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A Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development

Durham District School Board – 2016-2018

The Durham District School Board (DDSB) is responsible for public education in the rural settings of Uxbridge, Brock and Scugog Townships and the urban settings of Ajax, Whitby, Pickering and Oshawa. The Board employs 7,000 teaching and educational services staff. With 131 elementary and secondary schools and learning centres, the board accommodates more than 70,000 regular day students and thousands more who take advantage of a wide variety of continuing education and adult credit courses. More information can be found on the DDSB's website at www.ddsb.ca. Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @DurhamDSB and on YouTube at DurhamDSB.

Rationale

In the Durham District School Board (DDSB), we believe that leadership development is an evolving process that focuses on continually nurturing and refining school-level leadership practices to support continuous improvement throughout our organization. The purpose of this case study is to outline the *DDSB's comprehensive approach to leadership development* with a specific focus on:

- *school leader development used as a high leverage strategy to influence large numbers of teachers;*
- *creating a large pool of well-qualified school and system leaders and on-the-job support for them once in leadership roles;*
- *placing a priority focus on developing subsets of the personal leadership resources and leadership practices based on local circumstances (OLF p. 17).*

The *Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)* provides the evidence-informed foundation for our collective capacity building efforts with students, staff and the broader community. We want to ensure that our current and aspiring leaders are well equipped to best serve their students and school communities. *Our goals, actions and this case study reflect how we identify, support and promote the best possible leaders, and support them in their continual development of the personal leadership resources (PLRs) from the OLF throughout their leadership journey.*

Succession Planning and Capacity Building for School-level Leaders

In 2015, the DDSB initiated a system-wide school leadership development review and created the *Ignite Leadership Strategic Plan 2016 - 2018*. Our purpose was to evaluate existing school-level leadership practices and make recommendations to build the collective capacity of aspiring, new and experienced school leaders. The review highlighted the importance of succession planning and early identification of leadership in order to increase the number, quality and diversity of aspirants. As a result, the *Leadership Development Department* initiated and produced the *Succession Planning 2016 Analysis and Report*. The report outlined a plan for onboarding and training to create a pool of highly qualified school leaders that are prepared with the necessary skills and knowledge required at all stages of their leadership journeys. The significant additional leadership actions taken by the department based on the Leadership Review resulted in:

- developing the *Ignite Leadership Strategic Plan* and the 10 Leadership Domains;
- focusing on recruitment, training and leadership for learning at all stages;
- designing leadership modules for aspiring, newly appointed and experienced leaders; and
- revising the Mentorship Program.

Initial Conditions

“School leaders are pivotal to the development of excellent teaching, excellent schools, and ultimately, enhanced student achievement and well-being.”

(OLF p. 3)

Our succession plan data revealed that a significant number of experienced administrators will be eligible to retire by 2020, which represents a challenge in our district. The data below identifies the leadership needs by 2020.

- 10% or 10 elementary vice principals,
- 40% or 46 elementary principals,
- 25% or 11 secondary vice principals, and
- 50% or 13 secondary principals.

Our analysis also included an overall picture of the experience in the role of our administrators. The chart below details the current experience level of our principals and vice principals. This information has been vital to assisting our department in designing and creating relevant professional learning and job embedded opportunities for our school administrators. The graphs below illustrate the range of experience in our existing administrator groups.

With 28 administrators in acting roles in the fall of 2016, we also examined the challenges in effective succession planning and found the needs to be in:

- supports for leadership capacity development;
- the lack of transparency in the promotion process; and
- repeated unsuccessful attempts for promotion and the lack of meaningful feedback.

Creating Conditions for Success

Advanced Leadership Key Operational Goal:

The DDSB's 2016-2017 *Ignite Learning Strategic Plan* named *Advanced Inspired Leadership and identifying, supporting and promoting leadership capacity for all stakeholder groups in the DDSB* as a key operational goal.

In order to implement this, the *Leadership Development Department* completed *the following steps* to support and address three areas related to school leadership:

- *Identification of Aspiring School Leaders*
- *Development of Newly Appointed School Leaders*
- *Support for Experienced School Leaders*

Aspiring Leaders:

In order to *identify, support and promote leadership capacity*, one essential step has been the intentional identification of future leaders by superintendents and principals. Our program for aspiring leaders includes the following features:

- Orientation sessions to provide an overview of the program and opportunity to network with other aspiring leaders, as well as an opportunity to connect aspiring leaders with superintendents, who led conversations and answered questions about leadership in the DDSB.
- Established two tracks: Yellow and Green tracks.
 - Yellow track: Aspiring Leaders considering administration in the next 3-5 years
 - Green track: Aspiring Leaders considering administration in the next 1 -2 years.
- Learning modules both online and face to face featuring sessions on:
 - Self-Assessment for Aspiring and School Leaders Tool - Transition from Teacher to Vice Principal
 - Becoming an Emotionally Intelligent Administrator - Safe Schools for Aspiring Leaders
 - Equity and Inclusivity for Aspiring Leaders - Special Education for Aspiring Leaders
 - Cultural Competency for Aspiring Leaders.

- Professional learning opportunities are available to those on both the yellow and green track. Those identified in the green group have the opportunity to also participate in the following sessions:
 - ***Preparing for the Process***: Provides participants with an overview of the promotion process
 - ***Preparing for the Portfolio***: Provides participants with an overview of the expectation for the portfolio
 - ***Preparing for the Interview***: Provides participants with tips and strategies for the interview process, as well as an opportunity to work with experienced administrators to complete practice questions.
 - ***Leadership Prep Groups***: A series of sessions in small groups led by experienced administrators which focus on key topics and strategies for aspiring school leaders. Teacher to VP (elementary and secondary), and VP to P (elementary and secondary)

We currently have a pool of over 140 aspiring leaders who are involved in a variety of leadership development training and initiatives that provide differentiated support to those individuals. This will ensure that they are better prepared for the role of a school administrator.

Another pressure point identified in our leadership review and *Ignite Learning Strategic Plan* was the need to have our administration be more reflective of our school communities. Strategies to address barriers in supporting diverse aspiring and existing leaders are being addressed. Working with the *Equity and Inclusive Education Department*, the *Racialized & Aboriginal Leaders Program* was created.

Newly Appointed Leaders:

At the start of 2016, there were over 50 newly appointed administrators in their first or second year. Research shows that providing support during this transitional time is essential in order to ensure school leaders' development and success, and as a result we provided a robust professional learning program.

- Mentoring: Assigned mentor, and each pair completed *Predictive Index (PI)* and coaching around its effective use in a mentorship, goal setting and professional learning.
 - The *Predictive Index* is an assessment tool that provides an understanding of leadership skills that can be leveraged and areas of adaptation and growth. This supports differentiation of professional learning for leaders.
- Mentor Coaching Support for Administrators: Created a program designed to provide job embedded support for operational/technical aspects for those in acting vice principal and principal roles.
- Learning sessions offered in key operational and instructional areas:

- *Finance/Budget*
- *Human Resources*
- *Communications*
- *Health & Safety*
- *Safe Schools*
- *Equity*
- *Special Education*
- *Aboriginal Education*
- *School Effectiveness Framework*
- *Student Success*

Experienced Leaders:

Actively involving experienced administrators in professional learning is essential as individuals move through different stages of the leadership journey. Our leadership review recommended providing administrators opportunities to continue to develop *Personal Leadership Resources (PLR)* and the necessary skills to lead schools.

- Unique partnership with *Rotman Executive Professional Learning* at the University of Toronto. Each module was at full capacity of 45 participants.
 - Modules included: *Difficult Conversations, Managing Change, Integrative Thinking to Problem Solving, Teamwork & Collaboration*. Sessions have included follow up resources created and designed by DDSB administrators to extend the learning.
- ***Leadership Management*** - the OLF states that management “*is an integral part of leadership.*” (*OLF p. 5*). It is important that all of our administrators receive ongoing training and support in the operational elements of the role.
 - Working with a committee of principals and vice principals who are designing and leading the learning for their colleagues.
 - Elementary and secondary topics related to the operational leadership required for school administrators. Topics to date have included: staffing and how to effectively execute parallel investigations.
- ***Mentoring for Experienced Administrators*** - This is a recognition that mentoring is an effective professional learning tool at all stages of an individual’s career.
 - We began piloting group mentoring sessions on topics such as navigating a unionized environment and exit and entry plans.

- At each principal meeting, professional learning is provided to assist principals' development leading the implementation of the Renewed Math Strategy (RMS).

Significant Points in our Progress

Internal Selection and Promotion Process:

Ensuring equitable access and practices are reflected in our policies and hiring is a key aspect in the DDSB's *Ensuring Equity* operational goals. A significant recommendation was to update the internal selection and promotion process, and to develop and pilot an external process for principals and vice principals. Our new process offers a more comprehensive approach that includes school visits, reference checks, a written portfolio, an interview and consensus around final decisions made by the Senior Administration team.

- A Selection and Promotion committee was struck in the winter of 2015. The committee was comprised of superintendents, principals, vice principals, system principals, and a hiring manager.
- Best practices from the pre-existing DDSB process and other Boards of Education in Ontario were reviewed.
- Draft internal plans were shared with Administrative Council, with an opportunity for input.
- Communicated with system about the proposed changes to the process, as timelines and requirements.
- Launched Internal Selection and Promotion process in the fall of 2016.
- Preparation sessions to prepare for the process including:
 - **Leadership Prep Groups**, led by experienced administrators in the roles
 - **Preparing for the Promotion Process**, an overview of the steps, and an opportunity to answer questions
 - **Preparing for the Interview**, where candidates work with experienced administrators to answer practice questions and provide feedback.
 - **Individual coaching sessions** scheduled with the Leadership Officer and other experienced administrators.

External Selection Process:

1. External processes from other Boards were also studied to determine beginning steps in formalizing a new process in the DDSB.
2. Need to ensure that we created a process with high standards and expectations in order to attract high caliber applicants.

3. Using the *Predictive Index*, we created a profile for the role of an administrator, using input from a group of strong principals, and superintendents.
4. Created a multi-step selection process for potential candidates, involving the completion of a *Predictive Index*, school visits, portfolio and interview.
5. External Selection process was launched in January 2017.
6. A selection team comprised of superintendents of Operations/Leadership, Employee Relations, a hiring manager, system administrators and school principals.
7. The committee selected candidates to move to the next stage which consisted of a school visit conducted by two superintendents.
8. The successful candidates have been recommended to complete a portfolio and invited to an interview.
9. Final results are expected in mid to late May.

Key Measures of Impact

The *Leadership Development Department* utilized the book *Trying Hard is Not Good Enough*, by Mark Friedman to regularly review and monitor our strategic plan and our actions with a focus on the following three questions as the framework:

1. How much did we do?
2. How well did we do it?
3. Is anyone better off as a result?

These questions allow the department to precisely assess the work, its impact, and next steps.

The following information are some examples of our measures of impact for the current school year.

Aspiring Leaders:

- Over 140 individuals identified as participating in our *Aspiring Leaders Program* in both our yellow and green track within the last year.
- 30 aspiring leaders attend the inaugural *Racialized & Aboriginal School Leaders* session. 4 of those aspiring leaders are currently moving through the promotion process.

Newly Appointed:

- 100% of the newly appointed leaders in acting roles participated in the Mentor Coaching program.
- Over 100 mentors and mentees are participating in our mentorship program for newly appointed leaders.
- 50 mentors and mentees have completed their Predictive Index surveys and participated in coaching sessions.

Experienced:

- 180 administrators participated in the *Administrator Growth Track* series offered through our partnership with *Rotman*.
- The average rating of the 4 sessions was 6.2/7.
- Participants noted the importance and relevance of the training to the work they lead in schools. The budget has been approved to continue the series next year.
- 185 of 254 administrators have attended the *Leadership Management* sessions.

Principal and Vice Principal Selection and Promotion Process:

- We have had over 65 people come forward to move through the promotion process this year. This number is up from 37 in the previous year.

Key Learning and Advice

We believe that the DDSB's comprehensive approach to leadership development uses high leverage strategies to grow and enhance the leadership skills of our school leaders and is vital to our continued success in achieving our operational goal to "*identify, support and promote leaders capacity in the DDSB.*" Through continued use of data and feedback, we will remain focused on our intentional, and precise planning to implement effective promotion, professional learning, and resource development which will support leaders at all levels. Our significant learnings throughout this process will guide us as we continue our efforts.

Summary of Reflections:

- Collect relevant data to identify gaps as a starting point
- Consult with various stakeholders to gather input and different perspectives Anchor the leadership initiatives in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*
- Create and implement a comprehensive approach to leadership development
- Ensure that a comprehensive approach to leadership development is a priority in the Board strategic plan and reflected in the operational goals
- Be transparent through the change processes and share information to obtain support from the Board Trustees and the broader community
- Set realistic timelines
- Celebrate the incremental success throughout the process
- Regularly revisit measures of impact to inform future planning