Ontario Leadership Framework, as well as align with our Board's Goals. The program is now aligned with the components of the OLF, in particular the personal leadership resources. Leadership opportunities at all levels reflect the diversity and uniqueness of the skills each candidate brings to the role. Supports and professional growth opportunities are provided at all levels, with the intent being that once a candidate has been appointed to the principal role, they will have had the opportunity to develop, in a very intentional way, their personal leadership resources.

The board's Aspiring Leaders Program now includes the following four pathways:

Pathway 1: Aspiring Leaders for Teachers Interested in becoming a Vice-Principal

After attending a fall recruitment and information session, candidates arrange a meeting with their principal to determine their level of "readiness" using the Catholic Leadership Reflection Guide. This guide is meant to support a focused conversation between the potential candidate and his/her supervisor to determine next steps. If it is decided that the potential candidate will participate in the Aspiring Leaders Program, they complete a Declaration Form indicating their desire to attend the Assessment Centre in the next two years.

Pathway 2: for Teachers currently on the Vice-Principal Eligibility List

Recognizing that allowing greater access to professional learning is instrumental to the success and seamless transition into the vice-principal role, candidates on the vice-principal eligibility list will be invited to attend vice-principal council meetings. This will help them develop a system perspective (systems thinking), allow them to keep abreast of system initiatives, have access to professional learning opportunities, and help them to begin developing a network of colleagues who they can call upon as a resource when they transition into their new role.

Pathway 3: for Aspiring Vice-Principals to Principal

At this point in the process, leaders have had the opportunity to be in a leadership role and transition from the classroom to having school responsibilities. It was felt that this would be a good time to implement a 360 tool, which enables candidates to reflect on their leadership practices, and to act on their discoveries. Leaders will gain deep insight into how they see themselves as leaders, how others view them, and what actions can be taken to improve their effectiveness. This tool is meant to be used as a guide to support a focused conversation between the potential candidate and his/her supervisor to determine next steps.

Pathway 4: for Vice-Principals currently on the Principal Eligibility List

Building on the professional growth opportunities already presented to the candidates, they will now be eligible to participate in *The Leadership Academy* in the late fall. This program was designed using the OLF, and specifically the personal leadership resources. It is a very intensive program, providing the candidates opportunities for video taping of “connection conversations” and guided feedback from a small group of colleagues and a professional coach. The candidate is then able to hold a “conversation” with a staff member back at their school, while receiving a Private Executive Coaching Session.

Turning Points

A significant turning point in the success of our restructured Aspiring Leaders Program was at our fall recruitment meeting. Potential candidates had a clear vision of where the formal leadership pathway would take them, and the variety, depth and breadth of supports available to them along this new journey. The clarity, succinctness and vision of the Aspiring Leaders Program allowed the potential candidates the opportunity to embark down this road knowing that by the time they were appointed into a formal leadership role, and even after their appointment, they would be supported, encouraged and have developed a network of colleagues who they could turn to for guidance.

Learning Organization

The Ottawa Catholic District School Board has enjoyed the privilege of recruiting from within, and the formal leadership pathways, has helped to ensure that potential candidates come to the role prepared to meet the demands of leadership as outlined in the Ontario Leadership Framework. With a clear and intentional focus on the personal leadership resources we continue to develop leaders with the leadership practices and personal leadership resources that we know will help them be successful.

Final Points

Providing leadership opportunities at all levels of the learning organization is critical. Having a clear and concise Leadership Pathways for those interested in pursuing formal leadership opportunities in the Board is critical for the sustainability of the Board’s success. Establishing an intentional, and concise program, based on the OLF, enables those moving into formal leadership roles the confidence, enthusiasm and effective support system they need to be successful. The OLF’s personal leadership resources offer the framework on which to build these supports.