Preparing for the Vice-Principal Selection Process

2014-15
Dear Colleagues:

Congratulations on aspiring to become a member of the dynamic leadership team of principals and vice-principals of the York Region District School Board!

Your decision to apply for this new leadership role demonstrates your commitment to work collaboratively with trustees, superintendents, teachers, parents and support staff to ensure the success of all students in a diverse and changing world community. It is also a commitment to engage in reflective practice and professional growth so that you can provide effective school leadership in a time of rapid change, increasing diversity, and considerable complexity.

At the YRDSB, we believe that effective principals and vice-principals are pivotal in building a school system with high standards for student achievement and are committed to well-being for all students and staff. Our Board prepares for the future by identifying and selecting potential leaders both from inside and outside its borders and by providing extensive professional development and resources to support these leaders as they articulate the values and develop the skills necessary to meet the leadership challenges of the 21st century.

In line with our Board’s succession planning, the Vice-Principal Selection Process contributes to meeting the organization’s diverse talent development needs and to building a workforce reflective of the communities we serve.

The selection of vice-principals in our Board is based on the Ministry of Education’s Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) 2012. As you reflect upon the selection process and your own suitability for leadership, I encourage you to read our trustees’ Multi-Year Plan, the Director’s Annual Plan and our Board Improvement Plan. These important documents outline key system priorities and strategies for implementation now and in the future. I also recommend that you read this guide Preparing for the Vice-Principal Selection Process and reflect upon its contents. It has been written by your colleagues and will assist you in your preparation for a new vice-principal position with the YRDSB.

Thank you for starting a journey which I believe will be rewarding for you professionally and ultimately be important for our students as they become successful lifelong learners in our changing world community.

J. Philip Parappally, Director of Education
York Region District School Board
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The *Preparing for the Vice-Principal Selection Process* document is intended to provide encouragement and to help applicants as they prepare for and engage in the selection process for vice-principal positions in the YRDSB.

It is important to take the time to prepare for the selection process well in advance of the application. While making the decision to apply for a position as a vice-principal, applicants must have the support of a current principal and superintendent who will assist them as they move through the selection process. Applicants should ensure that they can provide their most recent performance appraisal that describes their competencies and should have a current cover letter and résumé.

We believe that successful applicants know the mission, vision and values of YRDSB and its priorities. They can articulate their personal philosophies of education, and describe their roles in supporting student achievement and well-being. They are knowledgeable about Board and provincial documents, recent trends in education, their School’s Improvement Plan (SIP), priorities as outlined in the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being (BIP), the Trustee’s Multi-Year Plan (MYP), the Director’s Annual Plan (DAP), and the Ontario Leadership Framework 2012.

Prepared applicants will have reflected upon how they would address the Board priorities and issues that arise in the role of vice-principal.

Interested applicants have assessed whether they are personally and professionally ready for the selection process and the role of vice-principal. They can discuss their leadership practices within the context of the OLF 2012 and can support that discussion with evidence from their professional careers.

There are three (3) stages to this year’s selection process:

**Stage One:** Submission and subsequent assessment of a candidate’s résumé, cover letter, written submission and references.

**Stage Two:** A professional discussion with the candidate, based on the written submission from Stage One, an oral problem-solving Scenario and a related written communication. (Internal candidates—supervisor attends; external candidates—supervisor comments on contents of submission during reference checking process.

**Stage Three:** A panel interview.

In its complexity and length, *Preparing for the Vice-Principal Selection Process* may appear daunting at first glance. To facilitate its use, it is organized according to the selection process and includes the following sections that can assist applicants in meeting its expectations:

- Ontario Leadership Framework 2012;
- leadership readiness tools;
- advice on designing a résumé and writing a cover letter;
PREPARING FOR THE VICE-PRINCIPAL SELECTION PROCESS

- information about referees;
- suggestions for preparing the written submission that accompanies your résumé and cover letter;
- tips for how to prepare for the discussion during Stage 2;
- considerations for working through a ‘problem-solving’ scenario;
- suggestions for preparing for the interview;
- frameworks for shaping responses and sample questions.

The document may be used in part or in whole and returned to at different stages of the selection process depending upon the needs and experience of applicants.

Applicants for vice-principal positions are encouraged to visit the YRDSB website at www.yrdsb.ca and click on ‘Careers’ in order to view the timelines for the selection process and to apply online. Each year the short and long-term needs of the system necessitate changes in the timing of the selection process and the number of leadership positions available.

Ontario Leadership Framework 2012

The selection of vice-principals for the York Region District School Board will be based on the Ministry of Education’s Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 (OLF 2012) and supported by the Board’s leadership resources. The various stages in the process and their component parts will be assessed using the OLF 2012. The process is aligned with the “Big Ideas” in the OLF including:

- **Context is important.** Leaders enact practices in ways that are sensitive to the circumstances and settings in which they work.

- **Leadership and management are integrated.** Effective leaders lead instructional activities in their schools and manage organizational contexts that support and enable the work of their staff.

- **Formal leaders enact practices directly and indirectly.** Formal leaders take personal responsibility for some tasks and ensure that other staff members have the capacity to do other tasks. They always monitor distributed responsibilities to bring about effective and coordinated implementation.

- **Leadership is best shared in a planned and coordinated way.** Many people make important contributions to the leadership in schools, including staff, parents, and students. The principal’s role is to coordinate these contributions in a way that brings coherence to school leadership overall.

The five domains in the OLF 2012 which form the basis for the selection process, include:

- Setting Directions
- Building Relationships and Developing People
- Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices
- Improving the Instructional Program
- Securing Accountability
Personal Leadership Resources of candidates as outlined in the OLF will also play a key role in the assessment process within each stage. They include:

**Cognitive resources**, including:
- problem-solving expertise
- knowledge of school and classroom conditions that directly affect student learning
- systems thinking

**Social resources**, including the ability to:
- perceive emotions
- manage emotions
- act in emotionally appropriate ways

**Psychological resources**, including:
- optimism
- self-efficacy
- resilience
- pro-activity

For further information about the OLF 2012, click here.

**Leadership Readiness Tools**

Although the following preparatory tools are not required as part of the vice-principal selection process, many applicants find them valuable for their own personal reflection and growth.

Professional portfolios are purposeful collections of work which exhibit efforts and achievements in one or more areas over an extended period of time. Portfolios are reflective professional development tools and organized, goal-driven documentations of professional growth. While they have been used extensively with students over the past years, teachers and school leaders are increasingly using them to reflect on their own professional learning and document their own professional growth.

Portfolios invite leaders and potential leaders to evaluate their professional practice, capture their strengths and document their individual careers. Portfolios also provide a focal point for discussions with peers, principals, and superintendents.

They provide:
- authentic documentation of professional competence, creativity, organization and skill;
- on-going self-assessment and feedback;
- an enhanced résumé for career development or advancement;
- visible evidence of teaching and learning ;
- indications of increased awareness of strengths and areas for growth.

The *Self-Assessment Tool for Principals and Vice-principals* and the *Self-Assessment Tool for Aspiring Leaders* describe research-based leadership practices which are effective in improving student achievement and well-being. Applicants are invited to use these tools with their principal and superintendent to identify their leadership strengths and areas for growth. In addition, candidates are encouraged to self-assess and reflect on their personal leadership resources in preparation for the role of vice-principal. Page 23 of the OLF 2012 has more detail to assist with this assessment.
**Stage One - Application**

**COVER LETTER:**

Cover letters are application letters that accompany résumés. They provide introductions to applicants as professional learners and potential leaders by highlighting their leadership practices and suitability for the position of vice-principal. Exemplary cover letters:

- indicate what is unique about the applicant that adds value to the position;
- highlight key experiences that have shaped their growth as leaders and prepared them for this position, without repeating information already present in the résumé;
- briefly outline the impact of the candidate’s experiences;
- include a closing statement that expresses their enthusiasm, and communicates a sense of confidence in their abilities;
- are brief, succinct, balanced and persuasive;
- contain no errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation.

**RÉSUMÉ:**

Résumés provide ample evidence that the qualifications and experience of applicants make them suitable for the position of vice-principal. Effective résumés contain information that is relevant to the position sought, list the information under appropriate headings in point form, and include items that are current. Applicants will be asked to submit their résumés online as part of their application and must follow the standardized format.

Within two pages the resume will include the following information in this order:

- personal information: name, address, phone number, email address;
- educational background;
- teaching experience;
- evidence of leadership experience under the headings of the domains in the OLF 2012:
  - Setting Directions;
  - Building Relationships and Developing People;
  - Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices;
  - Improving the Instructional Program; and
  - Securing Accountability.

Other related experience, if that experience is professionally significant, can be included as well.
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REFEREES:

Applicants provide the names and contact information of referees who can provide strong oral and written support for their applications. It is required for applicants to select:

- [ ] the principal with whom he/she is currently working
- [ ] the current superintendent
- [ ] one other professional referee who can speak to the candidate’s leadership and readiness for the role

In selecting the third referee, applicants for a vice-principal’s position have some flexibility. They frequently choose from a wide variety of professional colleagues:

- [ ] a principal with whom they have worked in the recent past
- [ ] an administrator in another school or board with whom they have worked
- [ ] the candidate’s current vice-principal

Note: Teachers cannot use other teachers as referees for this process.

What to ask referees:

Successful applicants are never surprised by the nature of the comments that referees make in support of their application, or by the level of support they provide. They arrange interviews with those whom they have asked to act as referees in order to discuss their leadership roles and responsibilities and seek feedback on their leadership practices. It is suggested that the applicant provide a copy of the résumé to the referee. In the event that an applicant’s superintendent has been recently appointed and may not know the applicant, it is the applicant’s responsibility to arrange for a superintendent, familiar with the applicant’s leadership, to contact the existing superintendent.

In meeting with the superintendent, applicants may ask questions such as:

- Do you think that I am ready to take on the role for which I am applying?
- How would you rate my readiness based on other applicants you know?
- What leadership practices do you see as my strengths? What areas require growth?
- Do you have any questions about my leadership roles and responsibilities?
- What steps should I be considering to enhance my less-developed practices?
- Do you have any specific advice for me as I engage in the selection process?

What the referees will be asked about the candidate:

Applicants should know that their referees will be asked to comment on their personal leadership resources as well as the five domains of the OLF and may be probed on areas such as: evidence and impact of the candidate’s work with staff, students, parents, and community members, how the candidate builds authentic, trusting relationships, and the candidate’s instructional leadership experience and capacity.
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A variety of questions will also be asked such as:

- How long have you worked with this candidate and in what capacity?
- Describe what the candidate has done to demonstrate leadership in the school.
- What demonstrations of equity and inclusivity are evident through the candidate’s leadership?
- What additional growth opportunities does this candidate require?

Successful applicants know how their referees will respond to questions of this type because they have sought direct and honest answers to them in their own interviews and are aware that critical responses at the early stage of the selection process may help them to identify areas for future professional growth.

WRITTEN SUBMISSION:

In order to describe one’s leadership experiences in the context of the vice-principal role and to demonstrate skills in written communication, applicants are required to make a written submission as part of the online application.

The written submission question will involve answering a question about secondary school education using the candidate’s leadership experience to date in the context of 21st century learning. In answering the question, candidates should also reflect on their work using the OLF 2012 as a framework including reference to personal leadership resources. (750 - 1000 words)

Suggestions for preparing for this written submission include:

- knowledge of current issues in secondary education
- citing recent evidence of leadership; work beyond two years would not be recent;
- focusing on instructional leadership while also considering the relevance of operational leadership experiences to student achievement and well-being;
- describing school, network and/or board leadership experiences in light of the question;
- demonstration of knowledge, skills and attitudes in a 21st century learning context;
- demonstration of personal leadership resources— who you are as a person/leader.

Candidates who are successful with the application stage of the process will progress to Stage Two of the process.

Stage Two - Professional Discussion/Problem-Solving

Stage Two will be conducted at a centralized location. A committee member will contact each candidate with a date, time and location for this part of the process. Please allow approximately 90 minutes for this stage of the process. The process includes two parts as outlined below:
Part One:

Part One of the process will involve a discussion with the candidate to follow up on the written submission above. The candidate’s principal (for internal candidates) will be present. For external candidates, the probing of the written submission will be accomplished at the reference check stage by contacting the candidate’s principal or immediate supervisor and asking him/her to comment on the written submission. During the discussion with the candidate at this stage, probing questions will be asked by members of the Vice-Principal Selection Committee to learn more about what was outlined by the candidate in the written submission. The candidate will provide deeper understanding of his/her leadership as a result of the probing questions and the answers provided. This part of the process will take approximately 30 minutes.

Tips for the discussion about one’s leadership experiences:

- review the written submission; make point form notes about key areas from the submission
- anticipate the types of questions/areas that may be asked/probed and prepare point-form responses such as:
  - how an area of need was determined;
  - plans to build capacity with colleagues/students/community;
  - data sources;
  - monitoring of work over time;
  - measurement of impact;
  - next steps to be taken/sustainability.

Following the discussion with the candidate, the Vice-Principal Selection Committee members will meet with the candidate’s principal or supervisor. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss and verify the content of the candidate’s responses to the questions posed and secure the supervisor’s support for the information presented. The candidate is not present for this meeting. This part of the process will take approximately 10 minutes.

Part Two:

Part Two of this stage includes two parts, an oral response and a written component.

First, the candidate will respond orally to and reflect on a typical problem encountered by a vice-principal in our schools today. The candidate will be presented with a scenario and will need to respond appropriately as a vice-principal. Following the response, the candidate will have an opportunity to reflect on his/her response and share suggestions for improvement.

Considerations for working through a ‘problem-solving’ scenario:

- anticipate the types of problems encountered in our schools today;
- seek advice as to how current administrators may be working through such scenarios;
- consult appropriate Board documents/policies/procedures/collective agreements;
- practice responses to such situations;
- practice reflection.
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After the oral response, candidates will be expected to write a brief communication to a stakeholder group based on the problem-solving scenario. This may be an email to a staff member to follow up on an issue, a news bulletin to the community, a letter to a parent, etc. The written communication is assessed based on both the content of the communication and the style of writing.

Candidates who are successful at Stage 2 will progress to Stage Three, the final stage of the process.

Stage Three - Interview

The interview will consist of a variety of questions and will take approximately 30 minutes. The interview team will be made up of three practicing principals and one superintendent. Candidates will be invited to arrive for their interview 20 minutes prior to meeting the interview team. They will receive the first question upon arrival and will have the opportunity to prepare a response prior to the interview. It is not appropriate to bring notes or other printed material to the interview. The only written materials that can be brought into the interview are the notes made immediately prior to the interview that will assist with the first response. Applicants will have the opportunity to conclude the interview with brief closing remarks.

In their responses to questions successful applicants:

- draw upon their own leadership experiences to provide examples;
- include sufficient details to answer questions well;
- refer to Board policies and procedures and Board priorities;
- frame their responses, when appropriate, around the School Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being (SIP) and the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being (BIP) as well as the Trustee’s Multi-Year Plan (MYP) and Director’s Annual Plan (DAP);
- use the OLF 2012 to help frame responses and show competency;
- show impact of their leadership; and
- demonstrate personal leadership resources throughout responses.

Using frameworks to respond to questions:

A helpful way to prepare for the interview stage of the selection process is to develop and practice using frameworks as a way to structure responses. There are many different ways to respond and the applicants must utilize frameworks that work for them. However, the following section offers some frameworks that have been used successfully by current administrators.

When responding to questions whether in written or in oral form, frameworks facilitate analysis, provide organization and ensure that responses have both breadth and depth. They provide sequential structures within which to:

- complete a situational analysis;
- communicate with both internal and external stakeholders;
- develop a plan of action;
- complete a potential problem analysis;
- organize resources.
## Implementing Change (ASPIRE)

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<td><strong>Analyze</strong></td>
<td>Analyze school culture/climate/needs. Assess the extent to which the staff is ready for change. Use school and system data to analyze the gap between the ideal and the status quo. Involve appropriate stakeholders in the assessment process.</td>
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<td><strong>Strategize</strong></td>
<td>Collaboratively examine current information/data, (e.g. gap analysis data) and develop a rationale for the change. Ensure that the change is incorporated into the SPCI process.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Plan</strong></td>
<td>Establish a representative committee of internal stakeholders to create an action plan. Keep the committee small but ensure that it includes influential staff members and representative students, but make it clear that they will engage with other staff and departments. Ensure that there is a strong planning process in place. Articulate goals, indicators for success, measures, strategies, resources, responsibilities, and timelines.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Implement</strong></td>
<td>Share the action plan with staff, School Council, students, and implement it stage by stage.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Review</strong></td>
<td>Establish a review committee once the timelines have been met. Review the progress of the implementation. Gather data on the effectiveness of the implementation. Identify challenges and discuss strategies for addressing them.</td>
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<td><strong>Evaluate</strong></td>
<td>Collaborate with the committee to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation. Determine next steps to ensure that change has become institutionalized.</td>
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## Solving Problems and Resolving Issues

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<td><strong>Identify the problem or the issue.</strong></td>
<td>Define the problem or issue briefly, and articulate why it is important.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Investigate the problem or the issue.</strong></td>
<td>Identify the major internal and external stakeholders. Gather information about the problem from those involved. Identify causes and effects.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluate the problem or the issue.</strong></td>
<td>Describe the desired outcomes. Consider possible solutions to the problem or ways of resolving the issue. Where appropriate, consult with stakeholders regarding the possible solutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Make a decision and develop a plan of action.</strong></td>
<td>Determine the best solution to the problem or means of resolving the issue. Determine a sequential plan of action and share it with stakeholders.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Implement a plan of action.</strong></td>
<td>Keep all stakeholders informed as the plan of action is being implemented, and seek input on any additional actions that need to be taken.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monitor the results.</strong></td>
<td>Monitor immediate, short-term, and long-term outcomes of the resolution. Consider the impact of the implementation on all stakeholders.</td>
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#### Addressing Conflict

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<td><strong>Identify the conflict.</strong></td>
<td>Identify the conflict to be resolved, and determine whether it is one problem or a series of issues that need to be dealt with.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Describe the desired outcome.</strong></td>
<td>What would things look like if the problem were resolved? What result do you want at the end of the process?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Analyze the situation and engage those who are in conflict.</strong></td>
<td>Ask those who are in conflict to describe the issues within the conflict. Use their input as a basis for discussion and resolution. Facilitate dialogue in which those in conflict discuss how they might describe the conflict to outsiders, how outsiders might perceive the conflict, how people are affected, what the most damaging aspects of the conflict are, what obstacles prevent resolution of the conflict, and how they personally contribute to the conflict. If the conflict consists of a series of issues, identify them, seek agreement on the issues, and decide which will be dealt with first.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identify potential solutions.</strong></td>
<td>Brainstorm with those involved to generate a list of potential solutions to the problems, or resolution of the conflict.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluate the potential solutions.</strong></td>
<td>Use a graphic organizer such as an Impact/Effort Grid to sift through the brainstormed solutions to determine which solution is feasible and most appropriate.</td>
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<td><strong>Plan for action.</strong></td>
<td>Create a detailed action plan for items that need to be implemented. Make sure the action plan consists of a sequence of steps. Provide details about what will be done, how and by whom. Establish target dates for completion. Identify performance indicators that will tell you that you achieved resolution.</td>
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<td><strong>Complete a potential problem analysis.</strong></td>
<td>Identify potential obstacles in implementing the plan. Create strategies to resolve potential problems. Consider complex or sensitive aspects of the plan, any potential shifts in priority, organizational challenges, technical problems, lack of resources, staff commitment, and capacity of team members to fulfill responsibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monitor and evaluate the results.</strong></td>
<td>Identify how progress will be reported, the timing of reports, which stakeholders to consult/inform/involve, how results will be monitored, and who will take responsibility for the plan.</td>
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Sample Questions for Interviews:

Interview questions in the vice-principal selection process are designed to learn about you, your belief system, how you would use your knowledge, skills, attitudes and personal leadership resources to respond to various situations and how you might go about affecting change within a school.

The questions below are examples of the types of multi-layered interview questions that are often asked in the promotion process and are based on the OLF. Applicants are encouraged to brainstorm additional questions and to use the frameworks provided in this resource to practice responses.

Setting Directions
- You are leading the School Planning Team in creating a focus and implementation plan for your new School Improvement Plan. How would you begin this process?
- How would you implement a new initiative that the School Planning Team feels is essential to improving student achievement, in a context in which the staff is resistant to change?
- What makes you the right person to lead an improvement planning process in your school?

Building Relationships and Developing People
- You are new to your role as a vice-principal and are appointed in January. How would you go about developing a relationship with your staff members?
- A teacher on your staff is very negative and consistently tries to undermine your efforts/initiatives to improve student learning. What will you do?
- With recent media attention focused on intruders in our schools, what will you do to ensure the staff and students in your school are safe and feel supported by you?
- The members of your School Council are not representative of the student population. How will you tap into the voices of parents/guardians/families which are not typically heard in your school?
- You receive a telephone call from a storeowner at a local mall telling you that students from your school have been there over lunch hour. The storeowner says your students have been rowdy and have vandalized property in the mall. Describe what you would do in response to this telephone call.

Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices
- What strategies would you use to develop the leadership potential of your staff? What qualities do you bring to this task?
- You have been assigned to a school with a rapidly growing population of special education identified students. Staff are inconsistent in their understanding of learning diversity, and in their instructional and assessment/evaluation approaches to meet the needs of all students. How would you foster greater consistency among the teachers in meeting the learning needs of all students?
- You have received a phone call from a parent whose child is seriously allergic to scent. The parent requests your support in ensuring the school environment is scent-free. How will you address the parent’s concern?
You are placed in a school in which staff do not collaborate and are isolated. What steps would you take to develop a Professional Learning Community?

Improving the Instructional Program
- What steps will you take to involve parents/guardians and families in your community in supporting the school’s efforts to improve student literacy?
- Describe what you will see and hear in a classroom in which student engagement in meaningful learning is prevalent.
- How do you support teachers in implementing 21st century pedagogy?

Securing Accountability
- How can you use data to guide and support your school’s literacy program?
- How will you ensure that all grade 10 students are prepared to write the OSSLT?
- How would you use the feedback from a School Effectiveness Framework District Support Visit or Self-Reflection Process to determine the next level of work for school improvement?

Candidates who are successful at Stage 3 of the process, will be recommended to our Senior Team to proceed to the Pool of Eligible Candidates for Placement as a vice-principal within our system.

We hope that this resource is useful to you if you choose to proceed with the application process for this year’s selection process. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact our Recruitment team at (905) 727-0022 ext. 2726 or our Leadership Development team at ext. 3894. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Timelines:

Stage 1:
- Application available online: October 17th
- Workshop #1: Applying to the Process/Preparing for Stage 1—October 29th
- Application closes: November 12th

Stage 2:
- Workshop #2: Preparing for Stage 2—January 8th
- Professional Discussion/Problem-Solving/Written Communication at a central location: January 15th

Stage 3:
- Workshop #3: Preparing for the Interview—February 5th
- Panel Interview at a central location: February 12th

All the best!