



The Canadian School Leader: Global Forces and Future Prospects





The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Foreword

The Canadian School Leader: Global Forces and Future Prospects is a clarion call for the importance of public education in and for Canada within global and local contexts. These contexts include increasing population diversity and complexity, technological and economical shifts, and changing understandings of the role, work, needs, challenges and successes of school leaders and the students, staff and communities they serve. I highly commend the Canadian Association of Principals (CAP) and Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) for conducting this timely and important study and for the excellently written report that I encourage you to continue to read.

Based on survey responses from nearly 1,000 school leaders across Canada, the report contains rigorous research. Yet, it goes beyond statistics alone, calling for (re)commitment to Canadian ideals and aspirations for the children, young people and adults involved in our public education system. Further, the report calls for recognition of the complexities associated with aspirations for excellence, equity and inclusion in practice, which are not yet fully realized. Therefore, we need to take this important new evidence and join collectively in a commitment and plan for action to benefit current and future generations of students and the staff and communities that support them. As Gordon R Thomas (Executive Secretary, ATA) and Maxine Geller (President, CAP) conclude in their preface to this study,

We hope that this study's spirit of collaboration speaks to the future prospects for recognizing that Canada's school leaders—as teachers first—require our shared commitment of support to fulfill our country's most important promise to young people: a great public school education for all.

I fully agree. The “global forces” that exert influence on the day-to-day work of Canada's school leaders are increasing in intensity, complexity and volatility; we need to move to “future prospects” where we are not the reactive recipients of external change but, rather, supported as proactive professionals who turn possibilities for equity and improvement into realities for Canada's public education systems.

Let's start with the encouraging findings that may bolster the important work of school leaders in advancing Canada's public education systems. Crucially, Canada's school leaders believe that “A public school system contributes positively to the public good” (mean score of 6.28, from a scale of 1 = not at all, 7 = to a great extent). The majority of respondents report the importance of public

education for social, economic and equity outcomes. While there are concerns about marketization and privatization, particularly linked to technology for data collection and reporting, the core functions of teaching and learning remain a professional responsibility. The majority of school leaders consider their school district a great place to work and report supports for students' needs and for teachers' and their own professional learning and development. Notably, the majority of respondents perceived that "their districts had high levels of trust in school leaders" (74 per cent of responses) and "in teachers" (76 per cent of responses). On the one hand, this is encouraging; however, on the other hand, worryingly, this indicates that almost a quarter of school leaders do not believe their school district trusts the professionals working in schools.

Concerns about workload, work intensification, time and resources for professionals' learning needs, increasing complexity of students' needs and school working conditions, and stability and sufficiency of resources to meet such needs emerge in the survey results. Most troubling are major findings concerning students' needs and the reality that our aspirations for equity require urgent attention and action. Despite the overwhelming support for public education, the statement that "All students have the same opportunity for academic success in Canadian public schools" was rated at only 3.75 (mean score, out of a total of 7). The majority of school leaders report perceived increases in students experiencing anxiety, depression symptoms or some form of psychological trauma; students living in poverty; students coming to school tired or hungry; and students requiring English as an additional language supports. In combination with these highly concerning shifts, school leaders also report decreases in the proportion of students able to focus on educational tasks, bounce back from adversity and come to school ready to learn. Therefore, increasing complexity and diversity of students' mental, emotional, social, physical and cognitive needs appear in inclusive classrooms in public schools. School leaders and their staff want all students to succeed, but desperately need resources and supports to deal with the combined global and local forces of socioeconomic inequities, multiculturalism and multilingualism that they encounter in relation to their local teaching and learning conditions. Canadians value and appreciate diversity; yet, persisting and intensifying inequities for our children and youth, and for their schools and communities, are our most pressing challenge.

From my perspective, public education's primary purpose is the advancement and betterment of humanity through the individual and collective development of children and young people; the school leaders and teachers who work with and serve them; and the families, communities and societies connected to them. I take hope from the strong professionalism, service, commitment, values and priorities of school leaders reported in this study. These school leaders identified as a priority students' complex, diverse and changing needs, as well as—linked to this—the need for professional learning and development and for district, government and community support. The

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ideals and aspirations of and for public education are extremely strong; yet, these have yet to be fully realized and the global forces reported to be affecting school leaders are impeding such realization.

Thanks to the CAP and the ATA—as well as other studies indicating similar challenges with respect to students’ needs, diversity and complexity; professionals’ needs and work intensifications; and combined with calls and hopes for improvements—we have evidence that can enable us to move collectively, proactively, diligently, persuasively and persistently into meaningful action. The “call to action” has been made to move from future prospects to new realities: now is the time for the profession to advocate to and collaborate with governments, district and system leaders, professional associations, people and organizations working in and with schools, and communities to advance humanity in and through public education for current and future generations.

*Professor Carol Campbell
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto*

Preface

This publication represents the second part of a major two-part research initiative examining the key critical influences shaping the work of school leaders across Canada. The impetus for this research was *The Future of the Principalship in Canada: A National Research Study* (Canadian Association of Principals [CAP] and Alberta Teachers' Association [ATA] 2014). The study concluded that school leadership is rewarding with high levels of job satisfaction, but global shifts are fundamentally reshaping the work of school leaders, who are at the forefront of sustaining the foundation of this country: a good public school education for all.

In striving to better understand the changing nature of the work of Canada's school leaders, the ATA and the CAP embarked on a two-phase research initiative in 2015. The first phase of this initiative, which was undertaken by André Lanctôt and Linda Duxbury and is reported in *A National Study of the Impact of Electronic Communication on Canadian School Leaders* (Lanctôt and Duxbury 2017), attended primarily to how e-mail is influencing principals' work. The second phase, reported here, focused on the global influences and the future prospects shaping the work of school leaders. Such influences include the growing complexity and diversity of student populations, the influence of marketization and commercialization on governance and policy, and conflicting expectations related to narrowing accountability measures and advancing innovation in school development and professional practice.

This study reaffirms the work of Canadian and international researchers who have offered compelling counternarratives to reform efforts that attempt to decouple theory from practice and morality from policy and purpose. For instance, the work of Freire reminds us that school leaders exist in the brittle human state of being “unfinished”:

Genuine educational leadership means being concerned about having ethically justified, equitable, socially just human relationships. But such matters are indeed controversial, hence the nature of “good practices” and “good conceptualizations” of educational leadership are still contested. This should not deter us since it is usually the case with all human matters since we are “unfinished beings.” (Freire 1998, 51)

This study also echoes Freire's recognition of the quintessential moral character of the work of school leadership. In particular, this study reinforces the need to attend to the imperatives of leadership that remind us that achievement with integrity must be conceived within—and by working through—the all-embracing daily challenges that cause us to “pay attention to the quest for meaning within a wider community” (Shirley 2017, 25). This is the brittle but beautiful work of crossing boundaries between self and other, between them and us. If education is the project of making us “strangers to ourselves”

(Greene 1973), school leaders must become boundary crossers who understand that the complex ecologies within which they work cannot be divided neatly into individual identities, institutions, jurisdictions or countries. They are called to move from ego-systems to eco-systems (Campbell 2015).

It is time for Canada to join a global movement in education reform committed to “shifting resources from accountability to capacity enhancement” (CAP and ATA 2014, 82). School jurisdiction authorities, provincial governments and policy-makers can best support the work of school leaders by developing and resourcing a vision for a good public school education that prioritizes developing school leaders’ professional capacity to enhance human relationships and the vibrancy of our communities. Through this work, school leaders can join with all Canadians in recognizing that, though “unfinished,” we aspire to be more than a better version of yesterday—if not for ourselves, then for our children and youth.

In closing, we want to recognize those who contributed to this important work. This study was part of a collaborative effort between the ATA and CAP, and former CAP president Tina Estabrooks was instrumental in designing and advancing the research project from the outset and facilitating the administration of the surveys. Dan Nelles, associate executive assistant, ATA Calgary Public Local, and Jean Stiles, principal, Jasper Place High School, provided technical and design support for the survey that formed the basis of the study. Anna Yashkina, an independent researcher involved in numerous national research studies, led the analysis of the data and the writing of the final report. Additional support for data analysis and report preparation was provided by Laura Servage, postdoctoral fellow, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and Greg Thompson, associate professor, Queensland University of Technology. J C Couture, ATA associate coordinator of research, led the design and coordination of the project and Lindsay Yakimyshyn, ATA administrative officer, supervised the final production of the research report.

We hope that this study’s spirit of collaboration speaks to the future prospects for recognizing that Canada’s school leaders—as teachers first—require our shared commitment of support to fulfill our country’s most important promise to young people: a great public school education for all.

Gordon R Thomas
Executive Secretary
Alberta Teachers’ Association

Maxine Geller
President
Canadian Association of Principals

Study Background

The *Canadian School Leader: Global Forces and Future Prospects* is a pan-Canadian survey study sponsored by the Canadian Association of Principals (CAP) and conducted by the research staff of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). In summer and fall of 2016, principals across Canada were invited to respond to an online survey and offer their perspectives regarding the following issues: changes in teaching and learning conditions; the role of markets, businesses and government in public education; and district support for schools and their leaders.

The study, including its survey, builds on *The Future of the Principals in Canada: A National Research Study* (CAP and ATA 2014), a research project that identified global and national trends and critical influences shaping the work of Canadian school leaders, and ascertained the short- and long-term supports that administrators hoped to receive to support their work in the context of change.

For the 2014 study, 500 principals from across Canada participated in the focus groups. Each focus group worked through a facilitated process: the participants completed a workbook, drawing on two resources, *Changing Landscapes: Alberta 2015–2035* (ATA 2013), a brochure that explores seven global trends affecting education in Canada, and an accompanying student video. A comprehensive review of relevant research literature was also undertaken to inform the themes the focus groups would explore, as well as the analysis of collected data. The review identified external influences that are increasing the demands, complexity and stress of the principalship:

- Broad social, demographic and economic changes
- Changes in school regulation
- Increasing accountability measures
- Increasing expectations from parents and the public
- Dwindling and inconsistent human and financial resources
- Rapid technological change
- The increased role of markets and commercialization in education

The focus group findings aligned with the account drawn from the literature review. Participants in the study cited lack of public trust in schools, increasing accountability measures and a lack of long-term vision for public education.

First, principals in the study felt overloaded with administrative and reporting requirements and felt these responsibilities were diminishing their professional autonomy and capacity to support teachers. Further, economic strains placed on families left schools with more students whose social, emotional and basic needs were not being met at home. With increasing socioeconomic disparity and other public sector cutbacks, school staff become “first responders,” whether they feel equipped to respond or not. In addition, while respondents agreed that Canada’s growing social and cultural diversity enriches schools and communities and public life, they noted that it complicates efforts to address the complexity of student needs. School leaders across Canada reinforced the message that public schools struggle to reconcile the growing complexity of student populations with episodic government initiatives in the context of declining resources and a lack of capacity and expertise in priority areas.

Second, the increasing presence of commercial interests in education creates tensions and challenges for principals. Large-scale commercial purchases can create rigid structures that diminish the capacity of school leaders to tailor features, resources and products to the needs of their own school communities. *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* participants also indicated that schools are becoming increasingly reliant upon local businesses to fund programs. Principals in the study noted the “market mentality” replacing parent and community perceptions of collective interests and a common, public good. When principals try to respond to parent choice and demands for specialized programming, their capacity to offer programs that will address the public interest by meeting the needs of all students may be diminished. Principals questioned the growing sentiment articulated by some political figures that parents and students are clients and that the government’s work is simply to ensure the delivery of education as a service.

Third, principals in the study highlighted an array of issues related to technology. Advances in technology offer great potential in relation to student learning and school operation. However, they also present a number of concerns: the need to maintain a stable technology infrastructure; the growing accumulation of data collected for questionable purposes; parents’ expectations for instant, “24/7” communication affecting educators’ work–life balance; and technology-facilitated antisocial behaviours, such as cyberbullying. These technology-related issues add to principals’ and teachers’ workloads and stress levels.

The Future of the Principalship in Canada participants also identified short- and long-term supports they require to better respond to changes in their schools and work. Though responses related to both short- and long-term supports were similar, principals expressed more immediate need for increases in human capacity within schools (through professional development and more specialists in schools) and called for clear political vision and stable funding to help schools move into the future. Principals also envisioned the development of community partnerships and provision of wrap-around services, including “social services, speech therapy, language learning, occupation therapists and counsellors” (CAP and ATA 2014, 63) to support their schools.

These key findings of *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* informed the development of the study’s survey and themes discussed here.

THEMES EXPLORED IN THIS STUDY

As indicated earlier, the survey was designed around three major themes:

1. The changing contexts of teaching and learning
2. The role of markets, businesses and government in public education
3. District supports for schools and their leaders

The survey results for each major theme are reported and interpreted in the context of *The Future of the Principals in Canada*, as well as other relevant research and literature. Consideration of the implications for policy, practice and future research conclude the report.

1. Changing Contexts of Teaching and Learning

Changes in teaching and learning conditions, particularly related to the increasingly complex and diverse needs of student populations, have significant effects on the work of teachers and principals. Moreover, such changes require attention and support on the part of governments and school jurisdictions. A growing body of Canadian educational leadership research is recognizing the complexity of school life and the moral imperatives of equity and inclusion required to anchor theory and practice in nuanced ways (Griffiths and Portelli 2015; Fowler 2017). The need for system- and school-level leadership practices that sustain and support optimal conditions for exemplary teaching practice was also raised in *Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta—A Global Perspective* (ATA 2015). Underscoring the fact that, compared to the other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Canadian teachers have some of the largest class sizes and most diverse student populations, the report discussed the challenges and increasing expectations teachers face related to class size and classroom complexity. The fundamental problem is “the lack of appropriate government support for coping with increasingly complex school communities,” accompanied by increasing accountability and performance measures focused on a narrow range of outcomes (ATA 2015, 25). The report argues that efforts to improve “the quality of teaching”—for which the OECD calls and on which systems around the world focus their reforms—should take into account “the complex interrelationships that determine the conditions of teaching practice and student readiness to learn” (ATA 2015, 7). In the present study, questions were developed to further investigate changes in student diversity and classroom complexity.

2. The Role of Markets, Businesses and Government in Public Education

While results in *The Future of the Principals in Canada* suggest that the increasing role of markets and businesses in public education is not a pressing concern for all Canadian schools, concerns are emerging regarding the influence of market-oriented policies and commercial interests on principals' work. In particular, responses from Alberta participants in the 2014 study indicated the presence of market-driven ideology in education. The “culture of consumerism and choice” that drives the

Alberta school system renders the principal's position as "more of a marketing manager than an educator" (CAP and ATA 2014, 59). The 2014 study showed that commercial activity creates both ideological and practical tensions for school leaders. While school administrators strive to protect schools as sites of academic freedom, they also develop partnerships with companies to acquire resources for their schools. In the case of schools supporting low-income communities, some of these resources may be urgently needed.

Commercial activity in schools comes with a danger of businesses driving the public education agenda. Such concerns underpinned the *Commercialisation in Public Education* study in Australia (Lingard et al 2016). The study included a survey of over 2,000 teachers and school administrators that revealed significant commercial activity in public schools across Australia. The study participants expressed significant concerns about the effects of commercial activity on public education, both within schools and with regard to policy direction in general. As the present study seeks to address similar issues, it employs a slightly modified version of the survey instruments used in the Australian study.

3. District Support for Schools and Their Leaders

The district plays a vital role in helping schools and their leaders deal with external pressures, pursue system goals and meet local needs. Participants in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* called for support in response to the following external demands and changes: loss of trust in schools and teaching profession, increased accountability measures, social and cultural changes, and technological advances. These changes, according to the results of *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* and other research literature (eg, Cattonar et al 2007; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman 2015), have great influence on schools in general, and on principals' work in particular. In light of these circumstances, having timely access to relevant professional development for both teachers and school leaders was deemed vital by the participants in *The Future of the Principalship of Canada*.

Because of the importance respondents placed on district support in *The Future of the Principalship of Canada*, the present study included a set of survey questions that investigates the extent of support that districts and education ministries provide for principals to enable them to engage in their own professional learning, as well as facilitate their teachers' learning and development.

SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Responses were received from 921 principals, a 2.9 per cent sample rate relative to Statistics Canada census data.¹ Several attempts were made to increase the response rate; however, for both organizational and logistical reasons, it was challenging to achieve high response rates in all provinces and territories. In particular, Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec are underrepresented and New Brunswick and Alberta are overrepresented. Table 1, below, shows survey responses by province relative to the population of school principals in each province (based on the Statistics Canada 2011 census data).

Table 1: Distribution of Sample by Province

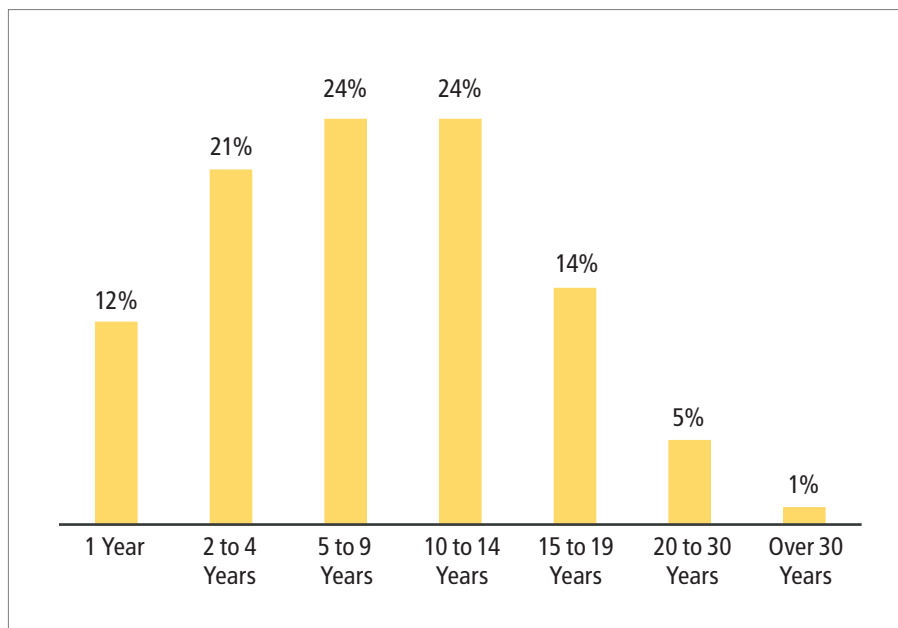
Provinces	Percentage of School Study Sample	Percentage of School Principal Population
British Columbia	5%	12%
Alberta	28%	13%
Saskatchewan	7%	5%
Manitoba	2%	4%
Yukon	1%	0%
Nunavut	3%	0%
Northwest Territories	1%	0%
Ontario	2%	39%
Quebec	12%	21%
Prince Edward Island	6%	0%
New Brunswick	21%	1%
Nova Scotia	1%	3%
Newfoundland/Labrador	10%	2%
	100% (n=920)	100% (n=31,562)

¹ The Statistics Canada data employed here is drawn from National Occupations Classification 0422, "School principals and administrators of elementary and secondary education." Available at www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=122372&CVD=122376&CPV=0422&CST=01012011&CLV=4&MLV=4 or <http://tinyurl.com/y9hb6jhg> (accessed 2017 06 19).

Although provincial political contexts affect the work of educators, *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* results indicated that respondents faced similar issues regardless of the province in which they worked. Rather, the most salient contextual factors appeared to be population density (ie, whether the school was urban, rural or remote) and the policies and practices of the school jurisdiction, which varied to some extent based on the jurisdiction’s geographical dispersion.

More than half (53 per cent) of respondents reported that their principalship was a full-time role, while the balance of respondents (more or less evenly) indicated that they allocated from 10 per cent to 90 per cent of their work to an administrative role.² With respect to respondents’ gender, 60 per cent of study respondents were female (compared to the figure of 54 per cent provided in census data). In terms of years of administrative experience, the range was wide, with the sample skewed somewhat toward younger and less experienced principals. As Figure 1 shows, one-third of respondents had less than five years of experience in their roles.

Figure 1: Years of Administrative Experience



² This study does not provide data on whether these roles are held by vice- or assistant principals.

Theme One Findings: Changing Contexts of Teaching and Learning

Mounting economic pressures, growing economic disparities and an increasing immigrant population contribute to the greater complexity and diversity of Canadian population in general, and the school student population in particular. Coupled with policies for inclusion, the changes in student population affect classroom composition by bringing together students of various backgrounds and abilities. In classrooms across Canada, students with identified exceptionalities (defined as those students formally identified as having behavioural problems or mental or physical disabilities, as well as other students with special needs, including gifted students) accounted for 16.3 per cent of total students in one study (CTF 2011); in the same study, students who were identified as English or French language learners accounted for 12.2 per cent of students. Students with other important educational needs (eg, students in low-income families, students with mental health issues, immigrant or refugee students) should also be taken into account, as circumstances such as poverty or psychological trauma can affect students' level of readiness for school, and thus further impact contexts of teaching and learning.

Diverse students present a wide array of learning needs that make teaching more challenging. In another (CTF 2014) survey on teacher work–life balance, teachers reported that the top stressors in their work environment were the inability to devote as much time as they would like to each of their students and issues related to class composition and students with special needs. Similarly, in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* (CAP and ATA 2014) participants expressed concern with teachers being “stretched very thin” trying to address diverse learning needs, as well as nonlearning needs. While some participants noted that society’s problems are being “downloaded” onto schools, others commented that schools take on “more family responsibilities” due to financial pressures that erode family time and the lack of community supports for families in need (CAP and ATA 2014, 35). Thus, the primary concern stemming from diverse student needs, according to the study participants, was school role overload.

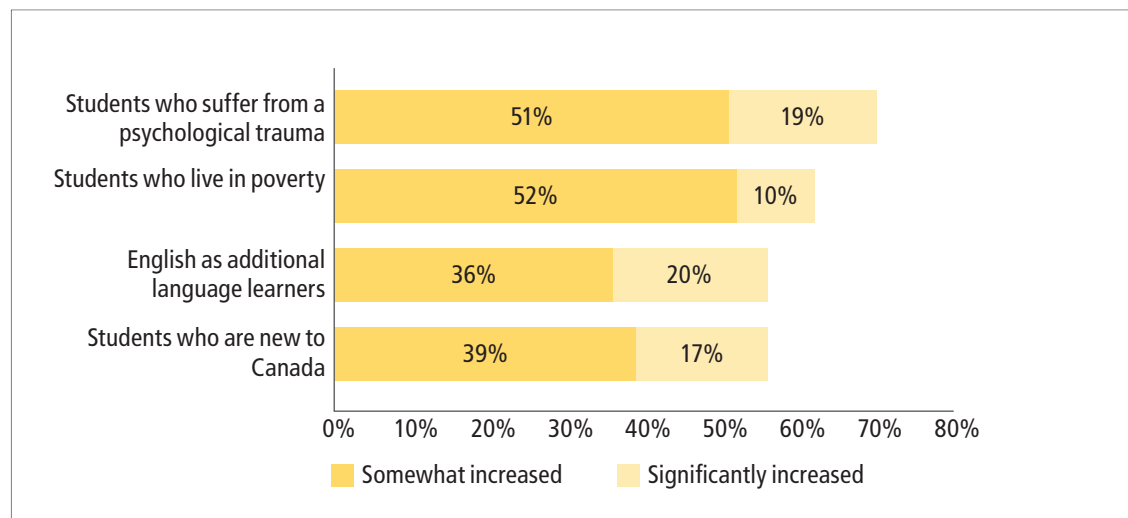
As the student population becomes more complex and diverse, principals spend more time ensuring that the needs of all students are met: they work to create an inclusive culture in school; offer specialized programming; and foster relationships with cultural, religious, and ethnic organizations and local community organizations (CAP and ATA 2014; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman 2015). Often, principals need to be flexible and creative in their efforts, and stringent reporting requirements and multiple initiatives imposed from above can diminish this capacity. Thus, participants in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* emphasized

the need for more autonomy to better respond to local needs. They also appealed for more district and system support in professional development for teachers and school administrators, specialized programming, and additional human and financial resources. They also desire more community support in providing specialized services to new immigrants, students with alcohol and substance abuse issues, and students with mental health and behavioural concerns (CAP and ATA 2014).

CHANGES IN STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AND NEEDS

Survey participants were asked to rate on a five-point scale changes in their student population over the past three to five years. The questions focused on challenging circumstances that put students most at risk in terms of facing difficulties in their learning.

Figure 2: Changes in Students in Challenging Circumstances



DIVERSITY OF CULTURES AND LANGUAGES IN SCHOOLS

More than half (56 per cent) of respondents reported increases in the number of EAL students and students new to Canada in their schools. Notably, Canada has one of the highest proportions of foreign-born populations (20.6 per cent) in the world (Statistics Canada 2011). While this enriches society, it also presents challenges. Children who are new to Canada (usually immigrants or refugees) have varying educational experiences before arriving in Canada, and may require very different levels and kinds of support to succeed in Canadian classrooms. For instance, newcomer students may have difficulty adjusting to a new country and culture, and require assistance and counselling. They may not speak English or French, and thus require focused educational supports to help them attain proficiency in one of Canada’s official languages. Language-learning supports may also be required by Canadian-born students raised in families where a language other than English or French is

spoken at home. As noted earlier, according to one pan-Canadian study (CTF 2011), students who were identified as English or French language learners accounted for an average 12.2 per cent of total students in the classroom. In some urban schools, the percentage of EAL students can be as high as 92 per cent (People for Education 2013).

In *The Future of the Principalship in Canada*, principals recognized the advantages of having diverse cultures and languages in their schools, but, at the same time, commented on many accompanying challenges. Cultural conflicts make it difficult to create an inclusive culture. Teachers and administrators may also experience language barriers in their attempts to connect with parents of EAL students. Administrators appealed for more programming support and professional development related to these needs. In many cases, teachers required professional development opportunities to learn how to teach EAL and to gain deeper cultural understanding. In an ATA (2014) study of teachers in one Alberta school jurisdiction, only 20 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had participated in professional development activities aimed at teaching in a multilingual or multicultural environment, and only 60 per cent of those indicated that they felt the training had either a moderate or a highly positive impact.

CHILD POVERTY AND ITS EFFECTS ON STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

Despite the national government's promise in 1989 to end child poverty by 2000, the rate of child poverty has not decreased. In fact, according to Campaign 2000's 2016 report card on child and family poverty, poverty has increased: more than 1.3 million children (18.5 per cent) live in poverty (in 2014), compared to more than one million (15.8 per cent) in 1989. Reflecting this increase, the majority (62 per cent) of study respondents perceived increases in child poverty in their schools and communities.

Child poverty has been linked to psychological trauma, mental health issues and being unprepared to learn. Participants in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* indicated that "poverty creates stress for families, impeding parents' ability to meet the basic physical, social, and emotional needs of their children" (p 40). Similarly, the CTF (2016, 2) cites research indicating that "many low-income children experience reduced motivation to learn, delayed cognitive development, lower achievement, less participation in extra-curricular activities, lower career aspirations, interrupted school attendance, lower university attendance, an increased risk of illiteracy, and higher drop-out rates." A Statistics Canada study on five-year-old children's readiness to learn shows that children from lower-income families are less ready to learn than children from more affluent households (Thomas 2006). The study also established links between a child's readiness to learn and his or her home

environment. Specifically, the study linked daily reading, high positive parent–child interaction, participation in organized sports, lessons in physical activities and lessons in the arts with higher scores on various measures of readiness to learn.

Table 2: Observed Changes in Student Attributes

Over the past 3–5 years, how have the following changed?	Decreased (%)	Increased (%)	Modal Response	(%)
Students coming to school tired	12.7	59.6	Somewhat increased	48
Students coming to school hungry	7.6	54.3	Somewhat increased	45
Students’ empathy	32.3	27.5	Not changed	40
Students’ overall level of physical activity during the school day	32.0	23.9	Not changed	43
Students’ overall readiness to learn	50.8	21.1	Somewhat decreased	42
Students’ ability to focus on educational tasks	61.8	15.3	Somewhat decreased	52
Students’ ability to bounce back from adversity (resilience)	61.5	13.0	Somewhat decreased	43

Scale: 1–significantly decreased to 5–significantly increased. “Decreased” includes “somewhat decreased” and “significantly decreased” categories. “Increased” includes “somewhat increased” and “significantly increased” categories.

CHANGES IN STUDENT ATTRIBUTES AND READINESS TO LEARN

Principals in the study indicated their perception of increases or decreases in certain factors that would indicate students’ readiness to learn. The responses are reported in Table 2.

The survey results suggest decreases in students’ readiness to learn. In particular, the study participants perceived that, over the past three to five years, an increasing number of students have been coming to school tired and hungry. Responses also indicate that students are less resilient and less able to focus on educational tasks. No significant changes were observed in students’ levels of empathy.

The results of correlation analysis suggest that child poverty and psychological trauma are linked to readiness to learn. Specifically, changes in the number of students living in poverty were positively correlated with changes in the number of students coming to school hungry (the strongest correlation) and tired, and negatively correlated with changes in students’ readiness to learn and students’ ability to focus on educational tasks. Low but statistically significant negative correlations were also observed between changes in the number of students suffering from a trauma and changes in students’ overall readiness to learn, student ability to focus on a task and student resiliency.

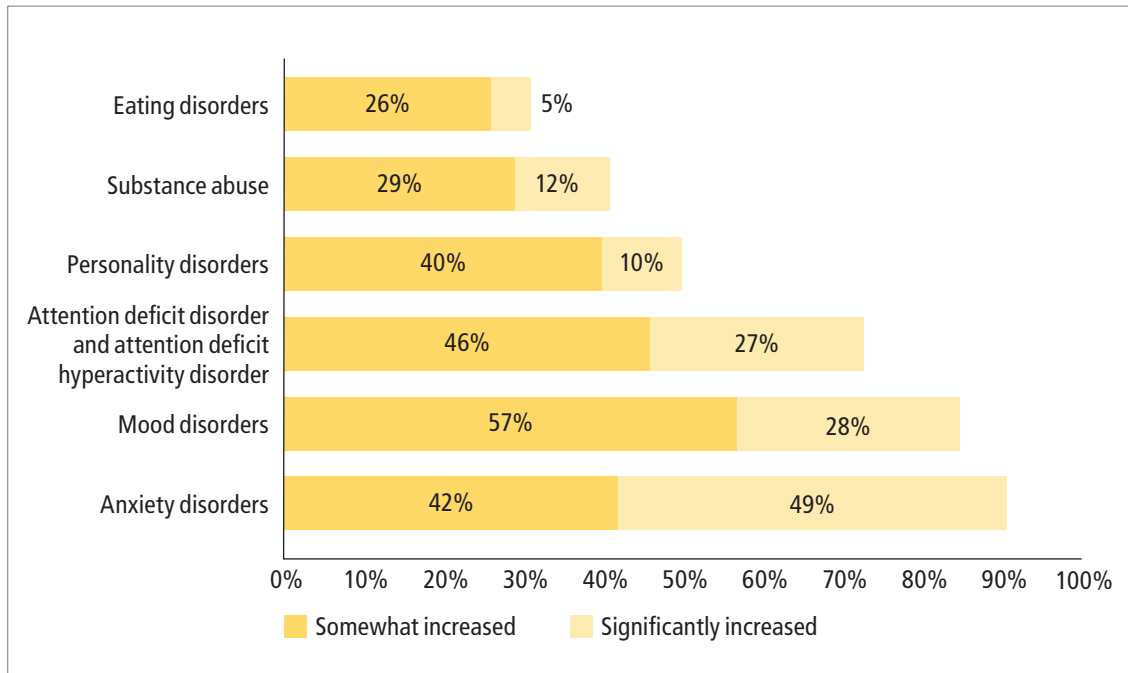
When an increasing number of students are coming to school tired, hungry, stressed and unable to focus on learning, schools are faced with meeting students’ basic, emotional and social needs in addition to their learning needs. Such efforts are often undertaken with limited resources and, to

address students' needs, school leaders sometimes seek help from social agencies, businesses and community organizations to provide such services as breakfast and lunch programs, counselling, social skills groups and home visits (CAP and ATA 2014).

CHANGES IN STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Statistics in recent years point to troubling trends in mental health problems faced by children and youth. Current estimates suggest that, at any given moment, one in five students in Canada is dealing with a mental health issue (Whyte 2016). According to Kirby (2008), between 15 and 25 per cent of Canadian children and youth suffer at least one mental health problem or illness, ranging from anxiety to substance abuse. Further, approximately 14 per cent of children aged 4–17 years old experience clinically important mental health disorders, while only 25 per cent of them receive treatment (Waddell et al 2005). Notably, 70 per cent of mental health problems and illnesses begin during early childhood and adolescence (Government of Canada 2006). Given its prevalence among children and youth, mental illness has major implications for students and schools as well as the aspiration of success for all students.

Figure 3: Observed Changes in Student Mental Health



The results of our survey show that principals perceived students' mental health concerns to be growing dramatically. A notable proportion of respondents observed significant increases in the number of students with anxiety disorders (eg, obsessive compulsive disorder, phobia), mood disorders (eg, depression, bipolar disorders) and attention deficit disorders (ADD and ADHD). Fewer

respondents noted significant increases in the areas of personality disorders, substance abuse and eating disorders.

Principals' perceptions regarding increases in student mental health issues can be partially explained by the increase in public and educator awareness of these issues. Another explanation is the increasing number of students living in poverty, as the data from this survey, as well as other research (eg, Thoits 1999), reinforce the link between poverty and mental health. Correlation analyses of the items in this section with the perceived change in the number of students living in poverty suggest some correlation between child poverty and mental health issues (ranging from $r=.20$ to $r=.28$, $p < .001$).

The relationship between poverty and mental illness has been explored by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA 2007): while people with mental illness often live in chronic poverty, poverty can be a significant risk factor for poor physical and mental health. The CMHA (2007, para 1) argues that "understanding this broader context is key to addressing poverty in order to promote mental health and support the recovery of persons with mental illness."

While mental health problems among children and youth constitute an increasingly important issue in Canadian public schools, "numerous barriers exist to mental health service provision for students" (CTF 2015, 3). According to a 2012 CTF survey of nearly 4,000 teachers, these barriers include "an

insufficient number of school-based mental health professionals; a lack of adequate staff training in dealing with children's mental illness; and a lack of funding for school-based mental health services" (CTF 2015, 3).

Similar concerns are raised in studies of principals in Canada (CAP and ATA 2014; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman 2014). For example, one school leader in *The Future of the Principals in Canada* (CAP and ATA 2014, 34) articulated a typical observation: "there are increasing social, emotional and mental health needs for students and a decrease in the amount of services to support them. A disconnect exists between government and community health services and schools in a time when a connection is imperative." With community agencies and supports facing funding cuts, the school often becomes the only place where students in distress can receive assistance, and teachers in schools are increasingly perceived as front-line mental health workers. However, mental health issues require specialized professional intervention; teachers would require additional training, knowledge, and competencies to perform this new role expectation (CAP and ATA 2014; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman 2014). Principals are seeking much more support to address students' needs, and look to the community and government to mobilize this support. At the same time, many principals in Pollock, Wang and Hauseman's (2014) study indicated that school-level partnerships surrounding student mental health concerns increase their workload dramatically and put a strain on time needed to attend to other issues.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from this study as well as literature cited in this section, schools require additional resources in the following areas:

- Government funding and support for schools, especially those with a large population of students from low-income families
- Support for low-income families to minimize the negative effects of poverty on families and children
- High-quality professional development opportunities for school staff in the areas of multiculturalism, English language learning and mental health
- More student counsellors, psychologists and mental health specialists in schools
- Additional government and community support in providing specialized services to new immigrants, students with alcohol and substance abuse issues, students with mental health and behavioural concerns, and students with other physical, emotional and social needs
- Greater school and principal autonomy in developing partnerships with businesses and community

As these points illustrate, while schools require additional resources, they also need support from other groups—specifically the government and the community—to provide students with the tools to experience success in school.

Theme Two Findings: The Role of Markets, Businesses and Government in Public Education

Neoliberalism has dominated the thinking of western countries for the past 40 years. One of the hallmarks of neoliberalism is the use of market mechanisms to deliver and distribute what have traditionally been considered public goods. In education, neoliberalism encourages “discourses of parental choice, competition, accountability measures, performance goals, and standardized assessment regimes” (Fallon and Poole 2016, 1). Distinctions can be drawn between privatization—the provision of schooling by businesses and corporations (as opposed to government)—and commercialization—the provision of goods and services in schools by companies generating profits. Examining the privatization and marketization of education in Canada, Fallon and Poole (2016) explain that most forms of privatization, such as mixing of public and private funding for public education, school choice, and competition between public schools, are not visible to the public. The authors argue that such invisibility creates “the illusion that the public nature of education remains intact, which in turn fosters passive public acceptance” and causes citizens to “willingly consent to arrangements that actually work against their best interests” (p 3).

Unlike countries such as England, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, where neoliberal influences have resulted in striking shifts in education policy directions, Canada has experienced a more incremental or “creeping privatization” of public education (Fallon and Poole 2016, 5). Fallon and Poole argue that this began with Alberta implementing charter schools in the 1980s, followed by British Columbia and Ontario embracing neoliberal education policy. Policy changes altered education finance, the relationships between education and industry, and labour relations in education.

The questions in this section of the survey solicited principals’ views on government and commercial support for schools, the extent of commercial involvement in their school, the role of businesses in education generally and the role of public education. Results are discussed in light of the findings from the Australian *Commercialisation in Public Education* study (Lingard et al 2016).

GOVERNMENT AND COMMERCIAL SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Two sets of questions employed in the Australian study were used for this study to document supports Canadian school leaders sought from government (eg, the provincial ministry of education) and from commercial providers. Using a seven-point scale, survey participants were asked to rate the frequency with which their school received or accessed support. Table 3 reports means (averages), standard deviations (variation in data), and the percentage of respondents who answered

“often” or “very often” for each type of government and commercial support noted. To investigate the differences between government and commercial levels of support, t-tests and effect sizes (d statistic) were computed.

Table 3: Frequency of Schools Receiving or Accessing Government and Commercial Support

	Government Support			Commercial Support			Effect Size
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	% Often	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	% Often	<i>d</i>
Curriculum	3.83*	1.59	15.3%	2.64	1.72	7.7%	0.72
Assessment	3.76*	1.55	12.5%	2.68	1.74	8.2%	0.66
Student reporting	3.50*	1.57	10.9%	2.46	1.69	6.6%	0.64
Professional learning and development	3.76*	1.55	13.1%	3.28	1.82	13.3%	0.28
Student counselling	2.61	1.43	3.7%	2.57	1.67	6.7%	0.03
Behaviour management	2.61	1.49	4.1%	2.66	1.68	6.7%	-0.03

Scale: 1–Never to 7–Very Often

* Significantly higher mean, $p < 0.001$

“% Often” indicates percentage of respondents who selected 6 or 7 on the scale.

Overall, principals did not report high levels of support from either government or commercial providers. However, given that many of the noted areas fall under the purview of the school district, principals’ perceptions regarding their relatively low use of government resources is understandable. Supports from school districts, addressed later in this report, are thus an important mediating factor in the extent to which schools rely on publicly versus privately provided services and resources.

Canadian principals report receiving or accessing support from government more often than from commercial providers or consultants. This is especially true for acquiring support in the areas of curriculum, assessment and student reporting, where statistically significant differences of large and medium size were observed. The Australian study similarly reports higher levels of government support in the areas of curriculum and assessment; however, the difference between government and commercial support is small, suggesting a higher level of commercial provision in these areas in Australia. In Canada, professional development was the most likely item to come “frequently” from commercial providers (13 per cent); however, the figure was the same for professional development accessed through ministries of education. Respondents noted very few supports from either government or private providers with respect to student counselling and behaviour management. Further study of the commercialization of education in Canada is needed for contextualization to provide insight into why teachers, schools and districts might turn to commercial providers.

THE EXTENT OF COMMERCIAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Another set of questions asked administrators to evaluate the extent of commercial involvement in their schools in a number of key areas. Again, a seven-point rating scale was used, with the midpoint, 4, indicating a moderate response. Table 4 provides descriptive and frequency (per cent of those who indicated significant or great extent) statistics for commercial activity in those six areas.

Table 4: Extent of Commercial Involvement in Schools

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	per cent significant
Student attendance and behaviour recording technology	4.32	2.53	45.4
Software programs for generating student reports	4.26	2.44	42.3
Design of student assessments	2.68	1.72	7.9
Provision of professional development	2.58	1.61	5.9
Data analysis programs	2.53	1.92	11.6
Delivery of curriculum areas or sections of curriculum areas	2.24	1.50	3.2

Scale: 1–Not at all to 7–To a great extent

“Per cent significant” includes percentage of respondents who ranked the item as 6 or 7 on the scale.

The highest commercial activity was reported in relation to technology for tracking student attendance and behaviour, and generating student reports. Over 40 per cent of the survey participants indicated significant commercial involvement in these areas. The split in

responses was also the highest in relation to these items, with over 30 per cent of the respondents reporting little or no commercial involvement. This suggests that principals’ experiences in these areas vary greatly or, on the other hand, that decisions regarding such technology purchases are made at a higher level with principals not necessarily aware of the origin of the software they employ. Like this study’s participants, school leaders in the Australian study also indicated significant extent of commercial activity in student attendance/behaviour tracking (51 per cent) and in student reporting software (44 per cent).

Both this and the Australian study suggest less significant commercial involvement in the areas of student assessment, professional development and data analysis. In the current study, the lowest level of commercial activity was reported in the area of curriculum delivery, with only 3 per cent of the respondents indicating significant activity levels. The Australian study also reported the lowest level of commercial activity in the area of curriculum delivery (6 per cent). A comparative analysis of the Canadian and Australian data indicates that Australian administrators are more likely to report somewhat higher usage of commercial products and services, but the difference between the countries’ reports is relatively small.

CONCERNS REGARDING THE COMMERCIALIZATION AND PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Several questions in the study asked principals to measure their concerns about

the commercialization and privatization of public education in Canada. Table 5 shows the level of concern using a seven-point scale, with 4 indicating a moderate level of concern on a given item. The percentage of respondents who identified an item as very significant (6 or 7) is also indicated.

Table 5: Concerns Regarding the Commercialization and Privatization of Public Education

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	per cent significant
High cost of technology	5.06	1.94	51.0
Lack of support from education ministry	4.75	1.89	43.6
Public schools running as businesses	4.11	2.06	31.4
Ethics of student data in commercial hands	3.96	2.28	33.3
Quality of commercial products	3.63	1.62	11.4
Delivery of curriculum areas or sections of curriculum areas	2.24	1.50	3.2
Paying for services government should provide	3.33	1.95	17.6
Privatization of public education	3.27	2.02	17.8
Amount of private tutoring	3.15	1.84	13.7
Businesses dictating education policy	2.97	1.80	11.3
Teacher activities being outsourced	2.46	1.69	8.0

Scale: 1–Not at all to 7–To a great extent

“Per cent significant” includes percentage of respondents who ranked the item as 6 or 7 on the scale.

The survey data in Table 5 provides evidence of some concern about commercialization and

privatization of public education in Canada. Study participants demonstrated most concern with the high costs of technology. Consistent and pressing concerns in the areas of high cost of acquiring and maintaining technology and lack of funding and resources were also highlighted in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada*. Such concerns raise questions about the relationships between provincial governments, school jurisdictions and schools with respect to funding and decision making in this obviously critical area.

Fund technology properly for both teachers and students to keep up with the world. Schools have to raise monies to fund technology, upgrades to facilities and school playgrounds open to the public to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars.
~Study participant

Lack of support from education ministries was the second most noted concern; it was a significant concern for 44 per cent of the study participants. In open responses, some participants linked increasing reliance on private and commercial companies directly to weak public funding. Responses were more or less pragmatic, in that administrators were simply happy to have the resources: “We would be in a sorry state without corporations supporting our bottom line,” reported one administrator. Another stated, “Do more with less is the expectation from government and thankfully businesses have stepped up to the plate. We are grateful.”

One-third of respondents (31 per cent) expressed concern that public schools are running as businesses. Open-response questions shed some light on how principals interpret the notion of

a business model. Some respondents equate business practices with increasing levels of administration and reporting, reducing time spent on the core work of teaching and learning. For example, one principal stated, “Very little time is left for administrators to provide instructional leadership and get into classrooms due to the ‘business’ of running the school.” This perspective echoes results from *The Future of the Principals in Canada*, in which participants indicate that increasing managerial activities diminish principals’ time to support teachers and their practices.

Education should serve the public and community and not other entities.

~Study participant

Placing student data in the hands of commercial providers was another major concern in the study, with one-third of the participants rating the concern as “significant.” This finding aligns with the growing use of commercial providers for student reporting and attendance tracking.

I worry about the effects of Big Data on decision making. Big business selling us their assessment packages based on American norms, which are then used to make decisions, is problematic and unethical.

~Study participant

Responses suggest some concerns regarding the quality of commercial products, paying

for services government should provide and privatization of public education. Lower levels of concerns regarding businesses dictating education policy and teacher activities being outsourced were indicated. It appears that the core functions of developing curriculum and classroom teaching continue to be predominantly publicly controlled and provided.

Compared to the school leaders in this study, the Australian study’s participants demonstrated much higher levels of concern in all areas. The majority of the school administrators participating in that study indicated significant levels of concern in the areas of costs of technology (70 per cent), ethics of student data in commercial hands (67 per cent), schools running as businesses (62 per cent), privatization of public education (62 per cent), paying for services the government should provide (55 per cent) and lack of support from the government (51 per cent). The comparison of the Canadian and Australian data revealed particularly large differences (with effect sizes ranging between $r=.39$ to $r=.49$) in the areas of privatization of public education, paying for services traditionally provided by education departments, business dictating education policy, outsourcing common activities and ethics of placing student data in commercial hands.³

We have minimal influence but the floodgates could be opened and if that was done I would see a serious erosion of school quality.

~Study participant

³ It would be worthwhile to consider whether creating a national schooling system through data (as has occurred in Australia through mandated national testing systems, a national curriculum and national teaching and teacher education standards) has contributed to Australian school administrators’ concerns or the politicization of these concerns. This seems to be one significant difference between Australia and Canada; however, it is not possible to move beyond speculation given the methodology and samples of the studies.

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Several questions in the survey solicited the perspectives of school leaders on the purposes of public education. The respondents used a seven-point scale to rate their level of belief. Table 6 provides descriptive and frequency (per cent of those who indicated significant or great extent) statistics respecting principals' beliefs about the role of public education.

Table 6: Beliefs About the Role of Public Education

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	per cent significant
A public school system contributes positively to the public good	6.28	1.08	79.8
Good education should focus on developing skills for future employment	5.48	1.14	52.1
Schools from low socioeconomic areas should be funded to a higher level than schools in higher socioeconomic areas	5.46	1.49	53.7
The prime purpose of education is to strengthen democracy	5.05	1.5	40.2
Social development of students is more important than their academic achievement	4.9	1.29	34.6
Schools are sufficiently accountable for student results	4.43	1.47	25.2
Public schools should have complete autonomy in their day-to-day operations	4.34	1.55	25.0
Student success in schools is determined by their innate ability	3.84	1.41	10.5
All students have the same opportunity for academic success in Canadian public schools	3.75	1.79	19.5
Student results should be used to judge teacher proficiency	3.20	1.56	7.3
Schools should use commercial providers for teaching and learning support	2.63	1.39	2.6
Public policy advocacy groups should be able to determine what is taught in schools	2.15	1.24	2.0
Business and industry groups should be able to determine what is taught in schools	2.05	1.23	1.9
Schools performing well on standardized external tests should be rewarded with more funding from the government	1.95	1.4	3.1

Scale: 1–Not at all to 7–To a great extent

“Per cent significant” includes percentage of respondents who ranked the item as 6 or 7 on the scale.

The majority of the respondents (80 per cent) strongly believe that a public school system serves the public good. Respondents believe that public education should “develop skills for future employment,” (M=5.48), but also that education should “strengthen democracy” (M=5.05). An equity-based model of funding is clearly preferred, particularly as a mean of 5.46 was expressed on the item “Schools from low socioeconomic areas should be funded to a higher level than schools in higher socioeconomic areas.” Equity and diversity as values are also somewhat reflected in the low beliefs that “student success is determined by innate ability” (M=3.84) and “all students have the same opportunity for academic success” (M=3.75). Responses suggest that principals see a strong role for public education in levelling what is otherwise an uneven playing field. Further, in this study, nearly 35 per cent of respondents ranked students’ social development as “more important than their academic achievement.”

The survey contained three statements regarding accountability for student results. As noted, principals did not support a performance-based model of funding (ie, funding based on the results of standardized assessment). About 55 per cent of respondents expressed absolute lack of belief in the appropriateness of such model. Overall, respondents considered their schools to be sufficiently accountable for student results (M=4.43). They tend to not believe that student

results should be used to evaluate teacher proficiency, though. Research shows that, among all school-related factors, teaching practice is the most influential factor that contributes to student outcomes (Sanders and Rivers 1996). However, it is not the only factor in student performance. In his groundbreaking work, based on the synthesis of over 800 meta-studies of what works best for learning in schools, Hattie (2011) identifies 150 effects on student achievement. Of them, student-related effects account for about 50 per cent variance in student achievement, teacher effects account for 30 per cent, and peers, principals, schools and home effects each account for 5 per cent.

Respondents expressed moderate to strong beliefs about the autonomy of schools in their day-to-day operations, suggesting that school administrators are inclined to protect teaching and learning in their schools from outside influences, regardless of the source of these influences. This may also be inferred from very low levels of agreement that schools should be influenced by public advocacy groups (M=2.15) or business or industry organizations (M=2.05). Two rationales for protecting autonomy are evident in the open responses. The first rationale relates to the skills and professional judgment that teachers possess. External consultants and commercial products were perceived by some as a waste of resource dollars that could be put to better use by investing directly in schools and teachers.⁴

⁴ The largest concern regarding consultants was that the expenditure was not worth the service delivered, and that funds would be better spent on frontline services for students. Respondents noted that the cost of consultants, many of whom are not accredited educators, represents an intrusion on the professional judgment and autonomy of teachers and school leaders.

Only teachers and administrators know the reality of the day-to-day workload and student concerns and yet outsiders often speak out publicly as experts in what schools “should” be doing.

~Study participant

The second rationale connected to the results is that schools need to maintain a degree of autonomy to meet unique local needs. In particular, this perspective appears to pertain to centralized district resource decisions that forced schools to adopt “one-size-fits-all” technologies or learning systems that could be “inappropriate” or “not effective” in some environments. One principal gave a compelling example of such scenarios and their potential consequences:

Teachers are being asked to use technology that has not been developed with our students in mind. We are working with children who are one or two grade levels below their placement and require highly skilled teachers to differentiate their learning environment . . . If the new report card only aligns with [students'] current grade level, teachers will have to mark children on a rubric that indicates that they are not meeting outcomes, and does not indicate how far they have progressed. There is an important need for children to have success to maintain engagement. Our current practices are stamping out any kind of passion that children might have if they are atypical learners.

~Study participant

Overall, open responses in the survey indicated that there is an appropriate balance between site autonomy and the constraints and standardizing influences that inevitably accompany supports from districts and government. Similar sentiments were observed in *The Future of the Principals in Canada* and are also evident in the following section of this report, which considers the role of school districts in supporting principals' work.

OPEN RESPONSES: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Survey participants were invited to leave comments about their concerns regarding the role of education businesses, consultants and corporations in public schools. We received and conducted thematic analysis of 267 responses. In general, the responses reflected modest but growing concerns about the role of private interests in public education. The involvement of businesses in schools in rural areas was low and presented little, if any, concern, with respondents noting the scarcity of businesses in their school's proximity that would have the financial means to exert any major influence.

Many comments expressed no immediate or local concerns, but these were still often accompanied by speculation that change was imminent. Respondents cautioned that different “agendas” could negatively affect student learning in the future, if the education system starts focusing more “on the bottom line as opposed to the quality of education.” At the same time, some respondents also saw value in partnering with businesses, as long as those partnerships focused on meeting

student needs. Respondents in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* also stated that business involvement ought not to encroach upon the goals of public education.

One of my main concerns is when the business model becomes the framework from which we want to justify and explain reasons for public education. Education is a human endeavour and it is about way more than just preparing students for work. We need to be cautious and critical in our questioning when “shiny and slick” products are designed to sell us away from the important and real role of educating children.
~Study participant

Participants also linked the potential greater influence of businesses with loss of fiscal control at the school or district level. School administrators are concerned that large-scale commercial programs can diminish school and administrator autonomy, and erode educational authenticity. These concerns may underpin administrators’ frustration—expressed in this study and in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada*—regarding access and affordability issues related to technology.

Several comments concerned the use of commercial consultants. Respondents noted that the cost of consultants, many of whom

are not accredited educators, could be better spent on embedded professional development. Further, they indicated that consultants could intrude on the professional judgment and autonomy of teachers and administrators.

Respondents had negative perceptions regarding their limited influence on decisions made by districts or ministries regarding the hiring of consultants or the involvement of businesses. While principals appealed for more direct funding support for schools, they also called for more input regarding working with commercial providers and purchasing products, enabling schools to choose providers and products that would benefit their students the most. Calls for more autonomy in building partnerships with businesses and community organizations to better address diverse student needs appeared in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada*, as well.

Funds ... provided to hire consultants, provide professional learning opportunities at the provincial level and establish learning specialists who are itinerant school-to-school ... would be better served at establishing more FTE at the school level as well as interventionists who are embedded on the front line, consistently at schools.

~Study participant

CONCLUSION

Compiled statistics and open responses suggest that, overall, principals are not significantly concerned with commercial interests in their own schools. However, they see some worrying trends on the horizon, including the potential for business interests to play a greater role in public education and the loss of autonomy at the site level to meet local needs.

In Canada, market-driven ideology has had a “creeping” effect (Fallon and Poole 2016). The slow and incremental dynamic can render neoliberal influences almost invisible, not only to the general public, but also to school insiders. Many principals recognize the effects of commercialization in terms of the immediate contexts of their work and their schools. While pragmatically inclined to access private and commercial sources where these benefit their schools and students, school leaders are wary of greater business involvement in the future, which may have negative impacts on the “agenda” and values of public education, and on their ability to serve the best interests of teachers and students.

Educators have the background and experience in the classrooms and schools and, therefore, they should have the loudest voice in helping a school run, not outside businesses who may value publicity and profit over progress.

~Study participant

Lack of government support creates opportunities for private interests in education. As one survey respondent observed, “If our ... governments invested in education properly

these companies would not necessarily exist.” It follows that increased government funding would reduce reliance on corporate programs. More cooperative and collaborative decision making with respect to resource purchases might also help school leaders tailor resources to their schools’ needs, and reduce the need for soliciting additional commercial and charitable supports. In *The Future of the Principals in Canada*, some respondents commented on the time and effort required to pursue these external supports—time that ought to be focused on student needs and instructional leadership.

These findings can be put in perspective by comparing them with those from the study conducted in Australian public school system, which has a longer history of marketization and more advanced structures and policies that create education markets. Compared to their Australian peers, Canadian school leaders perceive less business involvement in schools. Canadian school leaders remain less concerned with the influence of businesses and markets on their schools than their Australian counterparts. We speculate that these differences in school leader opinions can be partially explained by two key differences in Canadian and Australian school systems. The first is the “important difference between the two educational systems [in] the level of marketization—i.e., privatisation and school choice” (Perry and McConney 2013, 128). The second difference is the creation of a national schooling system in Australia, which may have opened timely opportunities for business involvement in schools at a national level and made the role of business in public schools more visible to school leaders.

Theme Three: District Support for Schools and Their Leaders

The last sections of the survey contained questions on school district support for principals and their schools in the areas of professional autonomy, diverse student needs, technology-related issues and professional development. Historically, the role of the school district was to facilitate the implementation of government education policy in schools, represent local community aspirations for children in decisions about their school curriculum and help ensure the equitable treatment of children across schools (Leithwood 2013). Presently, in a climate of increased school accountability, districts are viewed as “key agents in the chains of accountability for student learning between governments and classrooms” (Leithwood 2013, 10). Fullan’s recent concept of leadership from the middle gives districts an even larger and more active role in the educational system. While top-down leadership imposed by the state cannot achieve widespread buy-in from the bottom, and grassroots change (eg, school autonomy) does not result in improvement at the system level, leadership from the middle “mobilizes the middle (districts and/or networks of schools), thus developing widespread capacity, while at the same time the middle works with its schools more effectively and becomes a better and more influential partner upward to the center”

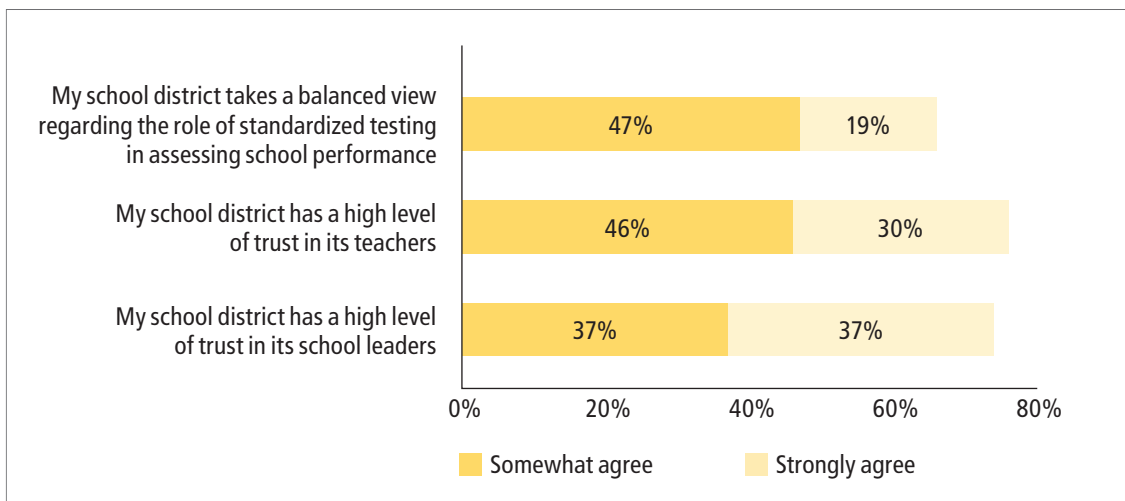
(Fullan 2015, 24). Therefore, the district plays a vital role in helping schools and their leaders to deal with external pressures, to pursue system goals and to meet local needs. Encouragingly, 84 per cent of the current study’s participants believe school districts in Canada are a great place to work. The findings that follow identify both strengths and challenges in existing school district systems. Again, survey results will be discussed in light of relevant recent literature, as well as findings from *The Future of the Principals in Canada*.

PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY

Many principals in *The Future of the Principals in Canada* commented on a perceived loss of trust in the teaching profession and the work of schools. Participants found it demoralizing and time consuming to be constantly justifying and defending their work and that of their staff. “Everyone feels they have the right to tell us how to do our jobs,” commented one respondent. “Parents are allowed to challenge teachers’ expertise or dictate student learning needs and supports,” added another (CAP and ATA 2014, 43). Lack of trust in schools is both a cause and consequence of the level of scrutiny that principals connected to excessive accountability measures. For example, pressures to achieve provincial targets and related to the publication of school results compelled many Ontario secondary administrators to adopt “teaching to the test” techniques, instead of relying on their own and their teachers’ professional judgment regarding teaching and learning (Volante, Cherubini and Drake 2008). Excessive

initiatives and standards imposed on the school also constrain the school administrator's role (Blakesley 2012; Fink 2010; Smith 2009), eroding principal and teacher autonomy and sending the message to educators that they are not trustworthy. Excessive initiatives and externally imposed standards also increase the stress level and workload for principals (CAP and ATA 2014).

Figure 4: District Support for Professional Autonomy



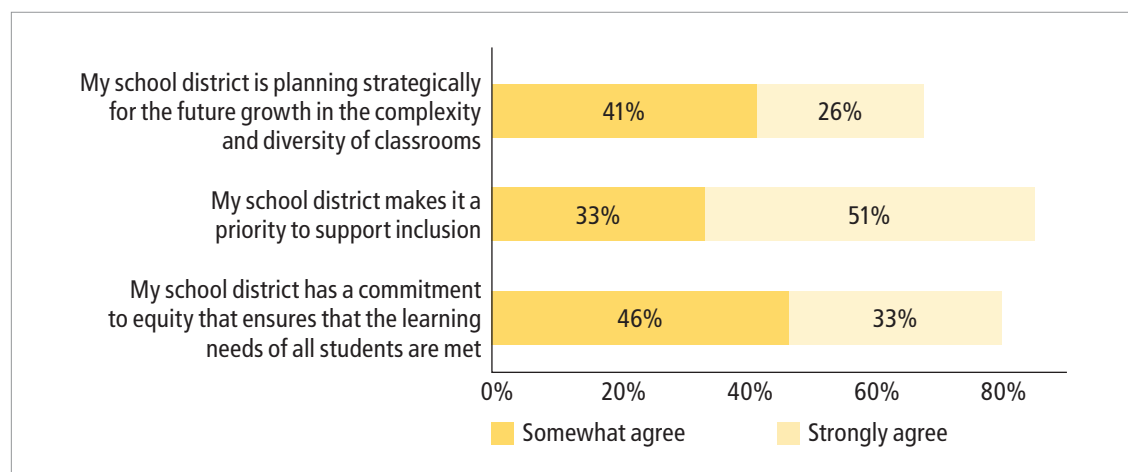
In light of the multitude of demands and pressures placed on schools by the government and the public, the district's role is to buffer schools from unnecessary external pressures and demands, and trust its school leaders and teachers to do their best in meeting students' needs. On a positive note, the majority of principals in this study agreed that their districts had high levels of trust in both school leaders (74 per cent) and teachers (76 per cent). Fewer survey participants (66 per cent) felt that their districts took a balanced view regarding the role of standardized testing in assessing school performance, suggesting that about one-third of the participants felt that their districts based school performance assessment primarily on the results of standardized tests and placed less weight on locally developed assessments and educators' professional judgement.

DISTRICT SUPPORT FOR MEETING DIVERSE STUDENT NEEDS

Canada is a very diverse nation: according to the 2011 census, about 200 ethnicities call Canada home (Statistics Canada 2011). There are many sources of student diversity, however. Schools in Canada (especially schools in the large urban areas) serve students varying in culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, economic class and ability (eg. students with special physical, mental and emotional needs). The ways in which a school staff approaches diversity directly influence students' experiences in school. As research on principals and inclusion in Ontario conducted by Ryan (2016, 78) demonstrates, "the way in which differences are interpreted, valued and judged can positively or negatively affect the way in which students learn in school, and also shape their prospects for life after school."

Findings in this survey, as well as other research (CAP and ATA 2014; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman 2015), indicate that administrators and teachers are finding it challenging to respond to the array of learning needs that accompany increasing diversity. As the student population becomes more complex and diverse, principals spend more time ensuring that the needs of all students are met: they create an inclusive culture in school, offer specialized programming, and foster relationships with cultural, religious, and ethnic organizations and local community organizations (CAP and ATA 2014; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman 2015). In *The Future of the Principalship in Canada*, participants commented on school administrators and teachers feeling overwhelmed and “stretched very thin” in their efforts to respond to diverse student needs (CAP and ATA 2014, 34).

Figure 5: District Support for Meeting Diverse Student Needs



Because Canada is one of the most diverse countries in the world, its school systems value diversity and strive for inclusion. Findings outlined in Figure 5 confirm that supporting inclusion is a high priority for Canadian school districts. The majority of respondents (79 per cent) agree that districts are committed to ensuring that the learning needs of all students are met. Fewer principals (68 per cent), however, feel that their districts are planning ahead for the future growth in the complexity and diversity of classrooms. Comments in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* showed that many principals perceived the inability to plan for the future as a general condition of public education created by lack of long-term vision. Provincial governments plan and budget with a degree of political expediency, and this leaves school jurisdictions and schools with budget uncertainties and shifting mandates.

This study did not specifically examine supports for students’ nonacademic needs. However, data from both the present study and *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* suggest that these needs are significant. Therefore, further investigation into district strategies for providing both academic and social supports for students would be prudent.

DISTRICT SUPPORT FOR TECHNOLOGY-RELATED ISSUES

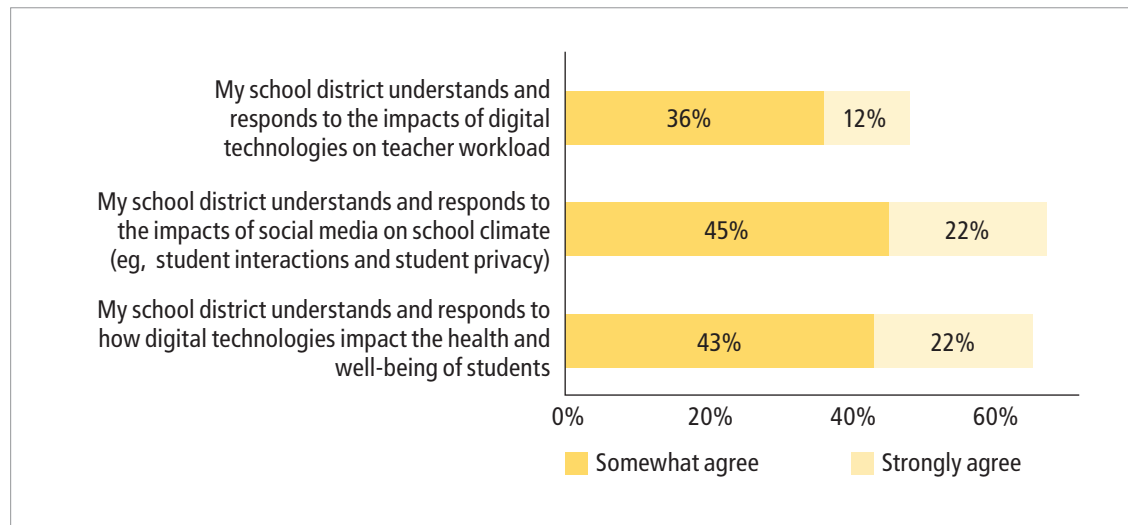
Initially intended as a pedagogical tool to improve student learning experiences and outcomes (Pollock 2016), information and communication technologies have taken on a central role in school operations. Learning and communication technologies now factor significantly in teachers' and school administrators' work, and in students' learning and well-being (CAP and ATA 2014; Pollock 2016). Findings in this section show that, in addition to facing challenges in keeping pace with needed technology infrastructures, respondents feel they are receiving inadequate support with respect to the social effects of technology on their school communities.

Principals in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* saw much potential in technology for enhancing student engagement and meeting diverse student needs. At the same time, however, they expressed concerns regarding their teachers' ability to "keep pace" with the new technologies they were being asked to use (CAP and ATA 2014, 39). School administrators and teachers need considerable professional development to gain technology-related skills and expertise.

Communication technology can help principals and teachers reach students, parents and the wider community quickly and more easily. However, with this ease of communication has come the blurring of boundaries between work and home, as well as increasing parental expectations that school staff be available "24/7" (CAP and ATA 2016; Pollock, Wang and Hauseman 2015). The volume of e-mail communications received from one's school district was also identified as a significant addition to school administrators' workload (Leithwood and Azah 2014; Pollock 2016). The companion study to this report on e-mail communication and principals' work found school administrators spending 17 hours (out of a typical 61-hour workweek) engaged in email-related activities (Lanctôt and Duxbury 2017). A strong body of research illustrates how the growth of technology is a significant source of job-related stress for both teachers (CTF 2014) and principals (Lanctôt and Duxbury 2017; Pollock 2016).

The data in Figure 6 show that district support to address technology-related teacher workload can be improved: less than half of the respondents (48 per cent) agreed that their district understood and responded to the impacts of digital technologies on teacher workload. The survey, however, does not provide us with any data on district support for principals' work as it relates to technology.

Figure 6: District Supports to Address Social and Workload Impacts of Technology



Another major concern regarding technology relates to its inappropriate use by students. The respondents in *The Future of the Principals in Canada* connected “their concerns regarding misuse, overuse and abuse of technology—from excessive screen time to cyberbullying—to a lack of family and social norms around balanced and responsible usage” (CAP and ATA 2014, 38). Technology can distract students from learning and, through cyberbullying and related behaviours, can cause feelings of humiliation, loneliness and insecurity, affecting student health and well-being (Johnson 2009). Cyberbullying can also create discipline-related issues that can occupy much of a school administrator’s time (CAP and ATA 2014; Pollock 2016). Cyberbullying and digital gossip can have a negative impact on the entire school community, requiring school leaders to change the way they promote safe and accepting school environments (Pollock 2016). Approximately two-thirds (67 per cent) of respondents in the current study felt that, to some degree, their school districts understood and responded to the impacts of technologies and social media on students’ health and well-being and on school climate. As the effects of negative, technology-related behaviours are only now becoming widely recognized (Pollock 2016), district leaders are still learning how to support schools with effective interventions and policies. Principals need to play a key role in these efforts.

DISTRICT SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In Canada and globally, there has been an increasing focus on developing teachers’ and school leaders’ capacities. This focus has been fuelled by research on best-performing educational systems (eg, Barber and Mourshed 2007; Mourshed, Chijioko and Barber 2010). Also informing this is literature on school effectiveness and improvement that suggests that, among all school-related factors, teaching practice is the most influential factor (Sanders and Rivers 1996) and school leadership is the second most influential factor (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins 2008) in student

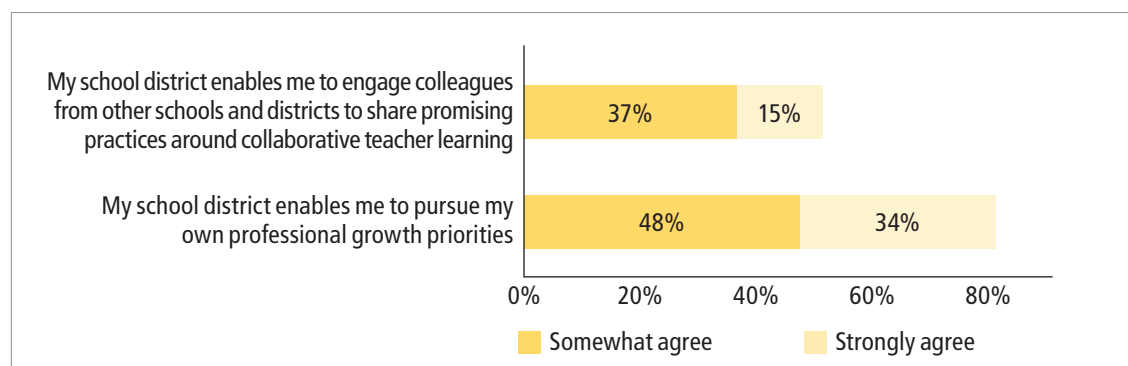
learning. While school leaders spend their workdays engaged in various activities, leadership practices closely related to teaching and learning (often described as instructional or pedagogical leadership in the literature) have the largest influence on student outcomes. Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd's (2009) meta-analysis identifies school leaders "promoting and participating in teacher learning and development" as having "a large, very educationally significant effect on students," with the largest effect size (0.84) of any other leadership dimensions identified in the study (p 40). Similarly, a recent study on professional learning in Canada (Campbell et al 2016) concludes that system and school leaders have important roles in supporting professional learning for teachers and for themselves. Encouragingly, in *The Future of the Principals of Canada* principals clearly expressed that, despite being overwhelmed by multiple demands, they place high priority and value on their roles as instructional leaders, and wish to devote more time and energy to this aspect of their work (CAP and ATA 2014, 51). Thus, to improve student experiences, districts and educational systems should support principals in supporting teachers.

Canadian principals clearly recognize the relationships between principal instructional leadership, teacher capacity and student outcomes. In *The Future of the Principals in Canada*, participants were asked to articulate the kinds of supports they needed to improve their schools in the near and distant future. Timely access to relevant professional development for both teachers and school leaders was deemed vital (CAP and ATA 2014, 44), with "teacher professional development" and "leadership and capacity building" ranked the highest among the short-term supports needed and the second and third highest among the long-term supports needed. Prompted by these findings, the survey for the present study included several questions to gauge supports provided by districts and ministries of education. The survey posed questions about both teacher and administrator professional learning.

Principals' Professional Learning

In the section on professional learning, principals ranked how well their district enabled them to engage in their own professional learning, as well as lead and support their teachers' learning. The following two items referred to principals' own professional learning: individual self-directed learning and collaborative learning with other school leaders.

Figure 7: District Support for Principals' Professional Learning



The study on professional learning in Canada reports that school leaders across Canada engage in various types of individual and collaborative professional learning and development, and require district and system support to do so (Campbell et al 2016, 13). The findings presented in Figure 7 suggest that the majority (82 per cent) of principals felt enabled to some degree by their districts to pursue their *own* professional growth priorities. However, only 52 per cent of the respondents agreed (with 15 per cent indicating strong agreement) that their school district enabled them to engage in *collaborative* learning and sharing around collaborative teacher learning with colleagues from other schools and districts. The findings of *The Future of the Principals in Canada* suggest that professional learning communities and collaborative learning opportunities help participants to develop their instructional leadership capacity and alleviate feelings of professional isolation. More district-provided support and opportunities for principals to engage in collaborative learning are thus a positive course of action.

Principals Supporting the Professional Learning of Teachers

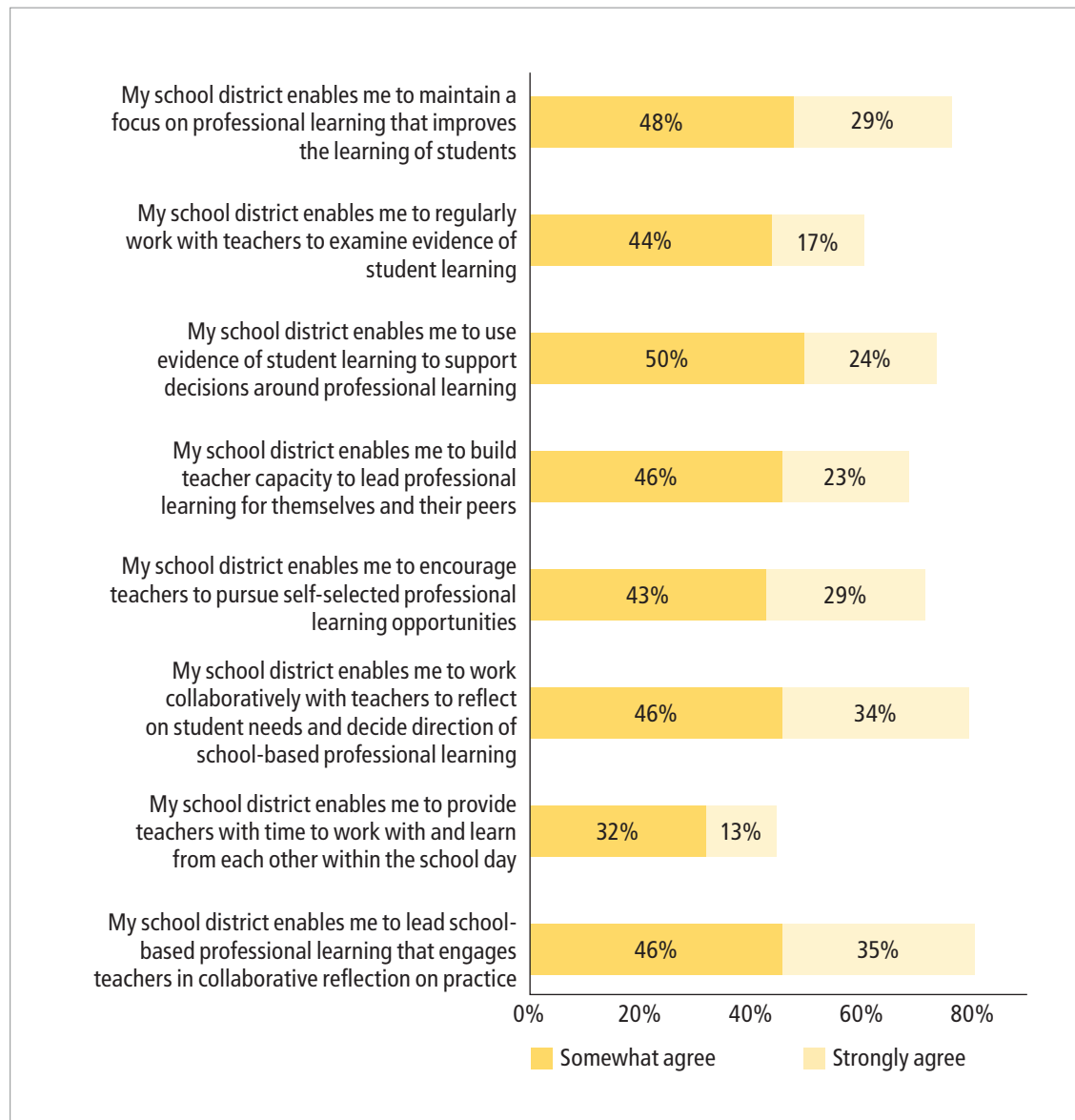
Campbell et al (2016) report that the level of engagement of formal leaders in teacher professional learning varies from active involvement, to a facilitative or supportive role, to no direct involvement at all (with

the intention of enabling teachers to lead their own learning) (p 13). In their study, Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) conclude that “leaders who are actively involved in professional learning have a deeper appreciation of the conditions required to achieve and sustain improvement in student learning” (p 42), which means they can better support teachers. In the present study, over 80 per cent of principals reported being supported in their engagement in professional learning alongside their teaching staff. By learning together with teachers, principals in Canada maintain awareness of teachers’ needs and can support their professional learning more effectively.

District Supports for Teacher Learning

Collaborative learning and communities of practice are widely upheld as best practices for teacher professional learning because of their potential to develop both individual and collective teacher efficacy (Desimone and Stuckey 2014; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Collaborative learning is commonly practised and valued by teachers across Canada (Campbell et al 2016). While principals play an important role in a creating culture of collaboration and trust and in providing opportunities and conditions for teachers’ collaborative learning (Yashkina 2010), not all aspects of school operation and organization fall under principals’ control. Additional district and system supports are required.

Figure 8: District Supports for Teacher Learning



Collaborative Reflection on Practice

The majority of principals (82 per cent) reported that their districts enable them to lead school-based professional learning that engages teachers in collaborative reflection on practice. At the same time, principals' ability to provide teachers with time to collaborate within the school day remains limited. More than half of the respondents (55 per cent) did not agree that the district supported this practice; large variations in responses suggest that principals' ability to schedule time for teacher collaboration within

the school day varies from district to district. Similar observations were made by Campbell et al (2016), who conclude that scheduling of time for collaboration varies from school to school and district to district, depending on the willingness and creativity of schools and districts in managing teacher organizations' policies and federal and provincial professional development opportunities, among other factors.

Distributed, School-Based Leadership

Ingvarson (2014) recommends that “professional development should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of learning experiences in which they will be involved” (p 389). Such approaches to professional development ensure that the content of the professional development is relevant to teachers' needs and motivates and engages teachers by providing them with a sense of ownership and responsibility (Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd 2009; Timperley et al 2007; Youngs and Lane 2014). Promisingly, 80 per cent of principals in the present study reported that the district enables them to work collaboratively with teachers to reflect on student needs and decide the direction of school-based professional learning. This collaborative approach to professional learning connects to the concept of distributed leadership, often portrayed as beneficial and even indirectly linked to student outcomes through teachers' performance (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins 2008). Indeed, engaging teachers in collaborative decision making and distributing leadership responsibilities could benefit those principals in *The Future of the Principals in Canada* who “appeared

to carry the leadership burden alone” (p 14) and sometimes felt overwhelmed by their responsibilities and duties.

While the concept of distributed leadership has become strongly associated with teacher leadership (Harris 2003), there is a distinction between leadership being delegated by formal leaders to distribute responsibilities and teacher-led opportunities for more democratic leadership within and among professional communities (Hargreaves and Shirley 2012), involving professional expertise and judgment (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). When supported appropriately, teacher-led approaches to professional learning—wherein teachers set their own professional learning goals, lead their own learning and share their learning with others—can yield overwhelmingly positive results for teachers, their students, schools and communities (Lieberman, Campbell and Yashkina 2017). Therefore, school and district leaders' support for teacher-directed professional development and teacher leadership are needed (Lieberman, Campbell and Yashkina 2017).

Not all school administrators seem willing to take a less direct role in teacher professional development. Findings in *The Future of the Principals in Canada* indicate that some principals believe that the administrator's role is “one of possessing and then passing along the skills and learning that teachers needed” (CAP and ATA 2014, 45). Districts can help these principals shift their focus to developing leadership capacity among their staff by offering professional development to these ends. In general, participants in our study agreed that their districts enabled them

to encourage teachers to pursue self-selected professional learning opportunities (71 per cent) and to build teacher capacity to lead professional learning for themselves and their peers (69 per cent). Given that fewer principals indicated strong agreement, though, the support for building more teacher leadership capacity within schools can be improved.

Supporting Evidence-Based Practices

In addition to professional judgment guiding professional development, the content of professional learning should be also informed by evidence (Campbell et al 2016). Campbell et al provide examples of schools and school districts across Canada engaging in the process of needs assessments, analysis of student outcomes, and other research and inquiry related to professional learning. Nearly three-quarters of principals in our study report being supported in using evidence of student learning to support decisions around professional learning. Fewer (61 per cent), however, felt enabled to examine evidence of student learning collaboratively with teachers on a regular basis; this presumably links to the challenge of finding time to engage in collaborative learning and inquiry generally.

Another key feature of effective professional learning is a focus on student outcomes (Campbell et al 2016). According to Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009), ensuring an intensive focus on the teaching–learning relationship is imperative in promoting teacher development and improving student outcomes. More than three-quarters of principals in the current study felt that the district supported them in maintaining a focus

on professional learning that improves the learning of students. However, only 29 per cent strongly agreed with this statement, indicating some lack of consensus around professional development priorities.

MOST SIGNIFICANT DISTRICT SUPPORTS

In addition to the survey items discussed above, the survey included three open-ended questions about district and ministry supports for principals to support professional learning in schools. First, survey respondents had an opportunity to name the two most significant supports their school district provides to assist them in supporting professional learning for their teaching staff. Responses were received from 615 respondents. Analysis was conducted and six common strands were identified. Respondents noted the need for time and additional personnel more than twice as often as they did in-district professional development opportunities or funding. Collaborating/networking and autonomy rounded out the themes.

Time

Time is the most often identified and likely the most essential and valued support for professional learning that school districts can provide. Examples include time in the form of release days (professional development days, professional learning days) and release time during the work day. Principals especially valued time provided for professional development determined at the site level, as well as collaborative professional learning and

planning within the school and networking with other schools in the district.

Additional Personnel

Additional personnel were also frequently requested. Provision of substitute teachers by the district allows teachers to engage in professional development during the work days. Districts also provide access to various specialists, coaches and experts to assist teachers with their individual professional growth goals, pedagogy or planning. District resources may also be deployed to help school staff acquire new knowledge and skills in a particular area, although some respondents mentioned that “training is not professional development.”

Inservice Professional Development Opportunities

In their responses, principals often mentioned districts organizing numerous workshops, professional development sessions, invited guest lectures and other professional development events for school administrators and teachers to attend. While these opportunities were valued by some respondents, others stressed the importance of prioritizing embedded professional development at the site level over district-directed events. Comments and survey items throughout this study illustrate tensions between district- and school-directed professional development.

Funding

Aside from funding provided for supply teachers, direct provision of funds for professional development is a key district support noted by participants. Examples

offered by respondents included funds to attend conferences or to take university courses, funds for principals’ personal professional development, set funds for professional development per teacher and funds for school or personnel-directed professional development initiatives.

Collaborating and Networking

Respondents mentioned opportunities for collaborating and networking at various levels (division, school, district). Examples include school networks of grade-alike teachers, professional collaboration days and job-embedded professional learning community time. From the array of comments, it is clear that effective collaboration occurs at both district and school levels. Districts can play a key role in bringing subject- and grade-area teachers together—a particularly important support for small schools that have trouble building these capacities on their own.

Autonomy

Both collective and individual autonomy in making decisions related to professional learning were mentioned. Principals valued “the freedom to plan and participate in school-based and self-directed [professional development],” for example, and “school-based autonomy to collectively pursue our [professional learning] as a staff team.” They also wanted to support teachers’ autonomy by having the ability to provide funding that teachers themselves could allocate.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT FOR THE DISTRICT

In the second open-ended question, survey participants were asked to name two areas of improvement for districts to better enable principals to support teachers' professional learning in school. For this question, 580 responses were received. Responses frequently noted the need for additional time and professional development autonomy. Funding and coherence were two other common themes.

Time

Time was, again, cited most frequently. Nearly half of the respondents to this question expressed need for more time to engage in collaborative learning or to pursue individual professional learning goals. In contrast, only about one-quarter of the respondents identified time as a key support districts provided to them. As one respondent commented, "Time is so crucial and it is impossible to find, especially in lower income schools that are small." Principals suggested creating schedules that would allow for embedding professional learning and/or collaboration within the school week.

Autonomy

Principals also stressed the importance of professional development autonomy. In particular, they wanted districts to expend less effort "telling us what our development plans should be ... rather [than] letting us work from within our own school context." Some were advocating for more teacher-driven professional development. One principal commented that districts have a role through centralized initiatives to "strike a balance between principal- and district-led

professional learning and teacher autonomy regarding professional learning. At the moment, teacher autonomy means there is little opportunity for principals to influence the professional learning of teachers."

Resources

Monetary, human and other resources were mentioned less often than time. However, these constructs, together, constituted a key support request. Respondents requested funding to provide teachers with additional time for professional development inside and outside the school and for collaboration with colleagues. They also cited the need for more support in bringing in coaches and other specialists to help teachers with their professional development needs.

Coherence

Principals expressed dissatisfaction with the excessive number of directives and initiatives coming from the district. Many suggested reducing the number of initiatives and aligning district-directed professional learning with the remaining initiatives. Lack of policy coherence and policy leadership was a significant theme in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada*, as well.

There needs to be a focus on a few goals to accomplish rather than having so many goals thrown at us all at once. We need to do the little tasks correctly and build off this, rather than increase expectations to the point where nothing is done with quality.

~Study participant

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT FOR GOVERNMENT

The third open-ended question, to which 560 participants replied, invited comments on areas of improvement for government to better support principals in their effort to promote and support professional learning in their schools. The majority of suggestions in this section echoed those that related to school districts. Respondents appealed for more funding and time (including time embedded during the work week) for professional learning, more professional development opportunities, and more local and teacher voice and choice in professional learning. Although less frequently cited, having fewer and clearer directives from the ministry was also suggested. Further, respondents made suggestions for aligning goals, professional development opportunities and resources.

In their study, Campbell et al (2016) identify similar issues or areas for improvement in educators' professional learning. For example, the authors call for a more appropriate balance of system and self-directed professional development for teachers. They also bring attention to the importance of "time for sustained, cumulative professional learning integrated within educators' work lives" (Campbell et al 2016, 3). The authors further argue that inequities and inadequacies in professional development funding have negative consequences for teachers' ability to participate in professional learning.

Responding to *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada* (Campbell et al 2016), Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) argue

that "neither professional development nor episodic job-embedded professional learning makes the difference. Rather, the essence of system success is a culture of daily interaction, engaging pedagogy, mutual trust and development, and regular, quality feedback related to improvement" (p 8). They refer to such a culture as a culture of *collaborative professionalism*. Collaborative professionalism supports both professional learning (defined as "learning something new that is potentially of value") and professional development (defined as "growth in terms of who you are and what you can do") (Fullan and Hargreaves 2016, 3). Fullan and Hargreaves call for professional learning and development (PLD) (in the form of collaborative professionalism) to be a contractual responsibility and right of all teachers in Canada. Such contractual requirements should be accompanied by financial and leadership support at all levels, including microfinancing, system financing, and the development of a national declaration and set of guiding principles for collaborative professionalism.

Come out and actually get to know what school is like now. Things have drastically changed and children and their learning have changed. Technology has made things very different. The behaviours and family unit has really changed. We can't keep doing the same things; someone needs to get to know schools the way they are now and make some long-term decisions instead of knee-jerk reactions and changes just to write about in the paper.

~Study participant

CONCLUSION

The findings in this section show that principals feel supported by their school districts, but with important limitations. Districts tend to trust their principals and teachers to do their jobs, and offer various supports to help them do their work more effectively. At the same time, respondents did not overwhelmingly express satisfaction with the supports offered. Open comments point to many areas in which districts and the government could strengthen support. In addition, all findings in this section are marked by tensions between school sites, districts and provinces, as each level of the system holds different perspectives about the best ways to allocate resources and set priorities in what all stakeholders recognize as a complex system.

Implications and Future Research Directions

Based on the findings from this study as well as other relevant literature cited in the report, the following implications for policy and decision making at the district, system and government levels emerge:

Vision and Commitment

Echoing the findings of *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* (CAP and ATA 2014), this study shows that principals struggle to develop their own leadership and to support teacher learning, as the conditions and priorities under which they work are constantly shifting. Principals want collaborative, coherent, long-term planning from their school jurisdictions and education ministries. They want fewer episodic goals mandated for their schools, and for objectives to be clear and focused on students' learning and, ultimately, well-being.

Stable Funding and Supports

A clear and stable environment is needed if school leaders are to effectively implement goals “from above” and still find the time and resources they need to be responsive to local student and community needs. Comments in this study related to professional learning, in particular, indicated that changing initiatives and policy directions are accompanied by changes in funding and resource allocations

that make it difficult for principals to lead their schools with a coherent plan.

Sufficient Funding and Supports

Supports also need to be sufficient. Particularly in comments about the role of commercial interests in education, respondents suggest that schools are turning to private companies and fundraising to meet student and community needs. In the case of many of the nonacademic needs described in the first section of this report, there may be no alternatives to private supports for “extras” like equipment, playgrounds and breakfast programs. Findings in this study and others cited here show that schools do not have sufficient funding or expertise to deal with the complex social and economic dynamics associated with new Canadian families, low-income families, and children and youth struggling with mental health or addictions. Site-embedded expertise and funding are the most highly valued forms of support in these areas.

Professional Autonomy Grounded in Trust

Calls for trust in school leaders and teachers constitute a significant theme in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* (CAP and ATA 2014), and were also evident in this study. In particular, respondents called for less reliance on standardized testing in favour of building the capacities of school leaders and teachers. In relation to this, principals want more input into major resource allocation decisions at the district level and more latitude to distribute resources in their own schools. They seek time and latitude with respect to when, where and for what purposes professional

development occurs. Principals also would prefer high levels of school autonomy in day-to-day operations, including making decisions regarding partnerships with businesses and purchases of commercial products to ensure that these meet their students' and community needs. This might be achieved by maximizing opportunities for job-embedded, collaborative professional learning to develop school and district cultures of "collaborative professionalism" (Fullan and Hargreaves 2016). Ultimately, this is the best route to ensuring that students' needs—and those of society—are served by school systems in Canada.

Effective Professional Learning and Development

While many principals valued their districts' efforts to deliver inservice professional development and to fund site-based and school-directed learning, it is also clear from study findings that sustained, embedded, professional learning remains somewhat elusive. Less than half of respondents in this study agreed that their districts were providing for embedded professional learning, although open responses show encouraging signs that districts are trying to create these opportunities at both district and site levels. However, many principals and districts appear to be relying on ad hoc "creativity" to create job-embedded professional development time in lieu of more sustainable infrastructures. Who determines how this time is used remains key, as embedded opportunities are

in some cases provided with no principal or teacher input on the focus of these sessions.

This study also complements findings in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada*, as school leaders were particularly concerned that their schools lacked capacity in relation to student mental health, EAL students and families, and technology. In *The Future of the Principalship in Canada*, distinctions were discerned in respondents' comments between short-term training to address critical immediate needs, and the need for longer-term, system-wide changes needed to allow schools to respond to these needs in a sustainable way.

Knowledge Mobilization and Networking

Promoting knowledge mobilization and creating networking opportunities for school and system leaders encourages schools and systems to learn from each other. This report and others cited in it can inform policy and decision making in school districts and systems in Canada to support schools and their leaders. Development of networking and collaborative opportunities for district leaders (eg, dedicated online space, regular meetings) facilitates knowledge exchange and sharing of effective practices, allowing districts to better tackle common problems. From the standpoint of professional and personal well-being, collaboration among principals offsets professional isolation, providing a supportive community for managing job-related stress.

CONCLUSION

This report contributes significantly to our understanding of the changing work of Canadian school principals. It also points to areas where further research would be valuable. Thoughtfully developed strategies for knowledge mobilization will increase the likelihood that research will reach intended audiences and have desirable effects on policy and practice.

Building the Case for Better Student Supports

Research partnerships with agencies and institutions may be leveraged to continue to provide evidence of student needs and required supports. While provincial policies uphold the values of diversity and inclusion, they are often silent (or nearly so) on the specifics of supporting diversity and inclusion in schools. Compelling, well-disseminated evidence is needed to make cases for changes in public policy that will build the capacities of the public education system to meet changing needs, many of which extend well beyond academic learning.

Monitoring Marketization and Commercialization of Public Education

Professional organizations at national and provincial levels should continue to monitor and document the effects of marketization and commercialization on public education, and on the work of principals and teachers. This study indicates that the appropriate place and use of private and commercial resources are contested. Findings show that commercial resources play a significant role in reporting student attendance and academic achievement. There is little indication that commercial interests are encroaching upon

more politically contested areas like curriculum development and testing; however, as noted in this study, reliance on principals' reports alone may be obscuring the extent of commercial activity at higher levels of the system. Based on many comments from respondents in both this study and *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* (CAP and ATA 2014), it seems that local and ad hoc engagement of private providers, particularly with respect to professional development and nonacademic resources and programs, is underreported. Detailed, aggregated statistics could be gathered to consider the efficacy and implications of tapping private providers in these contexts. Findings of this study suggest the potential for both positive and negative consequences.

Documenting District Best Practices

Research efforts should continue to discern and map how school and district needs vary according to geography, school populations and provincial political contexts. This analysis and other studies of Canadian school districts have made it clear that school districts across the country struggle with common problems like increasing student diversity, declining public support for education, and balancing site-based and centralized initiatives. Yet, some districts are more successful than others in managing these challenges. An advantage of national-level data collection, when it can be achieved effectively, is increased knowledge sharing of best practices across provincial political boundaries. Cross-provincial research may be of particular benefit to rural and remote districts, which, in their individual provincial or territorial contexts, can have

difficulty achieving policy input on par with more populous districts.

Informing Balanced and Comprehensive Technology Leadership

Research partnerships can be used to build strategies to catalogue and document resourcing, leadership, social and pedagogical issues related to technology in schools. Our findings show that “technology” encompasses an array of issues—from hardware to software, from cyberbullying to digital citizenship, from the affordances of standardized systems to the limitations these impose upon local autonomy. Respondents also indicated that privacy rights related to big data, customization of pedagogical supports and the impact of technology on teachers’ and school leaders’ workloads are issues. Educational reform literature often refers to “technology needs” and “technology leadership” without fully contextualizing what these mean in terms of the core values of public education. Such contextualization is imperative, given the level of investment required to create and maintain effective technology infrastructures, and the far-reaching social consequences of the ubiquity of social media and digital technologies. These are significant policy challenges for districts and schools.

Building Professional Capital

Trust in educators’ professional judgment, commitment to building professional capital in schools, and allowance for greater school and professional autonomy will help educators to reclaim a sense of pride in their profession and improve public confidence in the work of public education. Building professional capital in education includes providing teachers and school leaders with more voice and choice in their professional learning and development. In particular, providing principals more autonomy in directing and supporting their staff greatly increases the likelihood that professional learning and development will be directly relevant to the school’s unique set of student and community needs. Finding a balance, however, between system-directed, principal/school-directed and teacher-directed professional learning remains a challenging policy discussion that must be pursued and revisited through a commitment to building trust in the profession and the public good.

Epilogue

THE PROMISES AND PREDICAMENTS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN CANADA

The Canadian School Leader: Global Forces and Future Prospects foregrounds the promises and predicaments encountered by Canada's school leaders. The following reflections on this study draw on my background and current experiences: first, as a school principal in a wonderfully brittle and resilient school-community in Saint John, New Brunswick—one that embraces every student every day—and, second, as past president of the Canadian Association of Principals, an organization that strives to give Canada's school leaders a collective voice of advocacy for public education.

This study builds on the trends influencing educational leadership identified in *The Future of the Principalship in Canada* (CAP and ATA 2014). Moreover, it reveals that the demand for an immediate response to often complex and delicate social conditions threatens the quality of learning and places unreasonable pressure upon school leaders. As well, the study's comparison of Canadian and Australian principals reminds us that increasing commercial and private interests in education interrupt the function of the principalship, compromise the integrity of the public education system and are becoming a larger concern. This study also highlights the absence of critical resources and the lack of effective professional learning opportunities—both necessary for effective leadership. By attending to the urgent needs this research uncovered, policy-makers could restore the trust between government, districts and the principals who want nothing more than to excel at leading in an endlessly transforming nation.

This research study underscores three themes confronting the Canadian school leader today.

First, principals are faced with the growing complexity of school populations. Canada has an admirable culture of humanity that seeks to address inclusion, immigration and child poverty, but this layer affects our understanding of a school's function. Schools are increasingly becoming triage centres where assessing mental, emotional and physical well-being trumps teaching and learning. Principals are willing to act as first responders; however, many leaders are left frustrated knowing that their students are slipping through the cracks. Given the intertwined nature of the school–community environment, this can have a direct and negative impact on school staff. In addition, principals are confronted with historical structures used to measure school success, such as antiquated grade-level curricula and standardized benchmarks that are not aligned with the new environment. Such practices fail to reflect the assiduousness of schools and the true accomplishments of teachers and students.

Second, the growing presence of commercial and private interests in education has affected the workload of principals and brought into question the perceived role of the principalship. Technology expedites the data collection—a key reason for the presence of commercial interests in schools. But the reality is that data is now collected on nearly everything, creating a sense of extensive and constant scrutiny. In addition, requests for district support involve the presentation of more and more data. This requirement for evidence to justify what is good for students erodes a principal's faith that policy-makers recognize and value his or her professionalism, wisdom and competence.

School leaders want to provide all they can for their teachers and students; however, sponsorship from outside the public system raises some concerns. The influence of business “charity”—or what some call “philanthrocapitalism”—has progressed from partnerships to enrich the total student experience to a singular focus on improving academic performance. Over time, the need for and presence of private support diminishes a principal's expectation that government will actively support and fund public education. The more normalized these business partnerships become, the more teachers and school leaders feel abandoned by government. Moreover, school leaders recognize that soliciting external funding to ensure equity in schools can result in the marginalization of children who are subject to social inequity.

Finally, this study highlights three factors affecting the principal's ability to perform: insufficient resources to respond to diverse learning environments, ineffective policy to govern technology and a lack of authentic professional learning.

Schools and classrooms contain students with differing levels of academic ability, medical needs, mental health concerns and cultural requirements. School leaders and teachers are provided few tools—a grade level curriculum, an educational assistant, etc—to respond to students' various needs. Facing greater complexity, they triage and attend to needs beyond learning.

Increasing expectations placed on school leaders extend to an expectation of availability “24/7” through technology, as well. It is now difficult to determine when the workday begins or ends. Principals and teachers, attempting to build rapport with families and keep everyone informed, are connecting more frequently with students and their families through e-mail, texting and social media. This adds to workload and contributes to burnout. Also, an emerging trend of public scrutiny and criticism via social media is adding a new level of tension.

The Canadian School Leader: Global Forces and Future Prospects illustrates that current policies ignore the reality of the Canadian school leader and fail to provide the support that leaders require to achieve success. The disconnect between school leaders and districts is growing. To repair relationships and better address the needs of our nation's students, government must create opportunity for authentic dialogue. Districts must be granted political autonomy to listen to the principal and sanctioned to improve their response to increasing school complexity. As well, consideration for the well-being and protection of our profession is needed. The conditions under which principals and teachers have

performed have taken a toll. Meaningful appreciation for educators and concern for their health and welfare is overdue.

When considering how to move forward, governments must also recognize the need for common understanding and clear direction. Historically, school-based action plans have supported improved academic achievement; however, the move toward inclusion has prompted the need for attention to an array of other, more social areas of school life. When school performance is measured solely by standardized testing, principals become disheartened and frustrated. Reflecting on the practice of assessment and determining a new meaning of the school's function could result in reform that aligns such measures with circumstance.

Despite the challenges outlined in this study, school leaders overwhelmingly continue to report that their career choice is rewarding and gives them promise and hope. In the end, *The Canadian School Leader: Global Forces and Future Prospects* should inspire re-evaluation of our school systems, including reconsideration of appropriate levels of support and the potential restoration of an educational system that can answer the needs of a country committed to great public school education for all students.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The following section asks you to provide some demographic information about yourself that will be used to help us to interpret the results of the survey. Please indicate the response that best describes you.

1. The province or territory you work in:
2. Your age:
3. What is your current school leader/administrator designation (please indicate to the nearest 10% of your designation)

4. Your school leadership experience, including current year:
5. Your gender: Female Male Other

SECTION 2: CHANGING CONTEXTS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

6. Based on your observations of students in your school over the past 3-5 years, how have the following changed:

Student Attributes	Significantly increased	Somewhat increased	Not changed	Somewhat decreased	Significantly decreased
a) Students' overall readiness to learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) Students' ability to focus on educational tasks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) Students coming to school tired	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d) Students' overall level of physical activity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e) Students' empathy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f) Students coming to school hungry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g) Students' ability to bounce back from adversity (resilience)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The role of business in education generally

	Not at all	-	--	---	----	-----	To a great extent
16) To what extent are you concerned that businesses are dictating education policy in Canada?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17) To what extent are you concerned that common activities usually done by teachers (ie curriculum planning, assessment, reporting) are being outsourced to commercial entities)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18) To what extent are you concerned that there is very little support for schools and teachers from your education ministry?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19) To what extent are you concerned about the ethics of passing on student data collected at schools to private companies?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20) To what extent are you concerned that public education is becoming privatised?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21) To what extent are you concerned that public schools are paying commercial providers for products and services traditionally supplied by your government ministry?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22) To what extent are you concerned that schools are required to spend too much of their budget purchasing and maintaining technology?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23) To what extent are you concerned at the amount of time students in your school spend in private tutoring outside school hours?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24) To what extent are you concerned that public schools are now required to run as businesses?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25) To what extent do you think that commercial products and services purchased in your school are of a high quality?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. Overall, what concerns do you have about the role of education businesses, consultants and corporations in public schools?

39) To what extent do you think that schools should use commercial providers for teaching and learning support?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
40) To what extent do you think that business and industry groups should be able to determine what is taught in schools?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
41) To what extent do you think public policy advocacy groups should be able to determine what is taught in schools?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SECTION 5: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

42. To what extent do you agree that your school district enables you to:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
a) Pursue your own professional growth priorities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) Work collaboratively with teachers to reflect on student needs and decide the direction of school-based professional learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) Engage in professional learning opportunities alongside your teaching staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d) Lead school-based professional learning that engages teachers in collaborative reflection on practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e) Provide teachers with time to work with and learn from each other within the school day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f) Maintain a focus on professional learning that improves the learning of students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g) Regularly work with teachers to examine evidence of student learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h) Use evidence of student learning to support decisions around professional learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i) Encourage teachers to pursue self-selected professional learning opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j) Challenge and stretch teachers to engage in new forms of professional learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k) Build teacher capacity to lead professional learning for themselves and their peers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l) Engage with colleagues from other schools and districts to share promising practices around collaborative teacher learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

43. What are two most significant supports your school district provides to aid you in supporting professional learning for your teaching staff?

44. What are two improvements your district could pursue to better enable you in supporting teacher professional learning in your school?

45. What are two improvements your education ministry could pursue to better enable you in supporting teacher professional learning in your school?

SECTION 6: SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The following questions assess the extent to which you feel your school district supports your work as a school leader.

46. Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
a) My school district is a great place to work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) My school district has a high level of trust in its school leaders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) My school district has a high level of trust in its teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d) My school district has a commitment to equity that ensures that the learning of all students are met.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e) My school district makes it a priority to support inclusion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f) My school district is planning strategically for the future growth in the complexity and diversity of classrooms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g) My school district understands and responds to how digital technologies impact the health and wellbeing of students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h) My school district understands and responds to the impacts of social media on school climate (e.g., student interactions and student privacy).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i) My school district understands and responds to the impacts of digital technologies on teacher workload.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j) My school district takes a balanced view regarding the role of standardized testing in assessing school performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



The Alberta Teachers' Association