

**Themed Feedback, Principals' Council, LPAC paper:
*Ambition, Excellence and Prosperity:
Priorities and Directions for Learning***

Background

At their meeting on January 31 2017, the Principals' Council heard a presentation by Co-chair Bill Whelan on the LPAC's paper, *Ambition, Excellence and Prosperity*, and provided comment on LPAC's work and on the priorities and directions set out in the paper. Their input is summarized below.

The Council

Input regarding the work of LPAC clustered into three main themes: role of LPAC, advice going forward, and calls for more resources.

- Regarding the role of LPAC within the context of the Learning Partnership, some expressed a lack of understanding of LPAC's role. Questions were also raised about LPAC's scope, e.g. would LPAC be looking at matters of staffing, class size, and class composition. Others identified that LPAC's role was strategic, not operational, but asked who would drive implementation of the priorities and directions identified in the paper. Principals noted that they are already working on many of the priorities set out in the paper, and asked if their goals for high quality education would impact any of these priorities in a positive way. They asked how their relationship with LPAC could become more collaborative.
- Regarding the way forward, principals expressed a desire for action and focus. They suggested that LPAC clarify their priorities, narrow the focus, and decide where to start – pick one or two priorities and related partnerships, and stay with them for a while. They advised that action items should be aligned with the District Advisory Councils. They also placed importance on LPAC's communications role, suggesting that LPAC undertake public engagement and education to increase the value placed on education and learning. In support of this, it was noted that the LPAC's terminology, minutes etc. needed to be written in a way more accessible to a broader audience.
- Regarding resources, principals noted, generally, that funding is needed for priorities and directions in order to achieve positive change, both directly and as an expression of commitment by Government. As well, a need was seen for more staffing resources to better support students, and to free up principal time from teaching duties.

Learner Wellbeing

At an overarching level, a view was expressed that the current inclusion model is not suited to all students and that the model must enable learners to be treated as individuals. As well, a need was noted to define what inclusion looks like.

Much of the comment, however, was more specific, with mental health seen as the overriding challenge facing schools. It was noted that mental health issues stand in the way of most of the priorities and directions outlined by LPAC. Principals indicated that better access to existing supports, more resources, more supports, and better networking and integration of those supports are all needed. They expressed a need for increased resources both internal (guidance counsellors) and external (mental health and addictions staff).

Transitions

Again at an overarching level, suggestions included a Ministry of Youth to support transition into school, school completion, and transitioning beyond school; and a child advocate.

- Advice was also offered for various steps in the transition process, including:
- courses for parents at the point of transition from home to school;
- rethinking of the kindergarten age of entry and possible addition of pre-kindergarten to schools re the early childhood to kindergarten transition;
- expansion of late immersion to improve outcomes and reduce transitions;
- increased teacher to teacher collaboration and communication in the intermediate to high school transition, and
- better awareness within universities of what is going on in the high school system.

As well, this theme also saw some calls for additional resources, both generally re supportive programming and funding for transitions into and out of the K-12 system, and specifically re expanded occupational therapy services to improve transitions.

Partnerships

Some general questions and challenges were raised. Principals asked, “Who are our partners, and what are their roles?” They noted a lack of awareness of potential partners, and a need for partner groups to put words into action. Lack of funds, time, and opportunity were cited as inhibitors to partnerships.

Most of the discussion, however, focused on partnerships and collaboration, both within government and with external partners.

Within government, principals voiced a strong need for more collaboration across the board, to tackle serious issues and to better confront cycles of impoverishment and learner stress. They called for silos to be broken down, red tape to be cut, and joint funding mechanisms to support needed multi-departmental collaboration.

Principals also called for expanded multi-agency and multi-disciplinary partnerships and more open communication to better link educators, guidance counsellors, and youth service workers with professionals outside the education system, notably mental health workers, public health nurses and child protection workers. These partnerships were to support not only learners in the classroom, but also better preschool assessment and intervention, and parenting supports. Proposed models to achieve this included an expanded MAST (Multi-Agency School Team) system, and development of a hub school model in PEI.

With regard to partnerships external to government, a wide range of suggestions were offered, including:

- partnerships with post-secondary institutions to better use pre-service placements (teachers, nurses, youth workers) to meet learners' needs;
- relationships and dialogue with employers to expand co-op and job-based learning, and with unions to better understand the employment picture in PEI;
- partnerships with non-profits to better understand and access the supports that they provide;
- expanded programming for seniors in school settings via partnerships with long-term care facilities and seniors housing;
- learn from and celebrate the knowledge and heritage of our communities and our traditional industries; and
- creation of partnerships with the cultural community, such as the PEI symphony.