

# ONTARIO LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

## **CONVERSATION STARTERS**

*A resource for mentees, mentors, school and board leaders for Mentoring,  
Principal Performance Appraisal and other ministry initiatives*

January 2010

Ontario Ministry of Education



reach every student  
appuyer chaque élève



# **Ontario Leadership Strategy Conversation Starters**

## **Sample Mentoring Learning Plans for Principals and Vice Principals And Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA) Annual Growth Plans**

To support learning focussed conversations related to the Five Core Leadership Capacities:

- Setting Goals
- Aligning Resources with Priorities
- Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures
- Using Data
- Engaging in Courageous Conversations

The Five Core Leadership Capacities are derived from the Ontario Leadership Framework. For more information on the Ontario Leadership Framework, visit the Institute for Education Leadership website at [www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca)

## Introduction

Professional dialogue is a reflective learning process that can deepen understanding and promote shared learning. It is a key component in developing leaders in schools and boards and is essential to Ontario's Leadership Strategy. Conversation Starters have been developed to promote skilled professional dialogue.

**The Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS)** is a comprehensive plan of action designed to support student achievement and well-being by attracting and developing skilled and passionate school and system leaders across the province. The strategy is sharply focused on supporting the three core provincial education priorities: high levels of student achievement; reduced gaps in student achievement; and increased public confidence in publicly funded education.

The strategy incorporates a collaborative approach through which schools, school boards, education partners and the ministry work in partnership to make a difference for every student. It focuses on both individual and system-level development, embedded in daily practice and refined through continuous learning. The two goals of the strategy are to:

- Attract the right people to the principalship
- Help principals and vice-principals develop into the best possible instructional leaders

More information on the OLS is provided on the ministry website at <http://www.ontario.ca/eduleadership>.

Mentoring, Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA) and Succession Planning and Talent Development work together as integral and inter-related components and are a focus of province-wide implementation in 2009/10. The Ontario Leadership Strategy is grounded in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) and is supported by the five Core Leadership Capacities.

**The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)** identifies effective practices, skills, knowledge, and attitudes of successful educational leaders. The OLF is based on research by world-recognized experts in leadership and extensive consultation with educators across Ontario. The OLF provides a resource for school and system leaders to identify practices and competencies for building expertise in relation to a wide-range of leadership capacities.

More information on the OLF is provided on the Institute for Education Leadership website.

**The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)** is a unique partnership committed to exploring leading-edge thinking on education leadership and applying that expertise to the development of high-quality resources and learning opportunities for school, board, and system leaders. As part of its work on research into practice the IEL has adopted the Ontario Leadership Framework and continues to support and promote it as a powerful vehicle for strengthening school and system leadership in the province. Visit: [www.educationleadership-ontario.ca/](http://www.educationleadership-ontario.ca/) for more information about the IEL, upcoming events, leadership research, and a variety of tools and resources for leaders.

**The five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs)** are derived from the Ontario Leadership Framework. They have been recognized by research, practitioners and education partners as being critical areas of leadership required for sustained improvement in student achievement and well-being. Strengthening these capacities requires focussed efforts by all partners of the education system. School and system leaders have different levels of expertise at different stages of their careers related to the five CLCs. They use the Ontario Leadership Framework as a resource to identify practices and competencies that will be their focus

for building expertise related to the CLCs. This is a dynamic process. As contexts change and expertise grows, leaders identify new areas for development related to the CLCs. In this way, they continuously improve their practice.

**Conversation Starters** is a resource made up of a series of guiding questions that can be used as a focus of professional dialogue for mentoring, performance appraisal and other professional learning. The purpose of the resource is to:

- support growth through conversations focussed on the five Core Leadership Capacities identified as a subset of the Ontario Leadership Framework ([www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca))
- provide a menu of guiding questions from which to select and adapt as appropriate to support thinking, learning and planning
- provide a model of questioning techniques appropriate to a mentoring / coaching or appraiser / appraisee relationship
- provide sample Mentoring Learning Plans and PPA Annual Growth Plans that support the five Core Leadership Capacities
- encourage development of Mentoring Learning Plans and PPA Annual Growth Plans that reflect effective practices.

It is recommended that the conversation begin with **opening thinking**. Devote time to establishing a trusting and collaborative relationship, using plural nouns (e.g., what sources rather than source) and exploratory language. This approach will invite the individual to identify multiple possibilities and promotes complexity of thinking. From opening thinking, **focusing thinking** will address the individual's needs and interests (e.g. consulting, coaching, or collaborating) and offer a degree of challenge appropriate to the learning path and the context. Support is balanced with the challenge of moving into new learning. Offer probes to promote greater precision of language and clarity of thinking. This can support a sense of efficacy and the ability to identify a goal and a plan.

The Conversation Starters provided in this resource are examples to support learning focussed conversations. The discussions may take place between school leaders and their supervisors or newly appointed principals and vice-principals and their mentors. Learning focussed conversations are the foundation of teacher and principal performance appraisals and the mentoring process.

## Contents

This resource is organized as follows:

### Part One:

- I.1 How to Use the Conversation Starters
- I.2 The Five Core Leadership Capacities

### Part Two: Conversation Starters and the Five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs)

### Part Three: Sample Mentoring Learning Plans and PPA Annual Growth Plans

### Part Four: Tip Sheet – Courageous Conversations

## PART I

### Part One

#### 1.1 How to use Conversation Starters

##### Do:

- ☐ Use as a resource to support a focus on instructional leadership
- ☐ Dialogue with the individual about learning pathways and readiness to explore new skill areas
- ☐ Focus on areas most relevant to the learning needs of the individual
- ☐ Encourage the individual to learn new skills and attitudes
- ☐ Select areas that will support job embedded learning
- ☐ Select only a few manageable areas of focus at a time
- ☐ Use as a resource for collaboration while designing the Mentoring Learning Plan for newly appointed school leaders or the PPA Annual Growth Plan as part of the Principal/Vice Principal appraisal
- ☐ Update Mentoring Learning Plans and PPA Annual Growth Plans regularly so they reflect the continuous development and most recent learning goals of the individual
- ☐ Refer to the Ontario Leadership Framework, sponsored by the Institute for Education Leadership (IEL), to find a detailed description of the practices and competencies related to the five Core Leadership Capacities and as a resource for development of Mentoring Learning Plans and PPA Annual Growth Goals ([www.education-leadership-ontario.ca](http://www.education-leadership-ontario.ca)).

##### Don't:

- ☐ Use the inquiries as a checklist in any formulaic manner
- ☐ Use the inquiries in an evaluative tool
- ☐ Use all the inquiries; they are a menu only, from which one may select an item(s)
- ☐ Adhere to the exact wording in the inquiries-- rather express the ideas in relation to the context in which individuals are working
- ☐ Work through the inquiries in the order they appear

## PART I

### 1.2 Five Core Leadership Capacities

*Ideas into Action* bulletins provide research insights and practical strategies for school and system leaders that are aligned with the Ontario Leadership Strategy and the Ontario Leadership Framework. The *Ideas Into Action* bulletins focus on the five Core Leadership Capacities that are critical to making progress on the province's educational goals. For more information, visit the Ministry website at [www.ontario.ca/educationleadership](http://www.ontario.ca/educationleadership).

#### 1. Setting Goals

Ensure that goals are strategic, specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound and lead to improved teaching and learning.

For example:

- Develop and communicate a shared vision for the school that sets a context for goal-setting
- Lead groups to use evidence and inquiry to establish these goals, monitor progress and make adjustments to plans and/or practices
- Establish important linkages between individual goals, School Improvement Plans, and school board and provincial priorities.

#### 2. Aligning Resources with Priorities

Ensure that financial, capital, human resources, curriculum and teaching resources, professional learning resources and program allocations are tied to priorities, with student achievement and well-being as the central, unambiguous focus.

For example:

- Engage teachers, staff, the school board and the broader community to join in decisions related to resource allocation and share ownership for the results
- Collaborate with other schools and/or districts to learn about effective practices and to share resources wherever possible.

#### 3. Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures

Enable schools, school communities and districts to work together and learn from each other with a central focus on improved teaching quality and student achievement and well-being.

For example:

- Facilitate a shared understanding and ownership of student achievement and well-being as a central focus for collaboration among staff, federations, associations, the school board and the diverse school community
- Improve and build on existing models of professional learning communities
- Enable teamwork and collective decision-making among teachers and staff, providing opportunities for teacher-leadership
- Engage parents and the broader school community to be part of the learning culture.

## **PART I**

### **4. Using Data**

Lead and engage school teams in gathering and analyzing provincial, district, school and classroom data to identify trends, strengths and needs that will inform specific actions for improvement focused on teaching and learning.

For example:

- Use data to inform School Improvement Plans
- Move beyond technical aspects of using data to address adaptive challenges such as gaining support for data use, managing emotional issues that may arise, and building staff confidence and sense of efficacy around the use of data. Use data to foster a school culture in which staff:
  - have high expectations for student achievement
  - assess student performance and modify practice based on findings, take ownership for the results.

### **5. Engaging in Courageous Conversations**

Challenge current practices and foster innovation through conversation, to listen and to act on feedback, and to provide feedback that will lead to improvements in student achievement and well-being.

For example:

- Build relational trust and establish a culture in which courageous conversations and feedback are seen as necessary for improvement
- Challenge assumptions at both the individual and the organizational level
- Integrate description, analysis, prediction and a discussion of the next level of work in every debrief with staff about teaching and learning.

## PART 2

### Part Two:

#### Conversation Starters

These are samples only. Tailor the language and approach after actively listening to concerns, needs, interests, context and supporting the individual's identification of particular technical problems and adaptive challenges.

#### 2.1 Setting Goals

Opening Thinking	Focusing Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> What are some of your considerations when developing a goal?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> What particular model are you using when setting goals (e.g., SMART goals)?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> As you examine your goals, are there any refinements to specificity, measurability, accountability, relevance and time that would make your goals clearer and easier to implement?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How has the consideration of the following areas impacted on the implementation of your goal:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ sources of data</li><li>▪ alignment with school and/or board priorities</li></ul></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> If you were revisiting your goals a year from now, how easy would it be to measure their impact?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How do your goals reflect evidence based practice?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Which of the goals is top priority and why?</li></ul>
<p>When reflecting on effective practices that you use to lead the school improvement process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> What are some of the ways that teachers are involved in shared decision making about school improvement initiatives?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> What indicators would show evidence that the school planning process is a success?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> What are some of the strategies used for building consensus around school priorities?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> To what degree have you noticed that teachers' Annual Learning Plans support school goals? Are there ways you can support teachers' Annual Learning Plan goals that would also support the school improvement goals?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Is staff working collaboratively in professional learning communities to achieve school or system goals? How can you provide support to further encourage collaboration?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How have you observed classroom practice reflecting the school plan goals?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> How do you plan to recognize and celebrate the achievement of goals?</li></ul>



## PART 2

Opening Thinking	Focusing Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> As you reflect on the current school planning process, to what degree is it producing the desired results?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What methods are you planning on using to keep staff committed, engaged and motivated in implementing school goals?(e.g., commitment to the school vision/mission)</li></ul>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Which board goals do you consider to be most relevant to your school needs? Why?	<input type="checkbox"/> In what ways do your school goals reflect the board's goals?

## PART 2

### 2.2 Aligning Resources with Priorities

Opening Thinking	Focusing Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In what equitable way can you allocate resources and money to improving teachers' instructional skills at your school?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What impact does allocating resources to the improvement of teachers' skills have on the quality of daily instruction in your school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What skill areas might you want to focus on in order to support you?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How can resources be used to support teachers developing these skills? How will you know this is making a difference to the quality of daily instruction? What indicators will you use to measure this?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> As you consider staff assignments and allocation of resources now and over time, are there additional ways to optimize these in support of student learning?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What types of resources can be accessed to support the School Improvement Plan?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> As you take a mental inventory of the internal resources (e.g., teachers willing to mentor new teachers, student success teachers) available to support your school goals, what comes to mind? In what ways could the use of these internal resources be more effective?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Considering the external resources available to the school, (e.g. literacy coach, lead teachers) which could be accessed further to support a focus on your priorities?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on any strategies, expenditures in your plans that may seem unconnected to board priorities. Are there ways these will be supported by the broader system resources? What are the timing considerations?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Are there areas of duplication of effort or expenditure that could be addressed?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What is the focussed and strategic approach to the allocation of funds to support the top school priorities?</li> </ul>

## PART 2

### 2.3 Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures

Opening Thinking	Focusing Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What indicators would show evidence that a collaborative learning culture is flourishing in your school?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How would staff or students benefit from this collaborative learning culture? What benefits would be realized in daily teaching practice?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Over time what indicators will show evidence that the collaborative learning culture is having a positive impact on your school?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How are the principles of equity and inclusive education embedded into school practices and the School Improvement Plan?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How will you provide opportunities for you and staff to engage in joint decision making and planning?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How will you know if there is continuous improvement in teaching practice? (e.g. assessment practices, common reviews of student work)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In promoting a collaborative learning culture at your school what areas have you identified that require further attention?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What effective practices can you use to support a safe environment for staff to collaborate, so that input and ideas are shared openly and respectfully and that foster professional development?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are ways that you can provide staff the time to meet on a regular basis for collaborative planning? (e.g., flexible timetabling)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How do you communicate with your staff about school/system priorities? (e.g. regular staff meetings, informal conversations)?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How would you gauge the level of trust between staff, staff and administrator(s), staff and community and between staff and students? In what ways can trust levels be enhanced?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How would you reach and engage parents, the diverse communities and stakeholders?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What practices are in place to ensure a safe and respectful environment for staff learning (e.g., risk taking, trying new ideas, and high tolerance for mistakes as part of learning)?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How will you facilitate training and discussions with staff on equity and inclusive education?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How do you make use of technology to enhance collaboration (e.g., wikis, google docs)?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What <b>external expertise</b> has your school accessed to support staff learning?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What <b>internal staff expertise</b> has your school accessed to support staff learning?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What approaches are taken to problem solving/ responding to challenges by you and/or staff?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What approaches to professional learning opportunities are used by you and/or staff?</li> </ul> <p>Are you finding that staff is self motivated in their professional learning? What strategies might you use to encourage and promote interest in professional learning?</p>

## PART 2

### 2.4 Using Data

Opening Thinking	Focusing Thinking
<p>Choose one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What sources of data are available to you about the progress of overall student achievement at your school?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What sources of data are available to you about individual student progress/individual school programs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are your sources of data? (e.g., formal – reports on standardized tests and grades; informal – use of smart boards and individualized assessments )</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What might you infer from this data? (e.g., trends, patterns, areas of concern). How could these be applied in schools and classrooms towards improved student outcomes?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What insights do you have to account for any gap between what you hope to see and the results you are seeing? What are your understandings of the root causes of these gaps? i.e. context, demographics, school profile</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Weighing your sources of quantitative and qualitative data, which ones are most relevant and why?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Which sources of data are you finding most useful for analyzing your school results? (e.g. EQAO results, student surveys, samples of student work, parent feedback, teachers' Annual Learning Plans)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Based on the results of the data you have examined, what conclusions and related decisions could you and your staff make in terms of designing the School Improvement Plan? And towards improved outcomes at the student level?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In what ways can you support your staff to apply research or evidence based materials in relation to understanding school data?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In what ways does the school systematically and regularly monitor <u>individual</u> student achievement and well being?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In what ways does the school systematically and regularly monitor <u>overall</u> student achievement and well being?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In what ways does your staff use individual student achievement and well-being data to impact classroom instructional strategies? How do you monitor success of these strategies?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In what ways does school student achievement and well-being data impact classroom instructional strategies?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are some things you are doing, that are producing the results you are obtaining for overall student achievement and well-being/individual student achievement and well-being?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What strategies are in place to ensure that student well being is a priority? Are there strategies that you could add to current practices?</li> </ul>

## PART 2

Opening Thinking	Focusing Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What assessment and evaluation methods are teachers most commonly selecting?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Are the assessment and evaluation tools bias free? Do they reflect the diversity or demographics of the region / school?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> When considering the methods of assessment and evaluation that are most commonly selected, how is the authentic assessment of student achievement valued?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To what degree do you consider that the assessment, evaluation and reporting practices inform the learning opportunities and the student learning profiles? How do you know?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What conversations are you having to support the gathering, analyzing and use of data to support student achievement and well-being? (i.e., peer-to-peer)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Describe how the feedback received by students about their learning is specific and timely. How do you know?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Describe how the feedback that parents receive about their child's learning is specific and timely. How does this support building public confidence and strengthening confidence in public education?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> As you reflect on Annual Learning Plan conversations you have had with teachers at your school, what areas are surfacing that may require more support?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Based on current engagement in professional development, what gaps do you see that may require further in-service training?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What practices do you have in place to support the Annual Learning Plan process for teachers?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What effective practices might you use to improve the process you presently have in place for supporting the development of the teacher's Annual Learning Plan?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How will new knowledge and skills link to enhanced data literacy / numeracy? How will these new skills be applied and result in improved student outcomes? How will you measure their success?</li> </ul>

## PART 2

### 2.5 Engaging in Courageous Conversations

Opening Thinking	Focusing Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> As you think about a conversation where you would be providing constructive feedback, what would you need to know about the person with whom you are having the conversation?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> What other perspectives or interpretations of the situation might you want to consider?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> If you were the other individual, how would you like this to be handled?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> What are some ways that this individual can become more engaged in the conversation?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> How can you ensure that the relationship of trust and respect is not negatively impacted by this conversation?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> In planning your approach, how can you ensure the relationship is protected? In order to do this consider the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Ensure you have all the information you need to be thoroughly prepared for this meeting</li><li>○ Consider the individuals or groups with whom you need to consult</li><li>○ Do you know the socio- demographic composition of your student population?</li><li>○ Define your goals for the meeting</li><li>○ Consider what values of yours are involved</li><li>○ Be prepared to share your goals</li><li>○ Invite the other person to share their goals</li><li>○ Reflect on the goals you may have in common</li></ul></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> What is the best outcome you could envision? What could you do to promote this?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Consider if this conversation were to have a negative outcome, how could you avoid this?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Are there “non-negotiables” you have in mind? Are there areas where there is room for change and flexibility? What are some ways “win/win” might be achieved?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> What additional time would you need to prepare for a conversation dealing with a pressing issue? What other steps would you have to take to prepare for this type of conversation?</li></ul>

## PART 2

Opening Thinking	Focusing Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What aspects of the conversation do you look forward to or makes you uncomfortable?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are some possible contributing factors to this comfort level or to this discomfort?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What about the conversation makes you feel <i>particularly</i> tense?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What opportunities does this situation offer you?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In thinking about similar situations you have handled well in the past, what has been helpful?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> As you think about the other person, how do you make them feel respected and welcome in order to set a positive tone?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are some ways you help others feel safe and open to dialogue?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What might be some of the other person's concerns and/or issues?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are ways you can promote shared understanding and involvement?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> As you think about your approach in this situation, would a coaching mode support your goals? (e.g., encouraging the person to be reflective of their own practice)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> As you think about learning focussed conversations building a sense of efficacy amongst staff, what strategies do you consider effective?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What are ways you can handle a performance appraisal conversation to support staff to learn new skills rather than become defensive?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What accomplishments and improvements that support the school goals and priorities, can be highlighted in this meeting?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> As you reflect on your past handling of difficult conversations, do you notice that you prefer a more avoidant strategy/confrontational approach/use of dialogue and shared meaning? What skills would you like to further develop and how could you do this?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on times you have received feedback. What was effective/not effective? Why?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on times you have given others feedback. What was effective/not effective? Why?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How might you determine if the individual is receptive to and wants feedback?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is the real issue being brought forward, or is there a hidden agenda? What are ways you could approach this?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In what ways do you “own part of the mess”?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How and by whom, will decisions be made in this meeting/conversation? How will follow up be handled?</li> </ul>

## **PART 3**

### **Part Three: Sample Mentoring Learning Plans and PPA Annual Growth Plans**

This section provides examples of ways in which the Conversation Starters can support the development of Mentoring Learning Plans and PPA Annual Growth Plans based on the five Core Leadership Capacities. When setting learning goals, the individual will want to consider between three and five goals. Relating goals to the CLCs will focus learning on capacities that research has shown have a direct impact on student achievement and well-being. It is suggested that a separate template be used for the expansion of each goal.

A Mentoring Learning Plan is one of the first things the mentor and mentee must do together. This plan reflects the learning needs of the mentee and will become the focus of work between the mentor and mentee. Mentees are encouraged to use the areas for growth, strategies/supports and target dates identified in their PPA Annual Growth Plan as a basis for informing their mentoring Learning Plan. The mentor and mentee will review the Mentoring Learning Plan on a regular basis to determine progress and identify any change in learning needs and interests of the mentee. It is an effective practice to recognize that the mentoring relationship is planned and purposeful, driven by the professional learning needs of the mentee; is based on trust, respect and confidentiality and is non-evaluative and non-supervisory.

The PPA Annual Growth Plan provides a vehicle to plan the principal or vice-principal's professional learning during the appraisal year and in the intervening years between appraisals. Developing and maintaining a Growth Plan provides appraisers and appraisees with an opportunity to collaborate and engage in meaningful discussions about appraisee growth strategies. It also provides an opportunity for discussion about the supports that may be needed to carry out the growth strategies. The PPA Annual Growth Plan also supports the mentoring of new leaders by identifying strengths and areas for growth and development thereby focusing mentoring efforts and conversations. The PPA Annual Growth Plan should reflect the development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and practices described in the Ontario Leadership Framework and the 5 Core Leadership Capacities as these are evidence-based practices that have been shown to positively impact student achievement and well-being.



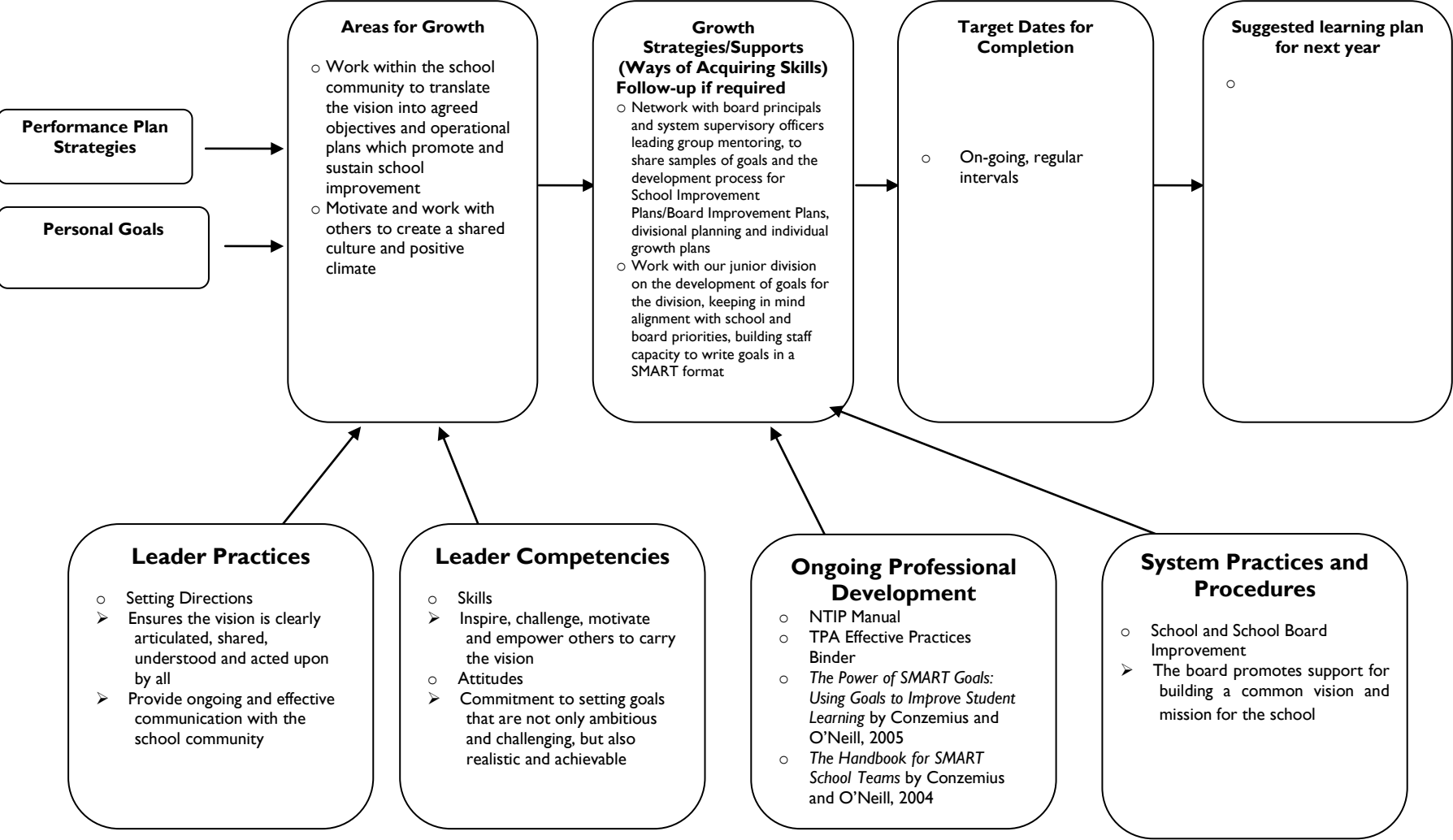
PART 3

I. SETTING GOALS - SAMPLE MENTORING LEARNING PLAN / PPA ANNUAL GROWTH PLAN

Appraiser: Ms Khan

Appraisee: Mr Peters

This template is derived from the Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA) Growth plan template and can be used in the Mentoring context. When used in the context of PPA as an Annual Growth Plan, it must be signed by a supervisor. In the context of Mentoring it remains confidential between the mentor and the mentee.



**Specific Focus Areas of Growth (Learning Goals) for Mentoring**  
(these do not need to be shared with supervisor)

**Mentee: Mr Peters    Mentor: Ms Leblanc**

Date(s) developed: 2009 - 08 - 19  
Contact Consideration: out of office  
Meeting Frequency: last Tuesday of each month  
Email/phone/Adobe Connect/SharePoint: Email back and forth on an as need basis for quick information; Telephone call as needed and also during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the month to give updates and to confirm upcoming meeting location and area of focus  
Meeting Location: YMCA meeting room

**I. Setting Goals**

Technical goal:  
Build knowledge of the language and format for SMART goals setting both for group and individual goal setting

Adaptive goal: Learn how to develop staff engagement, motivation and commitment to the process and implementation of school and individual goals

Growth Strategies as a focus of Mentoring	Dates and timelines
1. Attend board sponsored workshop on SMART goal writing for School Improvement Plans and individual learning planning. Follow up by facilitating staff meeting discussion on how to write SMART goals format for team or individual planning	August 2009
2. Draft, get input and monitor implementation of my own growth plan SMART goals with mentor, principal or supervisory officer	October 2009
3. Read Conzemius and O'Neill's work <i>The Power of SMART Goals: Using Goals to Improve Student Learning</i> with application of ideas to how to transform the school into a place where each and every student is meeting and exceeding standards by shifting thinking to a focus on results.	January 2010
4. Launch a book study with school team and determine as a team how to achieve #3 above	January 2010 – June 2010 and beyond

**Resources:**

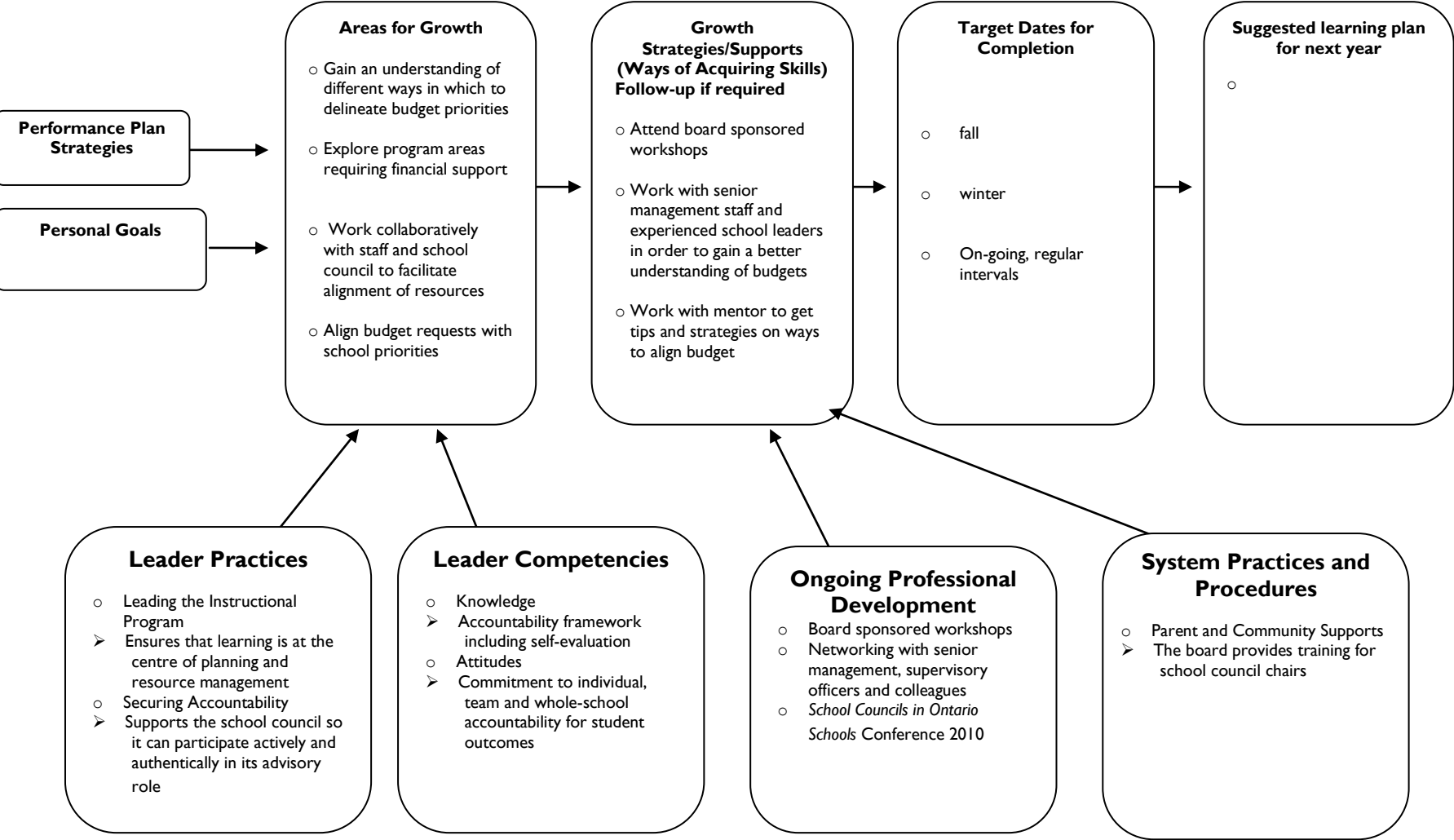
- With a group of 5 newly appointed school leaders, visit Data Driven High School
- Ontario Leadership Framework; Board Improvement Plan; School Improvement Plan

PART 3

2. ALIGNING RESOURCES - SAMPLE MENTORING LEARNING PLAN / PPA ANNUAL GROWTH PLAN

Appraiser: Ms KhanAppraisee: Mr Peters

This template is derived from the Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA) Growth plan template and can be used in the Mentoring context. When used in the context of PPA as an Annual Growth Plan, it must be signed by a supervisor. In the context of Mentoring it remains confidential between the mentor and the mentee.



Specific Focus Areas of Growth (Learning Goals) for Mentoring (these do not need to be shared with supervisor)

Mentee: Mr Peters Mentor: Ms Leblanc

Date(s) developed: 2009 - 08 - 19  
Contact Consideration: out of office  
Meeting Frequency: last Tuesday of each month  
Email/phone/Adobe Connect/SharePoint: Email back and forth on an as need basis for quick information; Telephone call as needed and also during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the month to give updates and to confirm upcoming meeting location and area of focus  
Meeting Location: YMCA meeting room

2. Aligning Resources

Technical goal: Learn budget requirements and technical skills to manage school and school council budgets

Adaptive goal: Develop skills of allocation of above budgets to school priorities through a collaborative process.

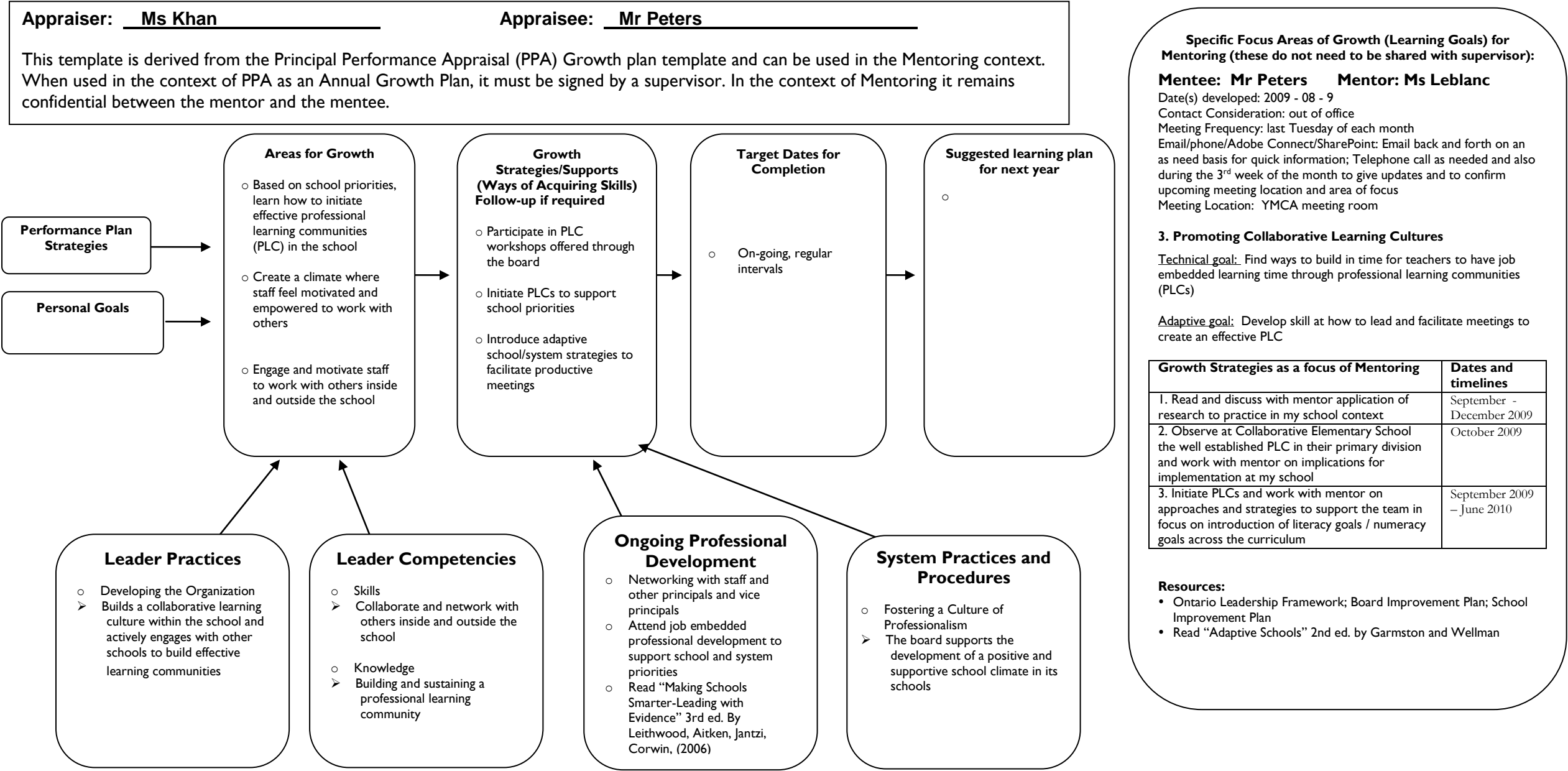
Growth Strategies as a focus of Mentoring	Dates and timelines
1. Participate in board sponsored workshop "Financial Management for New School and System Leaders"	September 2009
2. Mentor to participate in school budget meeting at mentee's school to observe process of decision making and alignment with board priorities, and provide feedback and suggestions	September 2009
3. Work with mentor and financial services staff on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>school budget</li><li>consult school council re: budget for outreach money</li></ul>	October 2009
5. Facilitate budget planning meeting with staff advisory council – plan and discuss with mentor. Review school and district priorities and the School Improvement Plan to inform the process	October 2009
6. Facilitate budget planning meeting with school council - plan and reflect with mentor	October 2009

Resources:

- Ontario Leadership Framework; Board Improvement Plan; School Improvement Plan
- Board Financial Handbook for Principals
- BAS 2000 Software (software used to manage school and board budgets)

PART 3

3. PROMOTING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING CULTURES - SAMPLE MENTORING LEARNING PLAN / PPA ANNUAL GROWTH PLAN

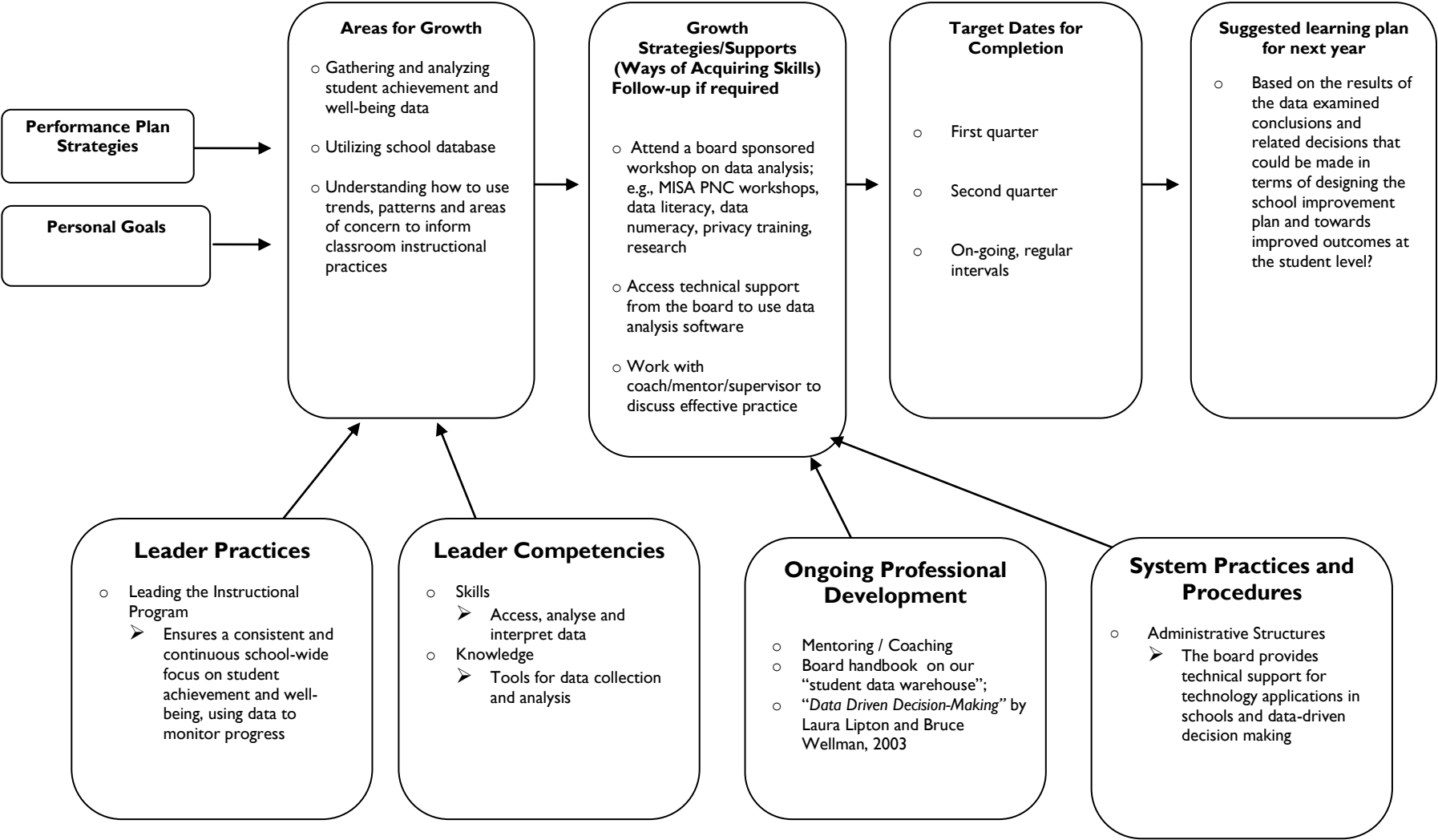


PART 3

4. USING DATA - SAMPLE MENTORING LEARNING PLAN TEMPLATE

Appraiser: Ms Khan Appraisee: Mr Peters

This template is derived from the Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA) Growth plan template and can be used in the Mentoring context. When used in the context of PPA as an Annual Growth Plan, it must be signed by a supervisor. In the context of Mentoring it remains confidential between the mentor and the mentee.



Specific Focus Areas of Growth (Learning Goals) for Mentoring (these do not need to be shared with supervisor):

**Mentee: Mr Peters    Mentor: Ms Leblanc**

Date(s) developed: 2009 - 08 - 19

Contact Consideration: out of office

Meeting Frequency: last Tuesday of each month

Email/phone/Adobe Connect/SharePoint: Email back and forth on an as need basis for quick information; Telephone call as needed and also during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the month to give updates and to confirm upcoming meeting location and area of focus

Meeting Location: YMCA meeting room

**4. Using Data**

Technical goal:

- a) Become informed about how and what data to gather
- b) Develop expertise in how to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data

Adaptive goal:

- c) Develop skills for building staff capacity and beliefs, to use data and make decisions for instruction that can impact student learning

Growth Strategies as a focus of Mentorin	Dates and timelines
1. Attend board hands-on workshop on how to use the "student data warehouse", using our own school data	September 28, 2009
2. Spend ½ day with Ms. D. at Data Driven High School to learn how this experienced principal works with her staff to translate data into action for students. Work with mentor on applications at my school.	October 14 <sup>th</sup> , 2009
3. a) Read "Data Driven Dialogue" by Wellman and Lipton b) Attend 2 day conference with MISA leaders on this topic, discuss with mentor how this would apply to my professional practice	December 2009
5. Work with Student Success Team and build capacity of staff to use quantitative and qualitative data in planning, implementing and monitoring of student progress, with mentor support	August 2009- June 30, 2010

**Resources:**

- Attend 2 day conference on "Using Data" and discuss with mentor
- With a group of 5 newly appointed school leaders, visit Data Driven High School
- Ontario Leadership Framework; Board Improvement Plan; School Improvement Plan.

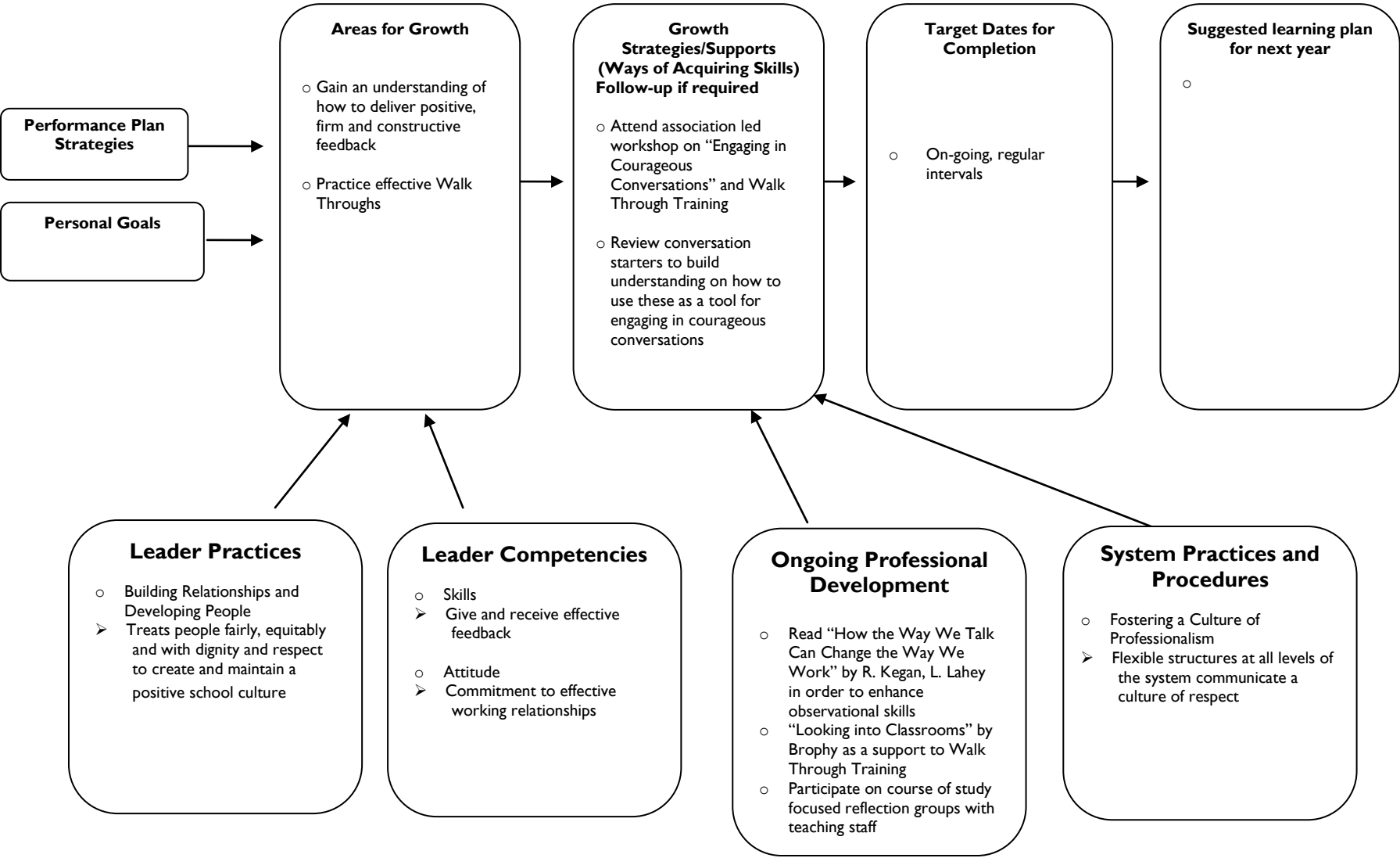
PART 3

5. ENGAGING IN COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS - SAMPLE MENTORING LEARNING PLAN / PPA ANNUAL GROWTH PLAN

Appraiser: Ms Khan

Appraisee: Mr Peters

This template is derived from the Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA) Growth plan template and can be used in the Mentoring context. When used in the context of PPA as an Annual Growth Plan, it must be signed by a supervisor. In the context of Mentoring it remains confidential between the mentor and the mentee.



Specific Focus Areas of Growth (Learning Goals) for Mentoring (these do not need to be shared with supervisor):

**Mentee: Mr Peters    Mentor: Ms Leblanc**

Date(s) developed: 2009 - 08 - 19

Contact Consideration: out of office

Meeting Frequency: last Tuesday of each month

Email/phone/Adobe Connect/SharePoint: Email back and forth on an as need basis for quick information; Telephone call as needed and also during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the month to give updates and to confirm upcoming meeting location and area of focus

Meeting Location: YMCA meeting room

**5. Engaging in Courageous Conversations**

Technical goal: Improve my observation skills and knowledge of effective classroom instruction

Adaptive goal: Develop effective ways to engage staff in dialogue and strategies to improve instruction and professionalism

Growth Strategies as a focus of Mentoring		Dates and timelines
1.	Identify and practice strategies to give effective feedback in performance appraisals so that the appraisee feels motivated to learn and doesn't become defensive over suggestions—work with mentor to plan and reflect	August 2009 – January 2010
2.	Develop skills at handling difficult conversations, e.g. addressing when a staff person is chronically late Practice with mentor how to engage in a difficult conversation, review and monitor with mentor	August 2009 – June 2010
3.	Update professional reading to enhance observational skills. Discuss applications with mentor, principal or supervisory officer	September - December 2009
4.	Participate in classroom “walk through” training offered through the Principal Associations	September 2009 – June 2010
5.	Develop skill at motivating and engaging staff to engage in improving daily instruction. Observe and dialogue with 2 mentors who have offered support in this area.	August 2009 – June 2010

**Resources:**

- Ontario Leadership Framework; Board Improvement Plan; School Improvement Plan.
- Conversation Starters



**TWO TYPES OF CONVERSATION<sup>1</sup>**

- To converse means to turn together, to exchange information, ideas, and opinions, or feelings.
- When conversation begins to take on a consciously organized purpose – that is two or more people must now either deepen understanding or make a decision, the focus shifts to two types of conversation – *Dialogue* and *Discussion*.

*Dialogue* is a reflective learning process in which two or more people seek to understand each other's viewpoints and deeply held assumptions. It is a conversation in which talking and listening by all parties creates a flow of meaning. Out of dialogue emerges a new and shared understanding. Dialogue is a tool for collective exploration of meaning – not a search for the right, wrong or best solution.

*Discussion* is a conversation in which two or more people intend to come to some form of closure – either by making a decision, reaching agreement or identify priorities. Discussion involves convergent thinking focused on tasks. While two or more people build deeper meaning along the way the real purpose is to come to a meeting of minds and reach some agreement.

**FIERCE<sup>2</sup> CONVERSATIONS**

- When you think of 'fierce', think passion, integrity, authenticity, collaboration. Think cultural transformation. Think of leadership.

**The Seven Principles of Fierce Conversations:**

1. **Master the courage to interrogate reality.** What has changed, does the plan still make sense? If not, what is required of you? Of others?
2. **Come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real.** No one has to change, but everyone has to have the conversation. When the conversation is real, the change occurs before the conversation is over.
3. **Be here, prepared to be nowhere else.** Speak and listen as if this is the most important conversation you will ever have with this person.
4. **Tackle your toughest challenge today.** The problem named is the problem solved. All confrontation is a search for the truth. Healthy relationships include both confrontation and appreciation.
5. **Obey your instincts.** During each conversation, listen for more than content. Listen for emotion and intent as well. Act on your instincts rather than passing them over for fear that you could be wrong or that you might offend.
6. **Take responsibility for your emotional wake.** For a leader there is no trivial comment. The conversation is not about the relationship; the conversation *is* the relationship. Learning to deliver the message without the load allows you to speak with clarity, conviction and compassion.
7. **Let silence do the heavy lifting.** Talk *with* people not *at* them. Memorable conversations include breathing space. Slow down the conversation so that insight can occur in the space between words.

Definition of terms adapted from *The Fifth Discipline Fieldwork: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* by Peter Senge et al, 1990

<sup>2</sup> From *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and In Life, One Conversation at a Time* by Susan Scott, 2004

## PART 4

### SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS<sup>3</sup>

Effective Questions are:	They sound like this:	Not like this:
Open Ended	Tell me about your teaching experience.	Where did you teach?
Invitational	What do you think about...?	Do you believe in ...?
Specific	It would be great to hear about...	Why on earth would you ...?
Evocative	Would you consider...?	Why don't you ...?
Positively or neutrally biased	How often does she...?	Does she ... much?
Challenge assessments	What does it look like when...?	What will happen if ...?
	What might this mean?	What does this mean?
	Let's speculate about ...	What will happen if ...?
	What might you learn from this?	What's up with ...?
	Tell me what you were thinking.	What did you think would happen?
	What evidence do you have that...?	What is wrong with ...?
	How could that be interpreted differently?	What's your feeling about ...?

#### Some Questions for Establishing Focus

What has become clear since we met last? What is the best use of our time in this conversation? What do you need to focus on? What topic are you hoping I won't bring up?

#### Questions for Discovering Possibilities

What outcomes do you want? What is the best thing that could happen? If you knew you wouldn't fail, what would you do? What have you observed that has worked for others? What is the area that, if you made an improvement now, would result in the greatest impact on student learning? What is currently impossible to do that, if it were possible, would change everything? What's the most important decision you are facing? What's keeping you from making it?

#### Questions for Planning the Action

Of all the options, what's the most compelling? What are you trying to make happen in the next three months? What do you need to do first?

#### Questions for Removing Barriers

Who or what do you need to include to succeed? How will these actions contribute to achieving your goal? What might prevent you from succeeding? What's missing? What roadblocks do you expect or know about?

#### Questions for Review and Recap

Tell me what you are going to do and by when? What are you taking away from this conversation?

### THE SUPERVISOR AS COACH IN THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

- All coaching is centred on increasing the principal's/vice-principal's ability to *set goals* effectively, to *act* in pursuit of those goals and to *reflect* on those actions and their impacts.
- None of this is possible unless the coach establishes and maintains a relationship that is characterized by trust and rapport.

#### The Basic Moves of Transformational Coaching<sup>4</sup>

**Start from breakdowns.** As Michael Fullan<sup>5</sup> reminds us, "problems are our friends". Every conflict, failure to achieve a goal, or crisis in competence is a learning opportunity. When a principal/vice-principal acknowledges a problem, that principal/vice-principal creates an opening for the power of coaching.

**Listen to the principal's/vice-principal's stories and test them.** By definition, interpretations are subjective. The central focus of transformational coaching is the act of helping a principal/vice-principal become aware of interpretations and to explore alternatives for action and behaviour.



## PART 4

**Use data to shift the principal's/vice-principal's perspective.** Data can range from a coach's own observations to the results of surveys.

**Develop and test interpretations and strategies that could help the principal/vice-principal deal successfully with the breakdown.** What is there about the principal's/vice-principal's current way of being that is preventing the principal/vice-principal from moving forward? What assessments is the principal/vice-principal making about the situation that are obstacles to taking effective actions? What interpretations does the principal/vice-principal hold that limits possibilities and how might they be shifted?

**Help the principal/vice-principal construct new interpretations, new stories that open up possibilities for effective action.** Use mediational questions<sup>6</sup> to lead a principal/vice-principal to explore new possibilities at the cognitive level. Some examples of mediational questions include: What's another way you might...? What would it look like if ...? How might she react if...? And what might be the rationale for...?

**Use hypothetical situations and role playing to help the principal/vice-principal practice new ways of being.** Situated in the protected space created by the coaching relationship, the principal/vice-principal can rehearse new ways of being.

<sup>3</sup> From *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development* by Gary Bloom et al, 2005

<sup>4</sup> From *Blended Coaching: Skills and Strategies to Support Principal Development* by Gary Bloom et al, 2005

<sup>5</sup> From *Change Forces* by Michael Fullan, 1993

<sup>6</sup> For more information about asking mediational questions refer to *Cognitive Coaching* by A. L. Costa and R. J. Garmston, 2002

**PART 4**  
**Reader Response Form**

Do you have comments or suggestions regarding these conversation starters? Just mail this form to the Ministry of Education, fax to (416) 325-7019 or email us at: [ldb-ddl@ontario.ca](mailto:ldb-ddl@ontario.ca)

Ministry of Education  
900 Bay Street, Mowat Block, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

District School Board: \_\_\_\_\_

Suggestions:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_